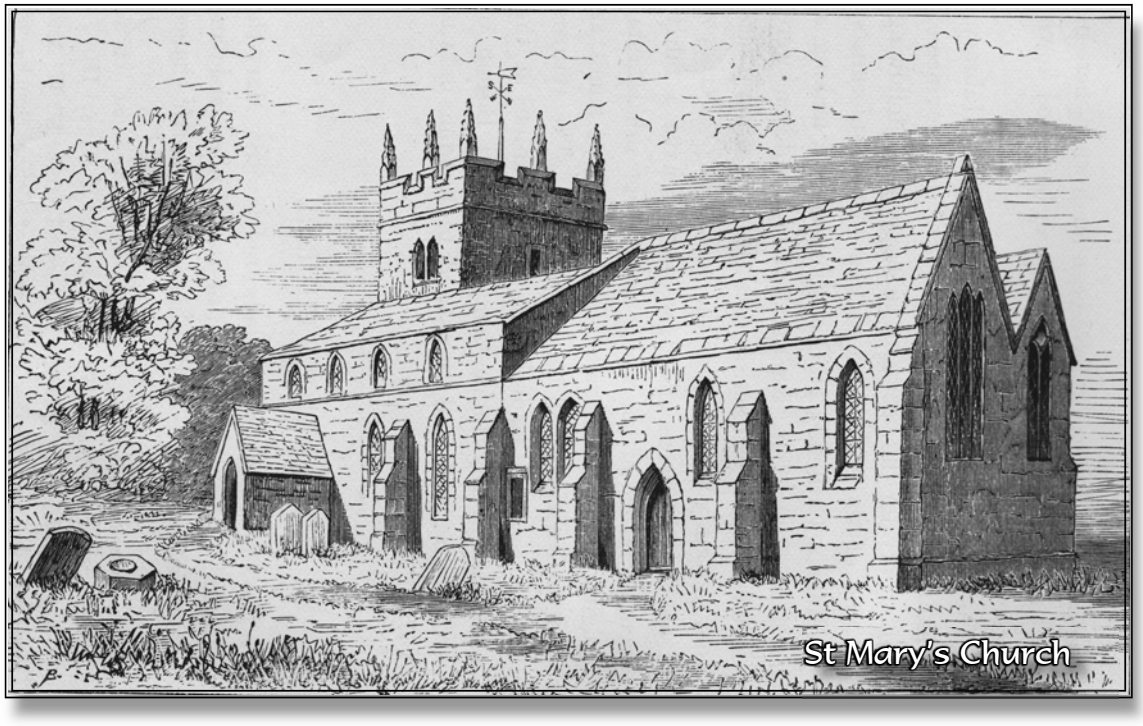
# Colton History Society

## All Our Stories

### Transcripts of villagers recollections of days gone by recorded as part of our

### All Our Stories Project 2013


St Mary's Church

# Colton History Society

## All Our Stories

Transcripts of villagers recollections of days gone by recorded as part of our

All Our Stories Project 2013

### Contents

# Colton History Society

## All Our Stories

Transcripts of villagers recollections of days gone by recorded as part of our All Our Stories Project 2013

# Sheila Bergin

**Memories of life in Colton**

**Sheila Bergin**.

S1: Maureen Dix
S2: Sheila Bergin
S3: Nona Goring

S1: This recording is being made for Colton History Society. Maureen Dixon, Nona Goring are interviewing Sheila Bergin on Tuesday the 12th of March 2013.

Good morning Sheila

S2: Good morning.

S1: Can you tell us about your family and where and when you were born, etcetera?

S2: Yes. Well, my dad's name was Tom Preston; he was born in 1913 and his family lived in Colton, I would say from the early to mid-1800s. Dad and his parents and brothers and sisters lived at The Forge and I think initially they actually rented it and then eventually bought it.

Dad left school at 13 and he worked at the manor. He'd always been interested in farming and I think the whole family was really. And while he was working there he gradually built up his own stock around The Forge. I think he converted the out buildings and he built pens and various things, and as far as I can make out he also rented land behind The Forge, which I suppose really is more or less where the village hall is now. So he built up stock, etcetera, and eventually became independent. He gave up working at the manor and met my mum and they were married and my brother was born, Trevor. My eldest brother was born in Colton and then my parents moved to a smallholding out at Holly Bank, which is between Armitage and Rugeley, and that's where I was born. But while they were there, they actually applied and were very successful in getting one of the smallholding on Blythbury Road, which had been made out of old wood farm and it created eight starter farms for young farmers. And so in January 1938 they moved there. I was just a few weeks old I think. And Dad actually stayed there with Mum until he retired in 1984 and we finished up with five children. Another three were born at the holding and then Dad retired and Mum retired to High Street in Colton in, well, in 1984.

