

[TRACK 1]

[BACKGROUND INTERFERENCE FROM 17:04.05 to 25:22.7]

TONY WRIGHT:

Right it's Tony Wright, it's the 4th of May 2011 and I'm speaking to David Wright in Arts Mill. Can you tell me your full name and where and when you were born?

DAVID WRIGHT:

Yes it's David Alexander Wright. I was born in Birmingham on the 22nd of September 1929. I went to school there; first of all to an ordinary school where most of the kids left at fourteen and went on to work. I lived on a council estate which had not long been built on the outskirts of Birmingham and it had quite a sort of good feel about it because it was one of the modern ones of that time, and the people that had moved into the houses were quite new and had come from elsewhere, most of them, so from the local school I then went – oh by the way, I lived in a place called Billersley which was just off King's Heath which is a better known district, and I went to a strange school which was called Chittiford Road School. From there I went to Moseley Grammar School and spent the next three years with a gap in between there...I was evacuated during the war and went to Devizes and I did a couple of years in the local grammar school there and returned in my fourteenth year, and started my exams which were then school certificates and a higher school certificate. However, going back just a little bit – my father was a sculptor so I was into the arts right from the beginning and when I went to school, he had no interest in academic studies at all, so I really ploughed my own furrow there with help from a doctor with whom I stayed as an evacuee, who did a lot to help me raise my academic standards, and at the end of the school certificate I got the right amount of results to go on to university if I wanted to and I thought I'd go into the sixth form to do literature, not art although that was the thing I'd set my heart on. I'd worked a lot with my father in his studio, so I had a good knowledge with grounding in all the arts really; he was interested in music as well, but I thought I wanted to do something totally different from him, so I joined a sixth form literature class and I did about three or four months of that, and I'm afraid I got into a tangle with the guy who ran it, the sixth form tutor, and I decided that I didn't want to go on, and he was glad that I didn't want to go on, so then my father, and this is the interesting part of my story, because we lived in a council house remember; my father decided that I could stay at home and work [I didn't have to go to college, he didn't want me to go to college at all, and he knew that I was going into the Air Force at eighteen, so at sixteen I spent my days in my own bedroom which I called a studio and painted under his tutelage and also of course under his wages because I'd got no money and I helped him on some of his commissions which were quite big, many of them, and that's how I earned my money, so that really completes the sort of embryo of my artistic interests and education, so I'll leave it there because then I went into the RAF.

TW:

That was during the Second World War?

AC:

That's right, yes.

TW:

And were you a flyer?

AC:

No, no, I was...twelve when the war broke out in 1939, but my father was and he felt, although he was a pacifist by heart, he felt that he had to do something about Nazism. He was a pilot in the First World War and flew in, you know, wooden canvas aircraft, and he looked a very smart man in his uniform; I've got photographs of him, but in the Second World War, although I can remember a conversation we had driving along, he said 'this shouldn't happen' he said 'people like me and you and Germany don't want this, and I don't want it and the rest of the world doesn't' and he said 'it shouldn't happen' but he joined the RAF again, and he worked on the ground, although he flew occasionally and he was there until the end of the war in the late 1940s, at which time I went into the Air Force myself and my two brothers had also been in the Air Force during the war, so you know, we had quite a sort of camaraderie about the Air Force, the four of us.

TW:

I see, I see. Were your brothers artistic?

DW:

No, none of the others were. I was the youngest and I suppose they'd set their teeth against it quite early on. My sister was quite academically clever and so was my older brother, who became a pilot in the Second World War, and....my other brother was a bit of a tease in a way because he got into difficulties and hot water on occasions, but art was not anything to him, and my sister went into the nursing service, even in her middle teens, and ended up becoming a nurse and eventually rose in the ranks there, and she and I met up again when I finally did go to college and that was after I came out of the Air Force and I went to the Slade, then she and I shared a house in Hampstead during that period....

TW:

Go ahead.

DW:

Okay.

TW:

So did you study painting at the Slade?

