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[00:01:00 approx] **Part 1**

Q: Tell us about your background.

JA: I've got two key points I wanted to say, and one is that we were absolutely Parker's babies. You said why did it happen, I think the answer to that is Parker, in my opinion. That goes way back, as I think Eileen [Whiting] is going to tell you about, like Centre 42, which is the influences on Parker, which is MacColl really, and also Joan Littlewood's lot – it was way way back, before my day. But I think it was all really, the whole thing in my opinion would not have happened without Parker. Of course he needed lots of other people, but Parker had this huge charisma, really. So that was one point. And you ask about me, well that was really because I was influenced by Parker. Parker changed so many people's lives. Yes of course it needed all the other people, but I think Parker was absolutely crucial. I'll just expand that a bit really because I've said it goes way back to influences on Parker, not direct influences on us. Like things like Centre 42 which I don't know about, but Eileen can tell you about, that's going way back. But so far as our lot was concerned, there were these crucial lectures that Parker gave for the WEA [Workers' Educational Association], and I've got the date of that; it must've been about 1964. Various of us went to them and were highly influenced by that, and out of that came the [Birmingham and Midlands] Folk Centre. One of the things about folk music at that time was that everybody knew that there was a corpus of music from the northeast and so on, but nobody had heard of any Midlands music. There wasn't any Midlands corpus; the Midlands didn't exist sort of thing. It was only Parker's influence really to get people to research, to see if there was... It was done by going to collections, the EFDSS [English Folk Dance and Song Society] stuff and that. From that, they put together and from that discovered that there was a Midland corpus of material. That

book was put out, which I've got a copy of – Songs of the Midlands, published in 1972, was sort of a subset of that stuff.

[00:04:06] Q: Who was involved in the collection?

JA: Well I've got the book there. The collecting, I think Pam [Bishop] would be the person to speak to, because Pam was very active. Douglas at that time was quite active, that's Doug Miller, and Roy Palmer – very active. I don't think Charles himself was active in doing the collecting. The collecting was not usually from people, originally it was from finding stuff that had already been collected but was not highlighted as being Midlands. It was to get a corpus that was Midlands. There was also some physical collecting went on. I'm going off my script now, but Pam will tell you it's very much about Mrs. Costello, which is the reason for the name of the Grey Cock Folk Club. That's a ballad, The Grey Cock, it's one of the key Child Ballads, historical ballads. Apparently the best example of that ever found was found in Washwood Heath, this is amazing, really, that wonderful ballad from this Mrs. Costello. They weren't the first actually to collect from her, because she was collected earlier. But I know when we decided to start the folk club we decided to call it the Grey Cock after that. Pam I think got a little article in the Evening Mail to say that it was called the Grey Cock after this wonderful ballad that was collected from the late Mrs. Cecilia Costello. The next week in the Evening Mail came a little letter saying "I'm note late!" So they got in touch with her again and collected some more material. Also Rhoma [Bowdler] collected and there was quite a bit of collecting of new people, of new stuff. But anyway, the idea of that was to get this corpus of Midlands material. For that, it was before the Grey Cock, they set up this thing called the Birmingham and Midland Folk Centre, which again was under Parker's influence and came out of these lectures. But even prior to that, Joan Smith was running a folk club and also Pam and Alan [Bishop] were running the Peanuts Folk Club. I'm sure you'll be speaking to Pam; she's the expert on all that. The Peanuts, or rather the club that Joan ran, I didn't ever go to it, but Barbara [Miler] used to go to it. In fact I think Barbara met Douglas at that folk club, so Barbara would be your informant about Joan's folk club. Then when we got some material together, we thought, well we must have a place to perform it, and that's where the Grey Cock came out of. So Banner had a long gestation and Parker was the seed of it really. And the Folk Centre, I'll tell you a little bit more about the Folk Centre. We

researched the Midlands songs and published them. We also organised lectures, which educated us really. We had EP Thompson for one, Edward Thompson was one of the people we had. We had Katharine Briggs, who wrote a collection called the Dictionary of British Folk Tales, which was a huge book. Graham [Langley] uses that stuff, and Marion Oughton, so that's a seed there, the Folk Centre. We also organised concerts from time to time. John Fryer will tell you about the Ravi Shankar concert. I won't tell you about that, because John Fryer's the informant. Do you want me to tell you a little bit? It was actually the Indian Workers' Association that John Fryer was a bit involved with. They decided to bring over this completely unknown sitar player – nobody had ever heard about a sitar – to play in some little pub around Birmingham. He was called Ravi Shankar. You've heard of Ravi Shankar, but nobody had then. About a week before, the Beatles performed with Ravi Shankar, so Ravi Shankar was world news and we were booking him in the back of a pub somewhere. You must get this story from John, but I believe that the chief of police rang up John Fryer and said, what room are you using and what are you doing about public order for this? So John said, well we've got the back of such and such a pub. "Well, you can't use that, what about the Town Hall?" At that time, Symphony Hall wasn't built. Anyway they agreed that they'd have it at what was then Digbeth Civic Hall, which was the next biggest [venue] to the Town Hall. But John said, oh we haven't got the funding for that. The chief of police said, well just send the bill to us. So they made lots of money from that concert that they didn't expect, and that paid for things for quite a long time. So, that was a little tale there... But John is really your informant on that. [00:10:10] Then the Grey Cock came out of the Folk Centre. It was what we called a "policy folk club", which meant that... Some people thought we were snobbish really. At that time traditional English songs were being sung with an American accent, because that's how music was done. Under the influence of Parker and MacColl, we took the view that Midlands songs had to be sung by Midlands singers, so that was the policy really. We were sponsored by the Arts Council, which was thanks to me getting some funding for that, which was a real job. We brought to Birmingham really top people. As you know, the folk club movement, there were lots of folk clubs going at the time, it was all the fashion really. But we had MacColl and Seeger regularly as guests, and lots of other guests including international people. We had guests every other week and then the nights in between, the Sundays in between, were our own residents. But there was none of this where people could get up drunk and forget their words and stuff, there was none of that

business. And that was again I think the Parker influence, wasn't it really, the discipline and professionalism really.

[00:11:40] Q: Was "policy club" a common term?

JA: It was our term, it was our term. But I know we were not very well thought of by some other clubs really. I'm not saying all clubs were rubbish and full of drunks all the time, but most clubs would tolerate that. If you went and you were a singer to a club, you didn't have to pay. You said, I'm a singer, and whatever sort of singer you were, you got in free, and if you wanted, you'd stand up and sing. Well we were charging people to come in, we paid ourselves even if you were performing, to set the standard that it was professional and we'd put somebody professional on. So that was all part of our seriousness really, so that's what we meant. But I think the policy bit really meant about the performing, which was a big thing with MacColl really about performing your own material, your own regional art, geographical really. So we did that. So we brought these top guests along, but particularly in relation to Banner, the point I was going to make about Banner was Parker being the seed of it. Also, Banner did not spring out from nothing. It had this long gestation and there was this really big bank of people who were serious performers, very good musicians. So we got a group of people who were already doing performances as well, as you'll see from the programmes. Some of those evenings that were residents' evenings they would do effectively a little mini Banner thing really, not as big as Banner but some of the things we did were full scale, particularly Of One Blood, which we did for the anti-apartheid movement. Again that was utterly Charlie. It was a weekend conference or something on anti-apartheid, way back when anti-apartheid was a big thing. The organisers asked Parker if he could provide a bit of, some entertainment during an evening social or whatever it was, and he agreed. Unbeknown to them he made a Banner performance really and we performed that. They were completely slayed by it, not just because they were expecting a few songs, but they got a full-on Banner show really with the slides and everything. It was the real thing, and that was way before Banner existed. I was the sort of narrator, which I was in a lot of the shows, and I did the words of Mandela. I know at the end of the show, the spotlight was on me. I was not acting Mandela, no way, but we were just speaking the words and letting the words speak for themselves. I didn't even understand the words, I was