S1: Right. What do you remember about your neighbours?

S2: Well, I suppose they weren't, in the conventional sense, neighbours but they were … there was a wonderful cooperation between the farmers because, obviously, they were all starting out together and trying to build up the equipment and stock, etcetera. And so they helped one another in many, many ways. There was quite and interaction between them all: haymaking and harvest times they always worked in collaboration. They shared all the implements and the tools and they were always there for one another. If a cow was having trouble calving then they only had to shout 'Help!' and one of the neighbours came to help them. But I think also the farmers' wives had a wonderful, close-knit group as well and they were there for one another and gave lots of help and advice and, in a way, they all became honorary aunts and uncles to us kids. Yes.

S1: Can you remember the day that the smallholdings were built?

S2: Well, I think they were ready by January 1938 and the date on the front of ours said 1938, but how long they were in preparation I don't know.

S1: Thank you. Did you think the winters were harder in your childhood and what did you wear?

S2: Well, in my memory, there seemed to be more snow than in recent times although, looking out of the window … [Laughs]. We've just had a hard winter really, in many ways, haven't we? I don't remember too much about what we wore but I think the first thing that springs to mind is the liberty bodice. And the knee-length socks which had a fold-over and we always had garters to hold them up. We had hand-knitted gloves and scarves and girls had the bonnets and I think the boys had the balaclava-type things didn't they? But one thing I do remember is that the boys didn't seem to wear long trousers in those days did they. To me it's amazing nowadays. Yes.

S1: Yes, they got to a certain age and then they would wear long trousers. I think it was 14

S1: What did you do for baths and general hygiene?

S2: Well, the irony was that in actual fact because the houses were newly built they were actually built with bathrooms, with a bath, but only a cold water tap to it so we children weren't bathed in the bath until quite a lot later when we actually had a Rayburn stove installed in the kitchen and that provided the hot water throughout the house. So Sunday night was always bath night and that of course was a bath in front of the fire. I seem to remember hair washes were Sunday morning which gave your hair time to dry, and, if you were going to Sunday school, it was all nice and clean and fresh to go to Sunday school. So, yes, bath in front of the fire, take it in turns, and I remember a big rubber mat to stop all the splashes. And the rest of the week, yet again in front of the fire, with a good wash down. Or sometimes the little ones I think were plopped in the sink and bathed in the sink.

S1: And I assume it was your mum who did the washing and cleaning around the house?

S2: Yes, well, washing day of course was always Monday. And it's funny how the house seemed to change around because when we were small, what became the living room was called the kitchen because it had the range in it for cooking, etcetera. And the back kitchen became the kitchen later on. And in the back kitchen there was a copper, which the fire was lit and so flake soaps and things for boiling, etcetera. I do remember the dolly tub and the blue bag for the sheets, because all the sheets seemed to be white—you didn't have coloured sheets or anything. And the wooden-rollered mangle and don't put your fingers anywhere near that. After a year or two I know an aunt used to come and help on Mondays as well with the washing, and *much* later the sheets went to Lichfield Laundry—they were picked up and went to Lichfield Laundry. But, obviously, as time went on we got a washing machine and things developed didn't they? But initially, of course, we didn't have electricity in the house either. And I remember that, it must have been just after the war, an uncle came and because we'd had a petrol engine for the milking machine somehow my uncle utilised that so that it charged batteries and we had a very, very basic electric light in the house, which of course was prone to give out once the batteries had drained. But, yes, really, fairly rapid changes. I mean we think of a rapid change now but to my parents it must have been very rapid change I think.

S1: And how did you celebrate Christmas?

S2: Well, when we were very young we went to my grandmothers on Christmas day because aunts, uncles, cousins, etcetera, used to go as well and I don't know how we all fitted in, looking back, but we did. And Mum and the aunts, prior to Christmas, made all the mincemeat and the Christmas puddings, cakes, and such like. For Christmas dinner we had chicken usually—home grown—and Mum and the aunts as well used to make a lovely stuffing, parsley and thyme stuffing—it was beautiful. Yeah. On Christmas Eve, we hung one of Dad's big socks and Father Christmas was very obliging; he left an apple and an orange and various small items. Sometimes just small things, but family presents we either exchanged when we went to my grandmothers or later on. When we had Christmas at home we had to wait until after we'd had our breakfast to open the presents. And I do remember, for many years, we had Christmas trees. So I must have been fairly young when we started having a Christmas tree but initially it only had candles which were never lit, of course.