DW:

Yes, but I mean getting into the Slade was interesting from my point of view because....a lot of people who went there were very well heeled you know, they had wealth at the back of them, and I'd done what they probably hadn't done and I'd worked on my own and accrued quite a lot of big paintings, big for that time, and when I applied I got a further education training grant which was from the Government, being in the RAF, so my fees were being paid really through that, and I suppose the assumption was - my proposal was - that I became a teacher afterwards, though really what I wanted to do was go to the Slade because I knew its reputation and just paint and develop that, so I bundled a whole load of quite big works for their interviews into a lorry and drove off when I was invited, and I was interviewed by William Coldstream who was the new Principal, he'd just come from Canada, and I got a place and they were rather shocked to see this lorry standing outside the Slade steps with all these big works on it, and I had to get people to carry them in, but I think it must have impressed them because I started there in the 1950s and did a three year course.

TW:

When you finished, what did you do after that then?

DW:

Well I hedged my bets actually; I didn't want to teach but I thought if I ever did at any level, it might be a good idea to have some sort of certificate so I went to Birmingham to a newly developed art teacher training, and I succeeded in getting that certificate, so you know, I put that in my back pocket just in case, and then I went....[interruption from someone else]the training at Birmingham. It was a new establishment, and it was....it was in the lead. It was at that time regarded as one of the bright colleges for teaching training in the arts, although I found it rather boring in a way and I didn't get on there very well. They wanted me to be a senior student which I did become, but I found all that such a bore that I'm afraid that it lapsed and I was chucked out of that job and somebody else took it on, fortunately. At the end of that I again decided that I didn't want to teach and I wouldn't, and that I would find myself a studio somewhere. Well I got married not long after that, and I moved out with my wife to Bewdley in Worcestershire, found myself an old factory and rented the whole top floor of that and began to paint. It was not very remunerative – then as now – but I did sell some pictures and my wife taught in Birmingham so you know, we had a steady income, but I met up with someone from the BBC and they wanted to know whether I would like to do some work for them, because they'd heard me play my guitar and sing to it, and they gave me one of their slots on a magazine programme in the evening which I did for some years, and I did that first of all for radio then eventually for television, transferred to ITV at some stage in my career, and I made something like six guineas a week out of that, which was quite a large sum in those days, and then.....moved from Bewdley out into the country and took an old farmhouse apart which was timber framed and re-built it to live in with my wife. We worked on it together ourselves, and from that point it was difficult financially so I did take some teaching and went to the local college in Kidderminster where I became a lecturer for the time being.

TW:

Right. How did you eventually come up to Hebden Bridge then?

DW:

Well that was a rather sad but a necessary move. My wife and I fell out, not too seriously, but I said I couldn't go on living where we were and she didn't want to move so I said 'I'm going to apply for a job in Wakefield' which came up. It was the Head of a School of Art which they still called it when I first made the application. I did my reading and I read up about Wakefield and how many schools there were in the area and what sort of courses they had, and they had a foundation course and I was always interested in those, and in fact I set one up in Kidderminster, and I thought 'I'd like to go to....an art school to work' you know, the traditional school, and I made the application and I got the job, so I moved to Wakefield on my own and I did live there for quite a long time, and was at the college for twenty years, and developed the School of Art into a Faculty of Art and Expressive Arts and Design, so it was not until 1990 that I was free to do what I wanted to do, but I didn't stop working, so I mounted quite a large collection of work during the time I was at the college of my own, set up a number of exhibitions for them and other places too – commissions – and eventually by chance met up with one of my staff who was actually doing her own work in Hebden Bridge in the mill, in Linden Mill. She had a large studio and she said 'well why don't you come and share this with me?'came here to Linden Mill. Linden Mill seemed such a comfortable and welcoming place and it had that wonderful feeling that it had been lived and worked in for years and years, and it had.....sustained itself and also it had carried that sort of atmosphere with it – working atmosphere with it, and I found