totally ignorant. But I stood there and said his speech from when he was actually put on trial and he turns the tables on them. That was the end of the show. The lights go down and they come up again, and there's people in tears. It just really made me see the absolute power of theatre. That really made me see that. But there was all this stuff before Banner actually took off as Banner. It was all there, particularly the performers and the singers and musicians, but also people writing stuff because when we did these little shows it wasn't always Parker. I think it was certainly Parker that put *Of One Blood* together by himself, but other people, even Chas [Whiting], did a little. [00:16:40] Those little modest things we did, somebody researched them, there was ever so much work went into them. I made a list of some of the things we did and I'll tell you... I'll just mention the radio programmes. Sometimes Parker got us in to do little bits for radio programmes, and one programme we did was called *The Making of the Midlander*. In that one I was narrator number one and Ewan MacColl was narrator number two. It was only because I said, good evening, this is the BBC home service or something, and then MacColl took over. I think it was John Fryer and Doug I think – and I've got the [newspaper] cutting for you – did a script called *She Rode on a Horse Naked*, which is about Lady Godiva, which was put out as a radio programme. This was all pre-Banner, so we did a few radio things. [00:17:45] We did two mumming plays which were quite big things really, quite fun things. We did a programme, not a radio programme but a theatre thing, about Joseph Arch, who started the Agricultural Workers Union. So we did a show about that and took it around. I'm sure that Roy Palmer would've had a lot to do with the research of that kind of thing. We did the one called *The Funny Rigs of Good and Tenderhearted Masters*, which we did about the place [Kidderminster]. Graham [Langley] will tell you this bit about this. Graham was involved in that because he had an old van at that time, we didn't have the Banner van, and for some reason in that show they were bashing one another with cabbage stalks, so these cabbage stalks were all over Graham's car. You can imagine the smell, can't you. That was *Funny Rigs*, I'm pretty sure. *Of One Blood*, we did that for the first time for this anti-apartheid conference thing, but we then did quite a number of other performances of that, including we did it for about a week's run at this theatre in Islington Row. Islington Row in Five Ways, it's now the ringway. Well, there used to be a theatre there. It was a small sort of private-ish theatre, a bit of an arty thing. There was some group on there who were doing *Woyzeck* I think. They didn't get any audience. For some reason or other they asked us if we'd come and do the B

turn sort of thing, and we did Of One Blood for them. Alan Bishop, the first night we got three people and a dog in the audience, so Alan Bishop went out and fly-posted the city, and the next night the place was packed, so we were packed for a week. They were really snobby about us but I think they had to change their tune really, because we packed the place out, thanks to Alan Bishop's illegal advertising. But that's something else that we did, we got people who know quite a bit about doing publicity, with what we'd done for the folk club, which again fed into Banner. So what I'm saying about the team of people and the skills that we got, we got some skills in that direction as well. We got people who I think did some of the early stuff, Dave Minto did artwork and stuff. So I'm really talking about pre-Banner but I think it's relevant because it sort of in a way was Banner before it actually went off and called itself Banner. [00:21:00] There were these Monday night workshops at Pam's and it carried on at Dave and Chris's [Rogers], and that was way, way back into the early 1960s to do with trying to get the skills to do what I'm talking now about. It's about taking the folk music seriously. Again it was inspired by Parker, but it was sort of in the style of the Critics' Group. They called themselves the Critics' Group I think because of the way that they worked, because they were about criticising one another. We sort of followed that example every Monday night for years and years at Pam's and then at Chris's. So that was an example of the seriousness.

Q: Could you tell us how they ran?

JA: Well I'll do my best because I went, I wasn't involved years ago, but I used to go because I was great friends with Pam then. Yes as I remember it, if you were working on a song, you usually didn't just stand up at the folk club and sing it. You'd probably work on it in that Monday night workshop. You would sing the song and then people would say... well it was quite harsh. We weren't expert enough to do it properly but neither was MacColl either really in that respect. His whole group imploded in the end really. But you would sing it and people would discuss. We'd have these workshops with MacColl about things like 'effort' as they called it, which is based on Stanislavski, to do with theatre, but it was to do with movement, but he applied it to singing. He would say, well I think that could do with a bit of

'dab' here or 'press' here or whatever these different efforts were. We'd work on particular songs and accompaniment and so on, all that kind of stuff.

Q: Do you happen to have a description of the 'efforts'?

JA: No I don't have a list but I'm pretty sure that it was standard stuff and I think it would be Stanislavski.

Q: 'Efforts' in Dance was Laban.

JA: Laban, that's right, well maybe it was that then, right okay, you're right. I think the application to music, to song I would think was MacColl, entirely a MacColl thing. It would've influenced the Critics' Group so people like Sandra Kerr and so on would know about it. Whether it really worked I'm not able to say but it was a way of trying to be analytical about what you're doing with the song. Yes you're quite right Jacqueline, it was Laban I'm sure, application of some dance movements attempting to apply it to songs, to singing. That's what it was about. The words 'press' and 'dab' will be standard I think. Certainly people like Sandra Kerr would know all about that. When we were in the Grey Cock we ran workshops with people like MacColl, we had them for workshops to teach us stuff like that. Katharine Thomson, you know Katharine Thomson don't you, who also was the music editor with Pam on this publication, Songs of the Midlands. Katharine was a great supporter of us and helped. Some of us, including me, went to her house for quite some time to be taught sight singing; she did sight singing classes. And also George Thomson... for quite some time, a lot of us, including Dave Rogers, went to his Marxist classes. All that's background, that's pre Banner, but it's all the various educational background of the people [in Banner].

[00:25:40] Q: How old were you when you started getting involved with Banner?

JA: I can definitely say that, because I came to Birmingham in 1963, I was 21. I met Pam in 1964 when she started at British Gas, and Pam kindly adopted me because I was a bit of a lost soul. When I came to Birmingham I didn't know anybody. When I worked at the Gas

Board it was a massive office but there was nobody like me because there were no sort of incomers. I got on with the people but I didn't make any real friends. When Pam came she kindly adopted me, and Pam and Alan dragged me off to all these things so I quickly got involved with all this stuff, the Charlie lectures in those early days. At that time Pam and Alan ran the Peanuts Folk Club. They were influenced by Parker and MacColl right way back then. Some of the other things that we did, we used to, well I think for several years we ran trips to the MacColl's Festival of Fools, we took a coach from the club. We did lots of those things. I put these notes about things that the Grey Cock did that were relevant [to this interview]... let's have a look. Individuals taking singing lessons, again talking about taking things seriously, which I don't think any other folk clubs ever did. It was not consistent with the drunks standing up and falling off the stage. I know that Pam did go to singing lessons. It was Katharine that recommended us to a woman, and they used to go and they paid. Barbara went, and I think Barbara went to other teachers. So a number of people went and I actually went once or twice. It might've been after Banner started, because I went because of the voice. I didn't sing but I did the acting, and I went to see whether I was doing the voice production properly. I remember when Pam went, Pam had done a lot of singing, and when she went to this woman's classes – and she'd remember the woman's name – the woman said to Pam, you're not producing your voice properly and you're going to damage your voice. Pam had been doing lots of singing and was a good singer, and so she gave her some exercises. So I went to see, and she said I was producing my voice okay. So I went a couple of times and she gave me all the usual exercises to do about breathing from your diaphragm and that kind of stuff. So I've covered that bit. And I've told you that the Grey Cock archive is in the Library of Birmingham. It was care of the archivist, Fiona [Tait], so that list I've just given you was from Fiona. Fiona archived the stuff. I certainly didn't put any taped stuff in there, so it's only paperwork, but there's a lot of paperwork in there. I'll just have a look and see if I've covered things; I think I have. [00:29:30] I've tried to make my point really about the very important sort of gestation of Banner via the Midlands Folk Centre and the Grey Cock. I think you know really about the immediate genesis of Banner, about Philip Donnellan and that. Do you want me to speak about that? I'll speak about that then, from what I know of it anyway. [00:30:00] Charles and Ewan and Peggy's radio ballad, The Big Hower, which was about coalmining. Philip Donnellan, who was a very good BBC film and television producer, was a good friend of Charlie's. He was commissioned by the