S1: You had a special meal at Christmas, but what do you remember about meals for the rest of the year?

S2: I do remember that Sunday breakfast was a very special meal. Somehow, I suppose it was a day of rest and Dad did the minimum that he could get away with. So we started off Sunday breakfast all together and I think it was usually a cooked breakfast on a Sunday morning. The rest of the time I think we probably had just porridge and toast and cereals, etcetera. I do remember dripping-toast, which was … especially pork dripping—it was beautiful. We always had a joint on Sunday and usually there was a pie and custard after that, and of course that joint from Sunday was cold meat for Monday, washing day, which went together with bubble and squeak and pickled and pickled cabbage, etcetera. If there was any pie left we had that with cold custard as well. And if there was any left on Tuesday, Mum had a mincer which she attached to the table and minced it all up, and that was with … we had mince with onion on Tuesday. Because we lived on a farm, I suppose, and there was milk readily available and eggs, we were quite lucky in that we had sweets and egg custards and rice pudding and I remember tapioca and semolina as well. And, just occasionally when Dad had been to the cattle market on a Tuesday, he would bring fish and chips home wrapped in a newspaper and that was quite a treat—but it didn't happen very often

S1: So, what was your favourite meal?

S2: I think Sunday tea was, actually, because it was one of those meals where we were … there was always extras around, relatives or friends or such like, and having a sweet tooth I enjoyed the jelly and the blancmange and the tinned fruit, etcetera. And sandwiches, we didn't often have sandwiches as such, I can't remember, but yes. I think that was probably my favourite meal.

S1: And did your family grow or rear any food?

S2: Yes. Dad was a great gardener, so he grew potatoes and lots of different sorts of veg and, yes, so there was always a ready supply and that came in useful.

S1: And how did you keep your food fresh or store it?

S2: Well, we, as well as Dad growing the veg and some of those… I remember beans being salted down in big stone jars and things like that. And we also had an orchard and we got apples and plums and damsons, and Mum always bottled those for the winter time. And we also had blackcurrant bushes and gooseberries and raspberry canes and grew strawberries as well. So wherever possible they were preserved. Pigs were killed and preserved. We had a slab which, I don't know whether it's the conventional name, it was called a thrall, in the pantry, and the sides of bacon, etcetera, were salted down there. I remember hams hanging in the kitchen as well.

As well as the bottling, in later years the WI in Colton had a canning machine and that rotated around the village for anyone who'd got preserves to do, and Mum for many years bottled, tinned, a lot of her fruit as well. And of course there was the meat safe, which I don't know how much use that was but the meat was religiously put into it.

S1: Keep the flies off.

S2: Yes.

S1: So where did your family buy the other food that you couldn't get?

S2: Yes. Well, we had a bread delivery three times a week. I think it was Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and I assume that came from the Co-op. The general supplies we actually bought from the Co-op and I suppose Mum or dad or whoever was going in, sometimes it was the whole family who trooped in plus pram, and the pram was very handy because it had those removable things at the bottom and you could stock, put all the shopping in and then load the children back in on the top of it.

In later years, when we had the phone, Mum used to phone the order through to Cheshires, who came, who were from Lion Street, and that was delivered by van. And when we travelled into Rugeley we either, as I said, walked, cycled, or we went in the horse-drawn float and that was quite an experience.

S1: Where did you go to school and were your school days happy?

S2: Well, Colton school until I was eleven; and I certainly don't remember being unhappy. I don't think they were unhappy times, you just accepted that that's the way things were didn't you?

S1: Yes. And what did you wear for school?

S2: I think, in the winter time it was a gym slip with a jumper underneath and I think, sort of, I remember navy double-breasted gabardine raincoats, I suppose, yeah, I think which covered a multitude of sins, and I think because they were double-breasted they were obviously unisex so they got passed down the family—it didn't matter if you were a boy or girl you still …. They still fastened on the right side. Three-quarter socks and heavy shoes in the winter, which Dad was prone to tapping scent in to try and preserve them a little bit. In summer it was cotton dresses and cardigans and ankle socks and sandals.

S1: What lessons did you have?

S2: Well, looking back my main impression is arithmetic. Mental arithmetic as well as sums. And English I remember as really spelling and compositions and that was the nightmare of the week really, was the composition. I suppose we did touch on history and geography but I don't have any direct memory of it at all.