the architecture so interesting too, and I said 'are there any other spaces in the mill?' Ro Knapper who was one of my former staff said 'yes' and....she brought me upstairs to the one across the way, over the other side of the stairway at the centre of the building, and it was huge, it's bigger than the space we're in at the moment which is the gallery, and I negotiated with the owners and got it for about three hundred pounds a month which was quite a lot of money for me to find. By that time of course I was retired, so I had my own income and I've been here in the mill ever since, and of course it was wonderful because it was a large space so I could do large pieces of work which I've always done, and I set to and spent a year or two working in there, just on my own, other people in the mill came to visit me and friends, and one day, talking to Ro Knapper who was the person who introduced me to the place; she said 'wouldn't it be a great idea if we could have a studio and a gallery in the building?' In Wakefield I set up the Arts Mill, Wakefield Arts Mill, which was a complex of studios and one of the reasons why I came to Hebden Bridge to talk to Rowan was that the politics of the administration got so barbarous that I thought 'I'm not staying here any longer' although we were due to go into the new art gallery in Wakefield as part of the complex there. It never happened eventually, but anyway I resigned and came, took up abode here, but traveled to Wakefield.....nearly every day.

TW:

What year was it that you came here?

DW:

That was 2003....and in 2003, as I say I lived in Wakefield but she and I came to look at this place here because there was a public arts consultant who lived in the space that we're sitting in here; this was his office and it was all empty apart from this bit, and who should be sitting at one of the desks but a former student of ours who'd been here for two or three years with him, and talking it over, we decided that the three of us plus the.....ghosting at the back as it were....the arts consultant, we would set up a gallery. That was in 2003 and we started that really off the cuff. I mean we didn't write a plan, we didn't do a business presentation of any sort, we didn't ask anybody else to contribute, to be involved, I just went to the owners again and said, 'That space is not being used. Would you donate it to us for a period of time, and give us the chance to set up a gallery with certain policies and we'll see how it goes?' and they said, 'Right, you've got it for free for a period and we'll see what happens. Well it never changed; we had it for free until 2010 and they were very good to us, the owners; they never bothered us, but were very pleased as it began to grow, and we had a policy, a contract.... (David begins to cough)

TW:

So did you have to start paying in 2010?

DW:

Yes, but that was another sort of move, which wasn't expected; in fact it came as quite a blow. The gallery gathered force and we had a programme that covered international and national, and people who worked in the vicinity....people who worked in Hebden Bridge in fact exhibited here, and the policy was quite wide and democratic and we always vetted everything that came in. Sometimes we rejected things, but we had connections with galleries in London and we could select things, so the range of work was tremendous, from local artists to.....people like Bridget Riley and.....we've had a Picasso exhibition specially set up for us; last year we had Goya; last year we had Anna Maria Pochenko; and Paula Rego has exhibited here nearly every two years. So we've had a wide range of exhibitions at different levels....and the policy was quite distinctive

and quite definite in that it was not a commercial gallery. We did not set anything up, any exhibition, to earn money; we set it up to bring as wide a range of people into the vicinity as we could, to feed...well, the festival among other things, but otherwise all the artists in the area who might have the chance to do something here that they couldn't unless they went a long way away, or they couldn't get to places, and to draw people in from outside. So it added to the tourism to some extent.

TW:

Do you think the area, the Upper Calder Valley and Hebden Bridge in particular, is a creative area and the fact that people appreciated the arts helped the gallery become a success?

DW:

Well it's fed a lot into it; the atmosphere, the quality of life in Hebden Bridge and the very broad range of artistic activities that go on in Hebden Bridge and of course its history – the writers that have been here or used to come – poets and so on – but I think it's the sense of permanence about the place. I know it's earned a cock-eyed name from time to time, but I think all that can be pushed aside for the fact that there are lots of people here...very knowledgeable, very interested in the arts, who make a contribution to the town in their own right, but also of course, have something amidst them, not just arts and gallery people, others as well, which is really like a show case for the things that go on and the work that goes on in Hebden Bridge – visual and other.

TW:

Right. I mean, the international artists you mentioned – Paula Rego and Bridget Riley, Frank Auerback and others... it not being a commercial gallery, how do you sell it to them, that you know, having an exhibition here would be a good thing?