BBC to make that into a television programme. Charlie jumped on the bandwagon because that meant the BBC were paying for doing a lot more, updating the recordings with the miners and so on. With Philip's blessing, perhaps not the BBC's, but Charles was able to access these. So he felt that he could make it into a theatre production, and that was really where we got together and decided that the way we'd done with production before, we would do something that was going to be ongoing and we would have a company that was going to take that side of the work and make it be an ongoing thing. The trigger for that was Donnellan's commission from the BBC, so that was the first one that we did.

[00:31:30] Q: I didn't realise it was commissioned.

JA: I believe it must have been. I'm just saying what I think, I might be wrong, but I think it must have been commissioned because it was certainly under the auspices of the BBC. It wasn't Philip Donnellan just doing his own thing. I think I'm right about that, but check it out with other people. But anyway, Philip Donnellan had some funding for a project to update The Big Hewer and make it a television programme, I'm pretty sure that's right, and thereby we got funding for extra recordings which Charles then was able to get his sticky hands on.

Q: Who did the recordings?

JA: Well Donnellan must have, I'm not certain on that, I might've got it wrong. But I don't think Parker was doing the recording. But of course it would still be using original recordings as well. It was only updating the original, but it did mean that they were getting new recordings. I think so, but again other people will know that better than me. We're losing people, because we've lost Philip, haven't we, tangential to Banner, but who was someone who was very supportive of Banner. When we did the performances, especially the big ones that we did pre Banner, Parker's skills really were very much in sound and also the slides. Parker, being radio, had no skill at all in drama as such, in movement; he didn't touch that whatsoever. MacColl did in his shows but Parker didn't. I remember in *Of One Blood*, the way we did it, we were just standing on blocks and I think basically the actors didn't move. They stood on blocks and they said their lines, which was quite sufficient to be powerful because you've got the lighting, you've got the slides at the back. So it wasn't lacking in

power really, it was a very powerful thing. But we did have a little bit of music in it, sorry, we had music and songs. We did have a tiny bit of movement because there was a group called the Stewarts of Handsworth, do you know about them Jacqueline? I'll tell you about it. They were a family that Charles discovered, and Charles gave them their break on radio.

[00:34:25] They loved Charles like everybody else did. When Charles was doing *Of One Blood*, he asked them if they would come and be part of it. Well by that time they'd taken off and doing quite a bit of performing, and they didn't want to come in and actually work on the rehearsals and stuff like that. But they were prepared to come in and do a little piece really, so I think there were two little spots they had in it. So they could just come along and spend ten minutes and do a piece. They sang some spirituals and just did a little bit of very basic sort of movement really with it. But they were absolutely wonderful, wonderful stuff. So that's as near as we got I think to any movement in shows. [00:35:20] It so happened that Rhoma then happened to come along to the *Grey Cock*, Rhoma Bowdler, who was the other big key to *Banner* being the way it was. I think *Banner* would've taken off anyway but because Rhoma was feeding in something that nobody else had got, which was the drama skills, because she was drama trained and she was a drama teacher. So she immediately said, where's the drama, where's the movement in this stuff? So Rhoma was able to train us with that. We did workshops, actual workshops, weekends even; I think we had some weekends where we went away to places to somewhere in the back of beyond, and spend the weekend doing drama workshops. She was a very good teacher, Rhoma. I remember that we did at least one workshop with a mime artist. It wasn't French but it was... do you remember?

Q: He was trained by [Jacques Lecoq], wasn't he?

JA: Yes he was, he was something like that. He was damn good, damn good. We had either a weekend or a day with him, at least one. Things like that. So we got a certain amount of training.

Q: Was Rhoma involved in staging *Collier Laddie*?

JA: Yes I'm pretty sure that's right.

Q: Was that her first involvement?

JA: It was just about then. I might be wrong Jacqueline because it might have been after that. Dave of course would know this, I can't remember now, Chris would. It might have been Collier Laddie, it was still very static - Rhoma saw it and said it needs movement. But that might be the case, I'm not quite sure exactly when Rhoma got involved, but it was early on. She brought in the drama and she brought in the movement. I don't think there was a great deal of movement in Collier Laddie but in later things there certainly was. [00:37:45] You asked me to mention about the masks. That was a later show, I don't remember what the show was called.

Q: Was it Dr. Healey's Casebook?

JA: It might have been Dr. Healey's Casebook, although I don't think it would've been. No it wouldn't, because Thatcher was after Healey, wasn't she?

Q: Oh yes, Dr. Healey's Casebook was with puppets, I think.

JA: It must've been after that. It might've been the Motor Trade show, I think it probably was. I know I played Thatcher. We were never allowed to really play the people because we didn't have the skills, but in that we went a bit in that direction I think. Dave's mum, whose name was Audrey Pearson, was very sympathetic and helpful. I can't remember whose idea it was to have these masks, but that was the idea of presenting Thatcher and a few of the baddies, or even goodies, I don't know, with a mask. So Audrey went to some workshop to learn how to do it proper, to do the real thing, and she made these masks for us. I remember that the technique was where she put soft wax all over your face to make sort of a death mask really, and you got to have a tube to breath through, and it really wasn't for anybody claustrophobic, especially with amateurs doing it! They must have hardened this thing, then she made the mask in plaster of Paris, which she then used to make the mask on. That's how she did it. I had the mask on my face for the death mask really. I had that for

a long time until I moved house, and I must have put it in the bin. I think that's all of my notes I've covered now pretty well, so if you want to ask me any more things...

[0:40:40] Q: What you didn't tell us was where you came from, what your background was...