S1: Do you remember your teachers?

S2: Well, Mr Broughton, obviously, and there were several assistant teachers in my time at Colton school but when we finished at Colton it was Mrs Shaw, I do remember, and she taught, obviously the younger children. And the girls used to go, I suppose it was when the boys went out and do the gardening, the girls went through and we did handicrafts and more like sowing, knitting, that sort of thing. Yeah.

S1: Were there punishments if you misbehaved?

S2: There were, yes. The boys got the cane and the girls had a slap on the arm. Yes.

S1: And how old were you when you left Colton school?

S2: I was 11 and I travelled to Stafford on the train from the Trent Valley station for my secondary school years.

S1: And what is your most vivid memory of your school days as a whole?

S2: Well, Colton school I think I was always very anxious. I think Mr Broughton must have had a thing about time keeping because I was frightened to death of being late for school, I do remember that. Another thing is the lavatories, which were very, very basic weren't they. But not associated with school but on the way home from school we always had a regular stopping-off place at different … to have a drink of water, and Mrs Hardcastle was one, Mrs Shelly, old Mrs Shelley, was another one. And in my early days an aunt, oh I suppose she'd be a great aunt, lived at the bottom of Bank Top and she always was out with a drink for us, helped us on our way home. Because we always seemed to be so dry.

S1: What games do you remember playing at school?

S2: I don't remember any games lessons as such at school, but obviously lots of playground games I think. The things that spring to mind are ring games and things like that. There was 'I wrote a letter to my love' and 'ring-o-roses'. We used to do 'Alley', 'The big ship sails through the alley-alley-oh', 'Sheep, sheep come over'—and they're not necessarily games but we spent a lot of time hand-standing against a wall and doing cartwheels and admiring anyone who could do a cartwheel because I couldn't. Yes, great fun.

S1: And did the school organise any school trips?

S2: Well, I do remember going to Rhyl, a couple of years running, and that was organised I think through the school. Now whether it was just Mr Broughton or whether there was an organisation working through the

school, I don't know, but that was great fun, yes. And I do remember my mum knitting me a bathing costume to go with the inevitable results! [Laughs]

S1: And what do you remember about the school holidays?

S2: Well, can you just … yeah.

The school holidays. I suppose, I'm not quite sure whether it's so much school holidays or weekend I remember but I think they were very strongly linked to weather and season. Because at home we all had jobs to do before we were free to enjoy ourselves. So if we were confined to the house we had books and we played cards and board games and did jigsaws, played I spy I suppose. We had a radio, so we listened to the radio and we did have a wind-up radiogram but I don't think we had many records. I did learn to knit quite early and I do remember embroidering, and we also had a daily newspaper and there was usually a children's section in that so we scanned that to see what we could find out of that. If we could get outside, we had … Dad had fitted up a swing in the barn and he fitted a swing up in the woods as well, so we had a swing and we roamed the fields. And I do remember just meandering around the fields around the house and making daisy chains and finding different wild flowers and things like that. We also had a habit which, we weren't very popular with my dad for this, for doing gymnastics on the air line to the milking machine. And I think he was always frightened to death it would, we would, fall down underneath our weight. We played in the hay barn and we roamed all the lanes and the fields and made contact with the other children who lived in the area. We fished, very basic: stick, cotton, and a bent pin and a goose-feather float, and we used to … we knew where we could find the fish in the ponds. We went blackberry-ing and we also knew where, in the area around, we could find gooseberries; we knew where there were gooseberry bushes in the hedges, and the damsons and plums as well. And how those came to be there other than being spread by birds, I don't know. We probably knew where all the violets and the primroses and the cowslips and the bluebells clumps were in a two-mile radius as well. And Easter was always looking for primroses to bring home for Easter. And I think it must have been from about eight onwards, we used to cycle up to Admaston and Newton to spend time with the Woodward children and the Betson children, and who obviously we knew from school.

S1: Did you go on holiday?

S2: No. No, we never actually went away, well, other than maybe to stay with an aunt for a night, but … and cousins came to stay with us as well, but no, not the conventional holidays that people have nowadays. Definitely not.

S1: And what was the social life in the village like?

S2: Well, I suppose we were very much on the periphery in some ways. We weren't in the heart of the village so I don't think we were hugely involved in village social life when we were younger. But Mum was a member of the WI and she made many lifelong friends through WI and joined in a lot of adult activities. But as regards childhood mixing I don't think there was a huge amount. I can remember going to the odd village party and fetes and games and things like that, but they're almost vague memories really. When we were older we went to square dances and whist drives.