DW:

Ah well, they are commercially viable those ones, and they come with a price tag on them, and if we can sell them we will sell them, so the fallback position is – when we can get artists that are of such a status that they can encourage people with money to come in and look at what we're offering, we earn a living from that to some extent. It's hit and miss, but funnily enough, the artists who bring in works that are at a much lower cost often don't sell as much as one or two pictures from someone like Paula Rego or....Pasmore, Victor Pasmore, for instance; we've just sold some works of his as well. I suppose the one layer of visual arts that we don't touch at present, although we'd like to, are those that are actually contemporary, and at the forefront of their own work really; and things that are going on in the arts nationally and internationally. We can't afford to bring those except through bought-in exhibitions from the Arts Council which is run now... one of the circuits is run through the Hayward Gallery, so in fact this year we've got one of the most controversial area of artists sending their work....the Chapman Brothers, and we're showing that at the festival. So we do get these challenging sort of exhibitions from time to time and that's part of our policy – to challenge our audience if you like.

TW:

Now I know because the uses of this building have changed recently, you've actually set up a whole series of studios in another part of the building. How did that come about?

DW:

Well I've always hoped that we would pay our way as a gallery and I was negotiating

with one of the owners to set up a studio on the same floor as the gallery in a huge space, which is parallel to it, which is all glass and it is therefore called 'the greenhouse' and I set up a design, costed it all out, and we discussed what income we would get from it, he and I, and we agreed that we would start building it and that we would split the income between us in what we thought was a fair division. In the middle of all this, quite to my horror, he came to me one day and said 'I think you'd better sit down and listen to this' and he said, 'I'm afraid you will not be able to build your studios on this floor,' he said, 'and not only that, I'm afraid we're going to take your studio over.' I said, 'You're going to kick me out?' He said, 'Well, you can put it like that,' he said, 'but it might be to your advantage, and what I recommend you do is to speak to the other half of the management, because there is this person who now owns this side of the building, because he's got a proposition to put to you and the proposition is as follows: We will not do it on the top floor, but because he is moving out of his space we will build it on that floor. It will give us an income, but more than that, we'll expand the Arts Mill to the whole of this side of the building, we'll try and get other people in to it and then we will live off that income and we will make bids to the Arts Council (which we'd already decided to do), so I've had a discussion with the other partner and one of the things he is keen to do is to give access to the gallery in such a way that it will attract more people and it will also give people who...were invalided or whatever, with wheelchairs even, to gain access to the building and to come into the gallery.' So it was decided that the gallery as it stands will be moved downstairs and it will treble in size, and I will then take over this gallery as my studio. So we set to: plans have been drawn up; we made an application to the Arts Council and we are breathlessly waiting for that; and we now have twenty studios and we also have, in the plans, four exhibition spaces – two smaller and two larger ones – and we also have a café written into the plans, so we might make it more of a social centre than we have done in the past - if it all comes into being. But you hold your breath on these occasions because the Arts Council, although we've had it vetted and we've been visited and they've seen it as a sustainable project and they've suggested what sort of bid we make... it's never guaranteed. What happens after that, if we don't get the bid, the grant, I don't know – we'll come to that in due course. But up until then we're very optimistic and we're still showing exhibitions right up until the end of year here in this gallery, and we hope to have the other one probably taking over before the end of the year, but we don't know.

TW:

So doing all this administration work, has it impacted on the amount of time that you've had to create your own work?

DW:

I haven't done any. I stopped working – I said, 'The best thing to do is to put it behind you for a year, or less if possible, until you get back into your studio when the gallery goes downstairs,' and I haven't felt deprived in any way. And in a way it's going on in my mind; I've got ideas – I've just been doing some small drawings ready for my next launch into it, but of course you fail to move with the times, you fail to have work that you can show that is contemporary in your own style, and when it comes to doing an exhibition, as someone pointed out to me a couple of days ago, all you show is retrospective work [laughing] which is not good for your psyche in a way.

TW:

Don't you think though it might give you a period of reflection so that you can look back over the years and the different types of work that you've completed, and maybe draw a line under some of it and say 'well I've done that now – I'm going to move on to something new' – have you not had a reflective period?