JA: I was not typical at all, because nearly everybody else was performers. They were singers and musicians and they were, as I've indicated, damn good quality, really good quality with some training, and they took it seriously, and they were good. I did actually do the words, the speech, and I think it must absolutely have been at a Monday night workshop way back in the early 1960s. Parker was there and he got a script and he wanted us to try it out, so he gave us our copies and he had us all reading them out. Parker was absolutely mad on regional accents. He asked me something like, on Saturday I'm recording something for the BBC and they've given me these BBC actors and they're absolute rubbish; could you possibly spare the time to come up? So that's how I got involved with being one of the people that could do the speaking, so I did the speaking. I basically just did the speaking but I sang when it was group singing. But no, I wasn't a singer or a musician. But I did also get lumbered with organising, not for Banner, but for the Grey Cock, I was massively involved in organising. I was nearly doing it singlehandedly, and it was a hell of a lot that we were doing in those days. Things like booking the guests, I used to have the guest stay with me most of the time. They stayed with other people but I didn't like asking people. I didn't organise the programmes in terms of putting the groups together, but there was a lot I did in terms of booking the guests. In those days even the guests were pretty slap happy. We didn't get the falling off the stage drunk ones, but even so, people tended to be rather slap happy about whether they'd remember to turn up, that was the sort of scene then really, rather laid back, etc. We weren't having that, we weren't booking somebody and not having them turn up. So I devised what looked like a proper contract. We were the only people, no other clubs in town did anything like that. I used to send them a contract with a stamped, addressed envelope. It had a slip on the bottom and all they had to do was sign their name on it and send it back in the envelope. I harassed them to do it, so we only got the reliable ones; we didn't have any not turning up. [00:44:05] We did a thing which was totally crazy, this was Alan Bishop's scheme for publicity. He wanted to have a register of everybody who came,

every week. The audience, he wanted the names of the audience every week and a register when they came. We did this. Maureen Davis took it over from me. It was a massive job, we had sort of punch cards, it was crazy, absolutely crazy. Of course we used to keep records of all the guests and everything. And with the Arts Council, in the fairly early days, because of there was a bit of interest... it was before there was an Arts Council, certainly before there was West Midlands Arts, there was Birmingham Arts or something, which was something under either the Arts Council or the pre Arts Council, where there was some funding for Birmingham. It wasn't the council, it was some arty organisation, it was very ad hoc I think really. But there was funding there for them to give to suitable outfits. I think because John Fryer was on it, we used to get a little bit of money from them. So we did get a bit of support in a rather loose and perhaps nepotistic fashion. But then when they got taken over by West Midlands Arts I remember John Fryer saying to me that we wouldn't be able to get any more funding, because when it was going to something more pukka, like West Midlands Arts you know, you would have to have for instance audited accounts and so on, so we would lose our funding. So I did quite good accounts, I did all the accounts anyway. We had West Midland's Gas's auditor working in our department and I said to Trevor, I told Trevor this tale, and he said to me, Joy, bring me your accounts and let me see them. So I brought them and he said to me, Joy he said, these accounts are an auditor's dream. He said there's no way they would fail. He said, if you need to have them audited, I'll audit them for you. So we got audited accounts. When I first told West Midlands Arts that here were our accounts and that we wanted some money for our folk club, they told me, and I'm sure I've got it in writing, that they didn't support things like folk clubs – no wonder really, because they were a rather rubbish bunch – but recommended that I apply to the Sports Council. I was so furious, I was absolutely wild. So I wrote to them back about how folk music was art and so on, and anyway they came around, they funded it, gave us some funding. Dorothy Wilson in those days, I don't know if she still is but she was probably head of West Midlands Arts. In those days she was a very junior arts official or whatever they were. We invited her to my house, wined her and dined her literally, chatted her up, and this was people like Graham and so on, and got her on our side. She was very good, she was good.

Q: She was a Northumbrian pipe player.

JA: Was she? Dorothy Wilson? I never knew that. My goodness, well that would explain something, wouldn't it. But it was obvious even then when she was a young junior it was obvious she was going to go a long way. I have a lot of respect for her, the way she dealt with us. Years and years and years later when I went to the MAC [Midlands Arts Centre], she recognised me. I had lots of time for Dorothy Wilson. Not everybody did, but I did. But to get this funding was quite ridiculous. You had to do all the things that the Birmingham Rep had to do, not only audited accounts but an annual report and god knows what rubbish. All this was **a bit fictitious** but it took an awful lot of doing, and I did that all. We were the only folk club in the world, I don't think even MacColl's club got any funding.

[00:48:50] Q: When Banner started, after Collier Laddie, did you continue doing that support work for them?

JA: I didn't do anything for Banner, Jacqueline, I didn't do anything of that sort for Banner, because the Grey Cock was still going for quite a long time at the same time. Interestingly with regard to that, after Banner had been going a little while, and I wasn't involved at all but they applied to the Arts Council for funding. We got in mind that we could do with a van and so on, and we [wanted] various things and money for us to do shows. We had a meeting with them and I can't remember if it was Dorothy Wilson, but that person said, what you need is an administrator. We hadn't thought of that but they were absolutely spot on right actually, so the first thing they funded was for an administrator. It wouldn't have been fulltime work. Dave and that will know. Was it Bernard [O'Donnell] that was the first one? It was just one of us doing some of it, but they gave him some funding. I think he was a person who was prepared at that time to give up work, yes I think he probably did. Those with fulltime work were dependent on it, so nobody was in a position to take on a funded appointment for Banner.

[00:50:36] Q: So what was your involvement with Banner?

JA: My involvement with Banner was acting. Talking about the static nature... I know in Collier Laddie, when we did that, I was a narrator in that and I was at the front of the stage.

We had to learn all this off by heart. God almighty, I don't know how we did it. You had to learn reams and reams of stuff off by heart, because you wouldn't have any script. But I was a narrator. Later on of course they did away with narrators but I still was an actor. So I was an actor with it, that's all I did with Banner.

Q: I've heard nothing but good things about your presence on stage and your delivery.

JA: Thank you, I really enjoyed it. But that was it, I didn't do anything else.

Q: How long were you involved for?

JA: I think I was involved with Banner probably until it really sort of went fully professional. As you know, when we started off there were a lot of people involved either in a small way, or in a come and go way. Really it was the Grey Cock people, so there were a lot of people who morphed into Banner really, so there were lots of people and I was one of them. One of the times – and this a tale I'm sure you'll get loads of times – when we had one of these meetings with the Arts Council and they said, can we see your schedule, and they laughed, they thought we were pulling their legs, because it was bigger than the RSC, we were doing more performances and more shows, a crazy amount of stuff. I was in all of the first several of them but gradually you just couldn't do it, I wasn't in all of them, and then gradually it stopped being a big group and then it became a small group and it was a small group really of professionals eventually, like it is now.

[00:53:10] Q: In the heydays of the big group, the main group as it was called I think, what motivated you to be part of it?

JA: Well it was just because I'd been involved with the Grey Cock but really it was Charles because I was a Charles baby like so many people. He was something else was Charles, really, because he had such an influence on so many people and really did change people's lives, he really did. I think all the people were greatly touched or motivated ultimately by Charles. I know Dave is the new Charles in a way, isn't he? In my case... lots of people I think were very motivated politically. I was never really, I agreed with the politics but I wasn't a

political activist or anything, it was more personal really, it was more personal for me because of the Grey Cock people who were... my people, really. That's where I got involved with it really. As I said to you Jacqueline, that experience with Of One Blood, I've seen the absolute power, I really did see it. When I go to theatres now... I've got lots of friends who get ill if they don't go to the theatre every few months, they really do. I've got lots of friends like that. I'm not like that at all. But I did see it from my own personal thing particularly really from being in Of One Blood, just seeing how it's utterly affective, the power of it. People would say, well you were playing to the converted, which we were obviously; we were utterly playing to the converted for that show, doing it for the anti-apartheid movement. I remember Charles saying, the converted need preaching to just as much as the unconverted; they need to have their spirits lifted and so on.

[00:53:35] Q: Do you have memories of shows after Of One Blood and Collier Laddie that replicated those experiences, that power?