DW:

Well I do. I mean I do that anyway, but I had a retrospective exhibition in 2008 which traveled around, and that was a time to look back and I was quite astounded by the work that I was able to dig out to show what I was doing when I was in my twenties; people loaned me or you know, I found stored behind others, and I suppose it was quite a pleasure to see that array of work and what it did reveal is that there were these stops and changes; sometimes there were slow developments, others there was a sudden break and something else started up quite different, and I think you do that anyway as an artist, and I've been looking back but I have not been saying to myself, 'Let's make a fresh start and do something – face in a different direction entirely...' I've actually looked at the work I've been doing and on one particular section which was all about the war, I started to do another series about contemporary war and that I hope might be joined with another artist who is in his nineties now, who has painted pictures from his experiences in the war, and we may have an exhibition here at some time in the future, so I've got a project, I've got a target, I've got a timescale, and they are different in one sense because they deal with contemporary people as opposed to....symbols if you like, of dictators and....people who have carried out atrocities and so forth, and bits of war and what it looked like in the First and Second World War. These are occurring here and now.

TW:

Right. Does the landscape of this area affect you in any kind of way?

DW:

Oh I find it fabulous. Funnily enough I write poetry and I write more poetry about it, because landscape is not my subject but yes, I think it's marvellous. I come through the moors every morning to work and it's....an extraordinarily.....rich sort of experience every day, changing light, changing effects of the weather and so forth.

TW:

Do you not want to include your poetry as part of your art work, or are they separate medias?

DW:

No they're separate. Poetry is much more personal, although I have written about the landscape a number of times, but I'm not a good poet; I do read my poetry to people from time to time, but never here, never in Hebden Bridge, not yet anyway [laughing]

TW:

And what about your music side then? I mean you obviously made a living out of doing that at one time. Is that not something you carry on or could integrate?

DW:

No, I do pick up the guitar occasionally but if you don't play it your skills go I think, and I earn my living by writing songs and writing lyrics and then singing to camera. It was a nerve-wracking experience for me; it was never easy and I....to perform in front of audiences or the public, I've never felt comfortable, so I think it's died out for that reason.

TW:

When you wrote songs for the radio and for television, what was the subject matter of the lyrics?

DW:

Well they were ironic, most of them – not all of them, but they were ironic and they were about what was going on from day to day. My remit was to phone up the director of the programme who would then say ‘get hold of the Daily Mail or’...I don’t know....’The Times and read the headlines, and base a song on the headlines’, so they were political, they were personal, they jibed at people - not too discomforting for them - or it was about some incident that occurred, usually, was not violent or too upsetting, but just doggerel really, you know. That was great fun but it was nerve-wracking because, when I wrote it, sometimes even the music during the day and the lyric, sometimes I borrowed old songs and based it on those, and then I drove thirty miles into the centre of Birmingham to the studios. I had one rehearsal – by that time they had vetted the lyric because I had to telephone that back as soon as I’d written it, and they’d tell me whether their legal department said I could sing it or whether I’d got to drop things out, and occasionally they said, ‘You can’t sing this – you’ll have to write another one,’ so I was shunted into the spare room to write another one, music and all, and then at about six o’clock, six thirty, I had to do it live to the cameras, so it was....it was nerve-wracking, I must admit.

TW:

You’ve had this broad experience of sculpture with your father and painting and poetry and music; what do you think about artists who create like installations that have a multi-media affect?

DW:

Great. I love installations – I’ve done them myself. I think there’s a misconception about what an installation is in some respects. I see installations as all-enveloping art works and ones that you can physically...merge yourself into, rather than some small object which becomes rather precious and seems to be in fact just something that goes on a plinth, though it may be called an installation. They may have to have historical, political or social meaning, but they must have a meaning; it must be an issue, and it must in a way almost swallow you, the whole thing, so that you walk through it – that’s what I think an installation is.

TW:

Almost like it’s environmental

DW:

It is, I think an installation is an environmental thing, and it will reflect the real world around in some way I think; either because of the materials you use, the issue you’re focusing on, whether it be something to do with war or you know, the green world or the not green world, but it has to be something that’s manufactured in a large space and is tangible, really tangible. I think installations where it’s purely words, purely words I find very difficult to take on board. I may use words within them, but not to....offload if you like my literary endeavours onto a wall somewhere on a small scale; I find that is not really an installation, not in my mind anyway.

TW:

Yeah. I’d like to talk a little bit more about your own work because you said you’ve had various periods over the years when you’ve done different things and gradually progressed. What kind of... do you have a philosophy of art or a way of working?