JA: Yes I think really yes. We were very aware I think that Banner was a very powerful thing. I'll tell you what Jacqueline, you asked that question. We were doing something for Chile, do you remember? It was before your day, wasn't it, but we did that performance. I think we called it The Chile Show, it probably had some other name, but we called it The Chile Show. I think again we were probably sort of approached by the Chile Solidarity Committee. At that time people like Joan Santana's husband [Apolo Santana] were coming over and the politics were such that there was the left wanting to put pressure on the Labour party to let people in. That's what it was about I think really as much as anything. There was a performance which no doubt was put on by the Chile Solidarity Committee I'm sure, which was in Digbeth Civic Hall. They had these people called... now I've forgotten their name but everybody else will know them. They were a band from Chile and they were quite popular.

Q: Was it Inti-Illimani?

JA: It was Inti-Illimani, you're right. They were something, they really were something. They put on a concert in the Civic Hall and therefore got big numbers. They asked us to do a show which would show the background, to illustrate, and they were going to do the songs and



music, which were knockout stuff, but they wanted us to illustrate what it was about. That's what we did this show for. Again in that I think I did the words of Victor Jara or Victor Jara's wife. Victor Jara was the one who was put to death because of being a musician. I remember at the end of that we got a standing ovation. The fact that we were able to be up there with Inti-Illimani and be up to their... I mean I'm not saying we were up to their standard of performance, we were not at their standard of performance, but in terms of what we did for the audience was so powerful really, very powerful. It was so exciting really, so that was a big one. [There were] lots of others. Our shows went down very well because we were playing mostly to the converted. When we did Collier Laddie we did it around the coalfields and things you know, but they certainly bore out the power of what we were doing. I felt in a way that it was a very good way of making a political argument, even if it was the wrong argument, if you want. It made the argument, it made people think about what you were saying. I think it was a very powerful way of making statements, of making an argument. I think that meant something to me really.

[00:59:22] Q: What elements made Banner performances in those days so powerful?

JA: I was thinking the other day about the radio ballads, because it was in the tradition of the radio ballads. I was thinking about all the radio ballads and how they worked and what the idea of them was, to take the people's words. It was the 'actuality', it was the fact that, well I think it was largely probably Parker that was doing the recordings. I know the others were recording as well, but now you've got the famous picture of Parker as he was at the feet of one of the informants. It was just marvellous really, I think it was just marvellous. His belief, he put it something like the language of Shakespeare is still alive and well in the mouths of ordinary people, and especially when they're talking about something that really means something to them, and work is a big thing. If you get people, anybody really, but particularly just ordinary working people talking about something that means something to them and you're able to do it like Charles. You wouldn't just go straight in and stick a microphone in front of somebody, you'd do it in a subversive way, and [be] prepared to let them talk, you get bloody fantastic stuff. With things like, well you know he won the Italia Prize with that show. The amount of immense, immense effort that went into the recording

but then the transcribing, which we all know is a [pig of a job...](#) [01:01:27] And in those days it was reel to reel and stuff like that, and carrying this humping stuff. But that stuff is the basis, and what they did with it, Parker and MacColl and Peggy, was the music, but picking out the poetry of it, picking out the really wonderful stuff and really paying homage to that, really servicing that by putting then the songs and the music. MacColl did the songs by just soaking himself in 'actuality' so that you got the songs and sound effects and Peggy's music really in the service of the language, the language being 'actuality'. That's Charles's big thesis in life, it was about the power, the absolute power of the language. It was Pete [Yates] who designed the original logo for Banner and it said Theatre of Actuality. It's a piece of jargon if you like. In a way it was a bad thing because people were saying what the hell is that? But what it meant, that's what it meant, it meant 'the actuality' – not writing it. And still Banner does it, they don't write their own stuff. Occasionally in some shows we did, which were a bit different, but basically you let the people speak for themselves and then you complement that with songs, music, sound effects and with the visuals, which were very powerful as well, and the drama. But I think it was really the fact of it being a theatre of actuality, which was the thing really.

[01:03:23] Q: Can you tell me about the shows you were involved in? You were involved in Viva Chile as the narrator?

JA: I think it was Joan Jara's words. The way they did that I think, they recorded... I don't think it was actually Charles that had recorded... but they were certainly recording, it was actuality of Joan Jara. It wouldn't have been Victor Jara because he was killed; it was Joan Jara's actuality. It was Victor Jara's story in Joan Jara's words, actual words, and that was the actuality with that. There was probably other actuality as well. Charles used quite a lot of [newspaper] cuttings, he also counted it as actuality when we were doing Banner [shows], meaning actual stuff, not [stuff] that they'd written. So it might be The Times, December 1st, blah blah, and it would be word for word and we'd have to learn that as well. It was terrible stuff to learn. [01:04:35] When you were learning actual actuality, that was people speaking, it fell off your tongue. It was as easy as pie really. Well it was never really that easy, but the words of the people speaking about their lives, it was easy. When you put

against that stuff from newspapers, that was just awful to learn. So he would have had undoubtedly lots of newspapers, and we were forced to learn the whole stuff... And he was a bugger, really, because he wanted it to be up to date so he got yesterdays' article from the Times and we had to learn it and it was terrible really. He was terrible, was Parker. I remember Collier Laddie of course and also we did a lovely women's show that wasn't actuality. I think that was the one we called Womankind, wasn't it, which was lovely. When we were doing that one I made up my mind I was going to opt out of it actually. I'd been in every show. It was in the early days and I think we were doing about three shows at a time, and it was a total killer. I thought, no I'll have to say no. So I was all set up to say no to this Womankind, and Dave Rogers said, oh Joy, you should see what we're writing for you. Because they were writing, it was a pantomime really. I thought, I can't say no for hurting Dave Rogers, and I can't say no for the temptation! So I did that one. That was great fun really, it was a great fun one that.

Q: Tell us about Womankind.

JA: Well the format of it was a pantomime format. It was in rhyming couplets, pretty well all in rhyming couplets. I was supposed to be helping with writing it actually, and I just didn't. I think it was Dave and Chris and Rhoma, possibly Charles as well, writing the script. Lots of work, very creative, something they didn't do [normally]. They wrote songs and they were good songwriters but they wrote all the script for that, so it was different. You would see a normal couple and then they've have their shadows who were clowns, and that was Pete and myself who were the clown shadows of them sort of thing. You'd have a serious scene and then it was done as comical. [01:07:45] There was a scene about birth, and Rhoma was inspired by this. She was a schoolteacher, as you know. She said for sex education at their school they had a film that had a birth in it. The doctor, when he delivers the baby, says, how clever of you, it's a boy first time. So that had to go in the show. So there was a birth scene and I think Bob Etheridge was supposed to be the doctor and I was supposed to be the woman. Rhoma had stuffed a pillow down my front. We had slides behind us. I remember Robin, my friend, he said to me: "When I saw that scene I was in tears." I said, Robin don't you know it was comical? He said, you didn't see the slides. So the slides were very moving whereas it was a comic thing. The slides contradicted [the scene]. I remember

Bob's lines, "How clever of you, it's a boy / To fill your heart with ... something and joy. / Girl after girl some women bare, / which fills their heart with deep despair. / But you have reached a state sublime, / for you have had a boy first time." You couldn't resist that, could you. [01:09:37] There was a rape scene in it as well, which was really rather shocking, which again Rhoma's thinking, and going back to the screams in the old shows of MacColl's – they wouldn't show but at that time it was a bit of a fashion to show nudity onscreen, it was a bit sort of lefty art. Well Rhoma was having none of that because she said, we want our shows to be for an ordinary audience, we're not playing to trendy people and stuff. So they never showed violence and things like that, so for the rape scene it was just a blackout and then a scream, which was me screaming. But Pete was there, that was something about pornography, and again it was... really anti. But what they did with that, Rhoma said, we're not having anything that's off the top shelf or anything, we're going to show what little children can see in the newspapers that are on the level of push chairs. They made a collage of that moving with the screens, not of any hard porn at all, just images of women that were everyday advertising in the paper. And it was very powerful. It made a bigger statement to me, because personally... if people want to go to newsagents to buy stuff off the top shelf, they did in those days, well that's up to them. But that fact that that stuff was there, well especially for young children, just stuff on the front page of a newspaper, nothing [awful], but that was denigrating women, that kind of thing. So they had a very powerful scene like that. The start of the way it went in the show was that it had driven this boy to... well, it wasn't really saying that inspires people to rape, but that was kind of the way it was acted out. [01:12:05] You've got Dave and Chris then, who were the real sweethearts, the real lovers. There was a piece about abortion and about... Chris was saying, I'd like to have a child but I don't want one now. It was again sort of pro right to choose and things like that. That really spoke to me because it did mean something directly to me, whereas something like Of One Blood, although obviously the politics were right, but I felt it's not something that I can identify with [directly], because I've not been oppressed in that way. But as a woman obviously you know the pressure on women from yourself, so I felt that my identification in a way with race was through that kind of thing. But with the woman thing it's direct, isn't it. It's really about your own experience. It was a lovely show, that one.

[01:13:30] Q: How did audiences respond to it?

JA: I remember we were doing that one time, we did stuff sometimes for university audiences. I think most of us were a bit nervous about students, whether they'd be a bit rowdy and they'd be throwing tomatoes and things. And we'd [perform] this to a student [audience] and we wouldn't get much response. We did a performance one time somewhere a long way away, London or something, to the elderly department of the Labour Club or something. It was Labour party elders, women. We thought, oh dear, they're not going to like this because it's a bit near the knuckle and so on. They were absolutely... it was great. I remember when it was Pete and I and he was being horrible, and they were shouting at him. I remember realising – and Rhoma said it too – when you played to young people they haven't got the experience. It was really something that was about more adults and the reason that we weren't getting youngsters is because they didn't have the experience. But these people had experience and it went down a right treat, so that was a bit of a lesson about audiences.

[01:15:15] Q: You said there was the nice couple and then the shadows, the clowns. Can you tell us how that worked?

JA: Well this is one really for Chris because she wrote it. I can't remember now but with the birth [scene] it would have something that was real... I don't think Chris was meant to be pregnant necessarily, but interestingly I think she probably was and Dave was carrying Katie [Katherine Rogers], as she was called then, on a baby rucksack thing in the rehearsals. He was supposed to be chatting Chris up and he'd got the baby; it was very funny. With the birth thing, you've got a sort of contradiction between... you've got the ultimate of sort of I suppose stupid people, as it were, and the more sensible people, to bring some comedy in it and to really send up, I suppose, the sexist attitudes and make a mockery of them, I suppose. I suppose that's what it was doing really.

## [01:17:00] Part 2

JA: ... The tales of Parker, which are manifold... The actuality that he did for all the radio ballads, it's what Banner does now, cutting a piece of actuality against music or whatever.

Now it's a click of a mouse, but in those days it was reel to reel tapes, not even cassettes. So when you were cutting something, it literally meant you cut a piece of tape, snipped it with a razor blade. Charles Parker used to do these little bits of speech, the 'silver darlings' about the fishing song, these gems really. You'd have to do it that way. I think he put chalk marks or some sort of mark on the tape. It was absolutely painstaking to do this; god knows how he did it. It took him hours and hours and he was totally absolutely besotted with doing the thing. He used to work any old hours, and he used to take what he used to call 'stay-awake' pills, he used to take drugs to keep himself going; he did that regularly. He didn't make a big thing about it, he wasn't peddling the things or anything, but he'd swallow them. He used to go into BBC at 6 p.m. or something. This must've been when it was on Carpenter Road, which was before it was at Pebble Mill. It must've been there up in Edgbaston. Supposedly, he used to break into the BBC building at night to continue to work. The security guards would see the light on in Parker's office at 2 in the morning and go up and, excuse me Mr. Parker. He was completely mad about doing the work. There's stories about him throwing typewriters at secretaries and things – they were big typewriters in those days. I don't know whether he really did but he had a bit of a temper on him. [01:19:33] I can remember one rehearsal of Of One Blood, him hurling the script across the auditorium, not in a show but in a rehearsal. He got quite carried away. Yes I think he got through secretaries at a rate because he was not a normal BBC producer who expected them to work 9 till 5 and have a nice long lunch break and everything. I think anybody who worked with him had to be prepared to work [hard]. But he had some very loyal people who did work with him. There was a woman, whose name I've forgotten but every else will remember, who was sort of his sidekick secretary, more than that really, who was with him for years and died some time ago. I don't think it's in there although there are some articles about her memories and stuff. She was more than his secretary I think. I don't mean it in a suggestive sense, I mean she was his production assistant or something like that.

Q: Can you go over the shows that you were involved in from the beginning? After Collier Laddie and Viva Chile, there was The Shrewsbury Pickets. Were you involved in that?

JA: Yes I think I was, I believe so.

[01:21:19] Q: Do you remember anything about that?

JA: Not very much really. I think I was in it. I was certainly in all of the first few really, if it's in date order.

Q: This one wasn't written by Banner, maybe that's why you don't remember it. It was written by Combine.

JA: In that case I probably wasn't then.

Q: And then the original Race Show, the one [listed in the Library catalogue as] The Great Scapegoat.

JA: Was it called The Great Scapegoat? The Great Divide I remember it being called. That was sort of... it wasn't Of One Blood but it was sort of related to it. That's where Pete was playing the fascist and I think there's a photo of me somewhere, I think I was largely doing sort of a sort of narrator; I played Britannia I think in that one. That was the one we did in Berlin. Do you know about that, that we took it to Berlin? [01:22:28] It was some sort of international theatre, well it must've been when Berlin was awash with money to try and make it a showcase so there must've been money all over the place. It was an international theatre thing and we were invited to go, us and the Young Vic. That was highly prestigious but that was probably because we must've been on the last of the list to be invited and it was only at the last minute. To get people to have a week off work at short notice was asking a lot, but of course we were all thrilled to bits to be going. And it was paid for, expenses paid. I mean, it wasn't slap up or anything but it was expenses paid. There were problems with getting passports at the time; it was very last minute to get them. There were some of us without passports and we wanted them quickly. I know I had a problem with a passport, but anyway we got it. It was just the group but we took Pam although she wasn't in the show, because she was an additional musician and they did quite a bit of bombing around playing. I didn't go but I think they went to some club in East Germany and stuff. It was very exciting because you had to go through Checkpoint Charlie and all that. I think we

probably did two performances in a week, so we spent quite a lot of time seeing what other people were doing and going around Berlin and stuff.

[01:24:31] Q: Was Renate [Viesel] in the show?

JA: I don't think she was, I can't remember.

Q: But she went as a translator, didn't she?

JA: She probably did, yes. Yes I think she probably did, that would figure. I've got a poor memory of stuff. I can remember a notorious event, 'coz there was Bob Etheridge and I think it must have been Bob and Bill [Shreeve] and there was an Asian guy as well in the show, Bhagat [Singh], he was a bit of a lad. George Gordon was in it but I don't think he was involved in this episode. They somehow got lost on the way to the theatre on the underground. They only just got there, and I mean it got terribly tense because they only got there five minutes before the performance or something. We hadn't done it properly really, we'd allowed them to get lost really on the underground, they'd missed the stop. And the underground, it was very exciting because the underground, Berlin was divided at the time. We were in the west and the underground necessarily went through the east but they didn't stop. You went through these ghost stations from the 1930s, and they had a soldier on the platform. I don't have very big memories of it but it was quite exciting.