DW:

Oh very much, yes. I think that if it isn't based on some activity, be it historical or contemporary, so it is at the forefront of people's minds that it's a social issue of one sort or another.then you have to use ideas. If it isn't that, if it's something that is totally imaginative in a sense, the issue has to be replaced by some sort of spiritual or mystical.sense of.dream or even nightmare if you like – another world; it has to be another world. So it falls into two halves really. A lot of my work is based on ideas that take you into realms of the imagination; gardens I'm particularly fond of and I use a lot of those as backdrops to ideas, but they're always somehow enfolding an idea about mystery, about magic, about the idea of penetrating into somewhere different and therefore has a surreal flavour to it. But the other ones are quite distinctly thumbing my nose at situations like the art establishment, banking, investment. The one that I'm working on at the moment is religion....that does involve contemporary ideas as well. But also I've set up ideas in my mind for the issues surrounding war and I've done quite a lot of work based on that.even about the law.I've done a large work based on the ironies of the law, but it is eventually humorous – I hope it's witty, but it's irony, it's juxtaposing ideas which run counter to if you like, the establishment notion of what the subject is about, so it's undermining it in a way.

TW:

So you focus very much on social life as it were, rather than individuals.

DW:

There is one further section I suppose to my work, and that's family – family in that sense of society.marriage is one of them, daily living is another, I suppose also family problems and pleasures as well, they come into my work, but that's a very small section in a way and that arises like everything else does, out of experience, so there's a whole one on the start of and the break down of marriage in a series, but I regard those as issues as well you see, so they fall into the other categories as well.

TW:

Right. You say you paint a lot of very large pictures. Why have you chosen that scale?

DW:

Well I find doing small things is niggledy.and not only that, when you sort of explore the possibilities in making work, large or small, you get caught up in different techniques and different ways of doing it, and one of the ways of sort of getting an expansion in your own mind as well is to take an image and blow it up. Now when photocopying and all the common photography came into being, you could do this and not actually make it costly, so you could start with a small idea and by a mechanical process you could blow it up, virtually to any size you wanted, providing you could afford to fix it to the surface on which you were working, and I found that by using photocopy you could blow up images to beyond human size and providing you were prepared to work on it very steadfastly and panel it in, you could go up to eight feet by six feet, or twelve feet by ten feet quite quickly and easily, and you'd got a ground of large shapes and forms and ideas down on a surface which you would then work over in various types of colour, usually acrylic paint, so that expansion made you feel that you could walk into your own picture. It's quite a nice sort of experience. A lot of people say about my very big works that the thing that they enjoy more than anything else, they feel that they can move into it – it's got a perspective – not always done distinctly with perspective but it's got a feeling that they could actually step over the frame and into the picture, so that's one of the things.

TW:

Well the reason I asked that is, you have people like Paula Rego and there's Goya you

spoke of, both of which painted large pictures but they also created quite small ones in their etchings and print making

DW:

Well I do that you see

TW:

So you do that as well?

DW:

I do that as well, but I mean Paula Rego works on her pictures on a very small scale – might start with drawing a figure you know, A4 size, and then she eventually, gradually builds up towards big things and eventually she does them just in pastel – they're not paint any longer - and big drawings as well which she turns into lithographs and etchings, but the...I work the opposite way round. I start off with an idea, I start painting it almost immediately, I look for the images that I want to put on it, which could come from any source – I could draw them, I do a lot of drawing and I transfer those onto the canvas, magazines, newspapers - anything goes - and I blow those up bit by bit and of course they become something different then, so whereas it might start off as an inch and a half by an inch and a half, it ends up by three feet by three feet and the difference in what you've got on the big scale and how far it's gone from the original statement, even if it's a picture out of a newspaper or magazine, the gap is so wide that it no longer has resonance at that scale, but it's very interesting to go back the opposite way. Once the paint is on the canvas, you can then photograph that and with the new techniques of print, you can actually reprint it on a small scale, in other words, boil it back down again, but of course it's changed irrevocably because it's now colour, it's got a different feel about the scale of it, and it goes down to a small scale and you can print that – a one-off straight away; you can print the photograph the wrong way round by having it photocopied the wrong way round and then you can put it down on a surface and by putting a fluid on the back and burnishing it on the paper or the canvas, you've got a full scale picture on a very small scale, and it's exactly the same as some of the big ones – I may have tweaked it in one way or another – and so you've got a sort of reflection on a smaller scale which in a way is what Paula Rego does; she often does small pictures of the same subject matter that become large works in oil pastel.

TW:

Have you ever thought about producing books as art work, because you're obviously into this reproductive side of things. Would that not be another way to go?

DW:

Well I did start at one time doing children's books and illustrating them, but I don't know why, I found it a chore. I also became engaged in the past in illustrating other books, quite a number of which have been published, but I've always felt that they do not effectively carry the message that I want them to carry, apart from the fact that you've got a subject matter that you've got to match up to quite often, and if you can't get the information that the writer wants in the book, in the illustration, if you can't get a source from which to get that information, it's a real chore.

TW:

You mentioned earlier gardens as backdrops. Is that a symbolic importance for you?

DW:

Yes, it's....I mean gardens are magical places to me, and many are so magical in fact

they become our worlds, totally other worlds. What's so interesting about a garden is that it's really a man-made construction in a way, or a person-made construction, and it's taking elements which are ungovernable in a sense, and it's creating a new world from the combination of, you know, imaginative ideas and the processes which you have to bow to in the natural growth of things, and I always think of it as a world in its own right, so you wander through a world which has been created with this rather mysterious and mystical feeling about it, and all my work in gardens is based on that notion. They have either become dreams or they have become nightmares or they have become other worlds, surrealist spaces if you like, but you can add things to them which can give you that feeling and you can, sometimes you take pictures that you've photographed of places, and you can quickly turn them because of what they are in themselves anyway, and that gives you the opportunity of changing all the colours of course, taking the natural colours and literally reversing them because I use computers to do a lot of those things, and it can also allow you to add things in that aren't there and so give it another character from its original one.

TW:

Right. You mentioned earlier that you weren't a landscapist, and I've heard you just talk about gardens as being man-made. Is the reason that you haven't ventured into landscape shall we say is because you feel it's not man-made?

DW:

No, no, I have done a lot of landscapes in the past but not of recent times, but I do create my own landscapes as backdrops to things as well, but the gardens are specific – they're always of a particular place – architecture is one of my great things too. I love...I did architecture as a secondary subject at the Slade and that has probably given me that sense, as my father's work has, because he worked with architects of grandiose themes you know, like the cathedral behind you there, which is...that's an eight by four picture, very meticulously done but printed and not the original place at all you know; I've turned it into my own cathedral really. But that sense of awe you get when you go into a cathedral or a large space – architectural, wood, whatever, forest - that's always inspired me, it's as though you are moving out of the urban, rather down-to-earth, somewhat boring local situation of...I don't know, a council estate somewhere - although that has its mystery as well - into the spiritual world, which is ripe, if you like, for using your imaginative creativeness to get this mystical, dreamlike feeling.

TW:

Right. I'd like to follow that a bit more. I mean, although people might think that out in the wilds up on the moors it is a wild place and it is, but it has been managed for a number of years and things like cathedrals, it is said that all the pillars are imitation trees and they're like symbols of old sacred groves and that type of thing, so do you believe the sort of symbolism of landscape shall we say, bringing that in to an art work, whereby you create your own world – is that one of the ways that you would look at things?

DW:

It's very natural when you think of temples, in the early days of Greek and Roman architecture, those columns were in fact wood to begin with and they were transformed because man found that you could make them more permanent with stone, and so that is there, and all...I mean my father's been into the decorative arts because he's worked on large buildings, public buildings. They have used all the symbolism and decorative elements of the past, going right back to Greek times, and they still crop up in...like the leaf forms and the plant forms, petals and flowers and so on, and they've become stock

in trade as it were; you make something twined round a column, the bark of a tree becomes fruits on the columns of stone buildings, and the use of animals, birds and all sorts of small creatures have always been combined into it. Now I've been brought up with all that, so that comes in unconsciously and the broad spaces that you're talking about, like the moors which have obviously been controlled in one sense, those wonderful, almost like....body shapes....you know, like lying people....those are sort of endemic in a way, they belong to one and they come naturally into the psyche and get translated from that into whatever comes to mind at the time, and then you look back and you say 'gosh, that's just like the way that the moors graduate backwards' or you go the other way round, you say 'I am going to take a slice', which I have done in some of my war paintings, and say 'this is France but it's based on the moors of Yorkshire', so you get that too, you know, these interactions and reverses that are going on all the time.