[01:26:06] Q: There was a skit called Sellout of the Century.

JA: Oh yes I think that's the one you've got some pictures of the street theatre. I don't think I was in that. I think you've got Rhoma possibly in that. That was the street theatre, wasn't it, the agitprop. I wasn't in that. They did a bit of agitprop with the Chile thing as well, there was a bit of agitprop that we did. We did that in a sort of agitprop form, which I think I was a bit involved in the street. I think it was probably cut down or a miniature [version] or something at the same time of Viva Chile. I remember Charles Parker being dressed as the US, he was dressed as the United States, with a hat. Uncle Sam.



Q: Then in 75 there was Fields of Vietnam.

JA: You're outside my time now.

Q: And then Womankind.

JA: Womankind, yes I was in that.

Q: And then Christmas Choppers... Were you involved in The Story of the Green, which was a community theatre project in Acocks Green?

JA: No I was not. There was also the big Handsworth project, that Chris was involved in. I'm thinking that you have missed some that I was in though. The Motor Trade Show, I was in that.

Q: Dr. Healey's Casebook?

JA: Yes I was in that.

Q: And then the Housing Game?

JA: I don't think I was in the Housing Game, if I was I can't remember it.

[01:28:00] Q: Talk to me about Dr. Healey's Casebook, then.

JA: I haven't got much memory of it. It must have been the one on the NHS... I'm pretty sure that was the one where Pete was an ambulance driver and they got some very nice actuality in that. I can just remember how powerful that was, the scene with the ambulance driver going to an accident. The actuality was just wonderful really about these people's jobs, the drivers saying things like, you go in and get somebody's heart going... how engaged these people were with their jobs. There was a little funny bit in that, they showed it to ambulance drivers... you know, how we always took the shows back to the informants to

check... It was a mime and Pete was doing it, where they're supposed to be getting the stretcher into the ambulance. Then they slammed the door, which they're absolutely not supposed to do, but it's just a little joke for the ambulance drivers, that they were doing this naughty thing that they're not supposed to do. Chris wrote a lovely song in that show about public service workers, We were there, We were there, Public service workers... Lovely song. That was one of Chris's.

Q: It would be great to get that one sung at the reunion.

JA: Yes.

[01:30:20] Q: Anything else you remember about Dr. Healey's Casebook?

JA: Just another thing that's a bit off, but another thing just made me remember, was song writing, and this would've been before Banner. We wanted to get people to write, to encourage song writing, because we had all sorts of workshops and things that we did. I know that we ran a competition for a song, and Peggy was judging the competition. We had a workshop about it and I can remember Dave and Kevin [Pratt] and Chris, and I went along to show willing, as it were, and they said that among the songs there weren't very many love songs. One of the points they made was that songs should be from your experience. I thought, well you know, there's not really much. Then I remembered the traditional songs about the old maid songs, about the woman whose been rejected, so I wrote a funny song called The Ones That Got Away, which is in fact the one that Mary Story put on tape. I won third prize with that. I think Chris and Kevin won the main prize, I can't remember which was first and second. I think probably Chris was first, and probably it was the one we mentioned. Kevin, I think it was a funny one about going camping, which was probably inspired by Talybont. So that was just something else that we did to do with workshops and getting involved in doing song writing.

Q: I hope you can sing that one at the reunion. [It was a lovely song.]

JA: I can probably sing it.

Q: Then The Housing Game.

JA: I might have been a bit involved but I can't remember any of it.

[01:32:36] Q: Was that one of the shows that went professional?

JA: I don't think so, I don't remember. Really I sort of petered out after the big shows.

Q: What about On the Brink? That was the one about the motor trade workers.

JA: Oh was that the Motor Trade Show? Well if it was the Motor Trade Show, what we call the Motor Trade Show, yes I was certainly involved in that. I think I'm in one of the photos that you've got there.

[01:33:10] Q: Could you tell us about it?

JA: I can't remember it very much. I believe that Frances [Rifkin] actually was producing that one. That was the one with the horrible character, that's right. The villain that they utterly hated in the piece and the real motor trade workers hated was The Evening Mail, which I thought was overtly controlled by whoever was in charge of the industry, and it was extremely biased. So they wanted to portray The Evening Mail in as negative a fashion as they could. There was a problem with villains, that villains always come over as great fun, and they wanted to ensure that that didn't happen. Kevin was doing it at one time and who else, I've forgotten. Oh, was it Steve Harper? Well in both cases they were really lovely blokes, difficult for them to be villains. They had to wear horrible long dirty raincoats for a start. They got some horrible toilet that they found on a building site or somewhere, which they didn't clean and they were getting [?] out of this toilet... And then the character who was personifying The Evening Mail was eating, was eating food out of a paper bag that was supposed to look like maggots, and it was actually rice... oh dear! It definitely succeeded in being an unattractive character. I can remember that; that was really awful.

[01:35:20] Q: Dave still sings the song, The Evening Mail.

JA: It was a very good song. I might be wrong, but I think Parker wrote that one. Parker was a pretty good songwriter as well, he wrote quite a lot of songs.

Q: What song was it when the three of them. . .

JA: The three newspapers: I'm the Times, I'm the Telegraph, I am the Sun.

Q: Was that for a show?

JA: I'm pretty sure that wouldn't 've been in the show... because The Evening Mail song was. So, that was a different song. I'm sure they sang that in at least one show.

Q: Charlie was the Times and Dave was the Sun, but who was the Telegraph?

JA: I don't remember but it might've been different people at different times singing it. But it was a lovely song, a very good song.

Q: Was that one of the shows where Banner managed to get some of the informants that had contributed the actuality for the show and the stories to actually perform in the show?

JA: Now then. Yes that's Bob Whiskens, isn't it. Also his friend, what was his friend's name? Vic Summerfield. Yes they did and of course Bob Whiskens became a major [member of Banner], and I believe he's got some family connections as well with Banner. That was great. I think that was fairly unusual; I don't think that happened very much, it was a big demand. Yes, that was lovely.

[01:37:29] Q: Any other memories of the Motor Trade Show?

JA: I don't think so. One of the props in that was a mini wasn't it, a mini chassis. I don't know where we got it but it was quite ambitious really. It was a nice prop, I think that was the main prop we had in front of the screen with the slides.

Q: What part did you play in it?

JA: I don't remember, I think I was just a worker. There was something where we were doing... I can't remember. Or was that the one where I was Mrs. Thatcher? I might've been Mrs. Thatcher in that... What else was I Mrs Thatcher in? I can't remember, now.

Q: You had a blue handbag, didn't you?

JA: I might've been Thatcher in that one, yes that's quite possible.

Q: There was a women's show after that.

JA: Yes I can remember that well because that was the genesis really of it being a women's group. The reason for that was nothing to do with women falling out with the men or vice versa, quite the contrary really. It was because we were asked; most of the shows were commissioned, we were asked to do them. I've forgotten what the name of the union was; was it NUPE?

[01:31:19] Q: It said GMW and some other sources said GMB.