TW:

Is this idea of permanence then important to you?

DW:

Very much, very much.....which makes me sad about some of the works that happen today, because.....even ones that appear to be of a permanent nature.....they can't be for all sorts of reasons. There's been an interesting exhibition, it's changed now, of a guy called David Nash who works in wood and he actually cultivates wood as well, so his whole life has been about wood – planing, sawing, burning, all the things that you would expect in making charcoal, so he was imbued with this idea of nature and wood, and he's used things that have been changed in nature, sometimes by a natural process, but sometimes he's taken something that has fallen down because it's been diseased or.....I suppose that's still natural, but he's also chopped them up in certain ways that somehow reinvests them with something that is still the spirit of wood and the spirit of nature, but again it's man-made, and those sort of artists I find, although the materials they use are transitory in a way because he uses live stuff, he combines you know, trees that grow together or form a ring or something like that, but.....nature is only relatively permanent isn't it? Man-made things are only relatively permanent, but I think they should have some time scale to them of permanence because they re-inform people you know, in the future, and.....we all look back to history and draw things out of it, whether we be artists or you know, just ordinary....commoner garden thinkers, which most of us are. [laughing]

TW:

Well we're getting near to the end of the hour I think. Is there anything that you would like to say about your own work or about Arts Mill that I haven't asked about?

DW:

I don't think there is really.....I think if you just.....three sort of statements.....as it were closing in from the town and its surroundings....one of the things that I know keeps me here – I don't live actually in Hebden Bridge, I live in Rishworth, but it's nice to come over the moors to this every day, it's like going to work every morning you know, I could work at home because I live on my own. I have a big space which I could use as a studio but I'd feel absolutely cramped in, so it's this feeling that you move out of what is a cramped little apartment, you go over the hills and they're changing every day. The light is changing every day, the animals change every day. It's burnt today; it was a sort of scabrous yellow orangey colour you know, a few weeks ago, because of its natural growth and dying, coming back to life again. Peat suddenly appears, like sores almost, or scars on the landscape. All this is changing all the time;

that's great, that is a setting for a small town which is built in layers and terraces, and that is in itself like many of the ones in other countries; you like walking up the hill to them. I mean you don't here, it's perhaps the other way round, you walk down in a way to the town in the valley, but that's got the same feeling, that you've got all these different levels at which you can see up and see down, so that's like a rolling down from the moors into the town, and there aren't many towns like that just immediately round here that are so compact and they have all the things going for them, even in this modern day. They've got a way in and a way out, which is terrific; a railway; they used to have trams which were great things at one time; they had buses which... okay, and cars can get here and get through it. So you can use what's going on in the present to come here, and then you've got all these buildings that in themselves are so exciting. You know, when you see three floor buildings that are actually three houses in one... I mean you see a lot of two, but you get three here occasionally and that's absolutely fantastic. So all these rather exciting and unexpected things gives this town a particular ambience which is comforting. There's a sort of cosiness about it; it still has shops that are individual; it has a range of people who are empathetic and sympathetic to their surroundings and to others. It has its sharp political edge like every town does, it has those who other people fear are trying to destroy it, and there are those that feel that they've got to keep to the times and build it up, so there is an evolution going on, even in this present time, but it refers back to periods of the past and it refers back more than anything to labour really, to a working situation and that's something that comforts me. Whatever it is, it's a working situation. To be in a building where fifty or sixty young women from about fourteen up to dotage were working with machines, across there right to the end of this building, here in this space at one stage, is both uplifting and it's tragic. So you've got these two interconnecting or facing issues about the drudgery of work at one stage, but the life it's left has, you know, passed on to you – it surrounds you, you can't help but feel it.

TW:

Well thank you very much

DW:

It's probably all mumbo-jumbo but you can edit it down

[END OF TRACK 1]