JA: What it was, it was a union where quite a lot of their employees were female employees doing jobs like cleaners and care workers and so on, and that was who the union was meant to represent. But it's hard to unionise those people because they're scattered about the place. They really wanted to get those people in, and furthermore when they did get them in, they wanted them to be active. They didn't want it to be women workers and all men to be the shop stewards and those things. They were running some workshops for women who hadn't got it to try and encourage them to become active, to be shop stewards really. They were running these workshops with women only. Again that was not negative, it was

because if they knew that if there were men there the women would just let the men do it, so that's why they were doing that. They asked us if we could do a show for it. We were then a mixed group and everything. We decided that it would be a good idea, these things were women only. They weren't telling us we couldn't bring any men but we thought, well it makes sense if we have the show with women only, we'll do that. So that wasn't too bad. But then with regards to the technical, the technicals were completely crazy, all these very heavy things and all that. We had had some women helping with it but it was largely a male preserve. We assumed that we would have the men to do that but then perhaps that wasn't quite the message we were looking for. So the men and the women decided, well we really want to get the women doing the whole thing, including driving the horrible beat up van and humping all this very heavy stuff. The men were very cooperative in this and helped the women to learn, and we had driving lessons in this horrible van on the Asda car park in Aston, where everybody took driving practice on Sundays when in those days it was free. I drove that thing sometimes to London and it was horrific, I hated it. So it was an all-woman enterprise and it did work, as such.

[01:41:08] Q: Do you remember who researched and wrote it?

JA: Well I was not doing anything to do with any research and writing myself. No doubt Chris was involved, no doubt Rhoma was involved. It's possible that it wasn't all female in doing the research, and I don't know about that because... you'd have to ask Chris about that.

Q: Do you remember who was involved in the show?

JA: Joan Smith was in it I know. That was another thing about Banner actually, the fact that we had older people. At that time in the 60s and 70s, there was quite a lefty theatre thing which tended to be young people doing things that appealed to sort of the student and trendy audiences. That wasn't what we were looking for. I think the fact that we had older people in the show was very powerful, in the cast. They were a generation above me – that would be Joan Smith, Charles, Bob Etheridge, Bill Shreeve, and probably some of us. But yes

and Joan was certainly in that show. If I saw the picture I could remember who they were. It was a nice show that one.

[01:43:56] Q: That was 1980, the first show was called Women at Work. When Doreen talks about the women's shows, she presents it as the men being quite antagonistic. The men had been saying, you can't do it.

JA: Well that's not my memory but maybe it's right...

Q: That's interesting, [this project] shows what different people remember. We all have huge gaps in our memories... That's how I got involved with [Banner], through the women's show... there were several shows.

JA: That's right, there was a later one, wasn't there, that was Marion Pike producing that, and I was involved in that as well. That was quite a bit later.

Q: So you were there for quite a long time.

JA: Yes, I wasn't doing all the shows, but yes I do remember that. That was one that was a bit controversial because... I liked Marion a lot and I think she was [good] but she didn't have the Banner background, didn't do actuality the same. She was a theatre person and I think she was less inclined to stick to the actuality as it were. But yeah I do remember that show. I'll tell you a funny story. I had an idea for a scene. It was something where women identified with a [particular] scene... In our office at the Gas Board, if you went into the computer department where they actually operated the computer, it was all-male in there. Sometimes you had to go in to take your [work], and they'd make sure that a filing cabinet door was always open with nudie pictures in it. They weren't being nasty but they were saying, this is our territory. It's really like dogs peeing on a lamp post really, this kind of stuff with the men putting up these pictures. So I thought we could do a scene where it was a woman interviewing a man, and there was all male pinups and things all around. The others thought it was quite a good idea so they said, where are we going to get these male pinups? So I said, well my friend Robin will get me some, so we did. They were horrible pictures

really. I did say to him, well Robin you know – being rather ungenerous – they are rather horrible. He said, well of course they are, I wouldn't give you any good ones. Anyway, what we were trying to do we realised it couldn't come over, it just came over sort of anti-gay and didn't work, so we abandoned the idea. We did it with scenes rather than... there may have been some actuality but it wasn't really actuality-based the same.

[01:47:47] Q: There were Second World War parodies in that show.

JA: Was that the one where we had... yes I think that was another one that Chris probably wrote about... it's one of the songs about digging for Britain, about planting spuds. That's right: Planting spuds and cabbages / Was never more worthwhile... Yes I think that was probably Chris writing that.

Q: Was that your last show?

JA: Probably.

Q: Then there was the Miners' Strike, and then I have a listing for a community show. Liquid Assets maybe?

JA: No I think by then it was getting to be the small group really and I wasn't involved a whole lot.

[01:48:58] Q: So, what do you think you got out of Banner? What do you think you learnt from Banner?

JA: Well to be honest I think for me it was mainly personal really. I didn't have a burning political commitment that people like Dave and so on had, it was mainly because of personal [reasons], Charles and the others. It was sort of fun and I think it was a good way of putting messages across and stuff. I think that was really my motivation in the thing rather than great politics really.



Q: What do you think Banner got from you?

JA: I was quite stalwart in terms of the speaking, and the acting to some extent. We got some acting skills which we got from Rhoma. In fact, at one point it must've been fairly early when they were thinking about going professional, when they were thinking about looking at getting some money. I was one of the ones who might have done it and I did think about it, but I decided it wasn't for me, and that was the right decision.

Q: In what way?

JA: I couldn't have done it, it was too much for me. To have done that you would've had to have learnt a lot of extra skills and everything. I could've managed on not a great deal of money, but I wouldn't have wanted to be in something where you weren't going to get any money. I couldn't have done like Dave done, I wouldn't have wanted to live like that. I didn't want to live in luxury but I wanted some income that I could rely on. It would've been too much for me. But I did toy a little bit with the idea.

Q: Any memories about the particular challenges that Banner presented?

JA: Well it was terribly demanding in terms of time, ridiculous really. That in the first place was sort of Parker but it took on its own momentum. Dave of course is very demanding on himself. It's something that I think in that respect, yeah.

Q: You said earlier in the break that you thought the group would've burnt itself out.

JA: Well you see it was because people were having kids. Doreen said some people were not sympathetic and she's quite right. But even [while] I was sympathetic to the people who might've had [children], I think it just wasn't viable. I can remember I mentioned about Dave having Katherine on his back; there's plenty of stories they'll tell about babies in the wings and things. We organised a crèche and I sometimes helped with that to look after, especially Katherine Rogers, who was the most perfect delightful child in the world. I can remember her saying, are you minding me tonight Joy? She accepted it and was happy with it. But it's

one thing when you've got one, it's another thing when you've got two. So I think particularly with people having children it was a big factor. There are always personal factors in things as well. I suppose really it stopped being a big group, it wasn't running in that way anymore. It finished with me as well as me finishing with it.

[01:53:34] Q: Do you have memories of people involved in Banner? What about Renate?

JA: Yes well they were all... it was very nice people. Like you were saying earlier, mostly I think people were in nice relationships with one another, like Renate and Richard [Hamilton]. I think we were unusual, really. I remember once going to a folk club, I think it was the old Black Diamond or something, and there were some guests I was interested in. I went there and I went to pay at the door and the guy at the door said, where's the rest of them, where's the rest of you? I said, I've come by myself. He said, are you sure, I thought you lot always traveled everywhere in packs. So we did really. Well it had to be our social life and everything as well because there wasn't a possibility of any other social life. I think we got on, at least... well, there was some antagonism necessarily because when you're working under pressure and stuff like that. But I think from my point of view anyway, I was happy with it.

Q: Thank you ever so much. Is there anything else you'd like to tell us?

JA: I don't think so. Thank you, it was very enjoyable.

[ END ]