S1: And what do you remember about church services? Sunday school and festivals?

S2: Well, there was the fete, which I … was obviously a church organised one and that was an annual fete and it seemed to me—and I may be absolutely wrong on this—it seemed to me it was always Lady Baggot who opened the fete. But there was a lot of preparation went on for that and certainly a group of girls were always … Mrs Gooding got a group of girls together to make handicrafts and put together a bran tub and things like that. And that was good because that was one way in which we were integrated into the village. Didn't go to church but we did for many years go to Sunday school and, in later years—I won't say progressed—but I became a Sunday school teacher.

S1: Did your parents have paid employment?

S2: No. Obviously Dad was self-employed but Mum was very involved around the farm as well, and they shared a lot of the tasks that had to be got through between them.

S1: And what hours did they work?

S2: No set hours, they just carried on until all the daily tasks were done really. But busy times, like haymaking, etcetera, they were working until it went dark because, as I've said before, they all worked together, the smallholders, and so they went from one farm to another and with one eye on the weather it had to be got in. Yes.

S1: When did you leave school and what did you do then?

S2: After I left school, which was after sixth form, I worked initially as a dental nurse and then went as a pupil teacher and then I carried on to teacher training college.

S1: And where did most people find employment?

S2: That's something I'm not sure about, because having spent my secondary years in Stafford at school I wasn't really aware much of people around. But it didn't seem to me that they had any difficulty finding jobs in local industry or on farms, etcetera.

S1: Do you know what happened if they couldn't find employment?

S2: I don't because I cannot recollect one person that I came across who was unemployed. No, I don't know.

S1: Do you remember being ill yourself or other members of your family?

S2: I suppose, out of our family, I was the one that most things happened to. I had my tonsils out when I was five. And then I was hospitalised at seven because I was having walking problems, but none of the other children actually went into hospital I don't think.

S1: What treatment were you given?

S2: Well, certainly when I was in hospital for my walking problems I had penicillin and the story went that very few people had had penicillin before those times, so … But it worked, so, it … and it's proved to be a wonderful invention hasn't it really?

S1: And do you remember any other home remedies?

S2: I don't remember any home remedies but I do remember that we had regular doses of cod liver oil and I suppose it would be welfare orange and syrup of figs.

S1: And did you see a doctor very often?

S2: No. Other than my two spells in hospital I think we were a very lucky family as far as health is concerned and didn't really have heath problems. The only things that we had were the usual measles and chicken pox and such like, and I don't even know whether the doctor was involved in those. I don't remember seeing a doctor.

S1: And did you visit the doctor or did the dentist come … sorry. Did you visit the dentist or did the dentist come to the school?

S2: It was the school dentist. No, I didn't in my early years visit anyone other than the school dentist and that wasn't a pleasant experience.

S1: No. Do you remember any health visitors coming to your house or to the school?

S2: Certainly at home, when the younger children were born there was the midwife came because they were all, in those days, home births weren't they? And I do have a vague recollection of possibly when I was sort seven plus, someone who I think must have been a health visitor came on a regular basis. Yeah.

S1: Did life change a lot during the war?S1: Did you see or have any contact with any soldiers?

S2: I have a vague memory of the American soldiers in the village and I think that's where I learned to say, 'Give us some gum, chum!' or something like that. Which is not very nice is it? But, I mean, my main contact is on the other side of things because we had a German prisoner of war who helped us on the farm. And he was a farmer's son from Bavaria and so he was very familiar with farming procedures and he was a huge help. And he became like a favourite uncle to us all. He was absolutely wonderful, yes.

S1: And did any bombs drop near here?

S2: I don't know. I wouldn't have known. I didn't think no.

S1: Do you remember rationing and how did it affect you family?

S2: Only the post-war rationing I think and it probably didn't have as much impact on us, living on a farm, and having access to quite a lot of the things which I think had been rationed, so I don't think it had a huge effect on us. I may be wrong but I don't remember it.

S1: Perhaps for clothes and things like that. You'd have to put coupons in wouldn't you?

S2: I suppose there would have been but I don't remember that we were … because it, sort of, … The thing was, in those days, you had the clothes were passed along weren't they? If you didn't have sisters, brothers, you then … there were cousins and so they came your way one way or another.

S1: Right, thank you very much Sheila, that was very interesting.

S2: Thank you.

# Colton History Society

## All Our Stories

Transcripts of villagers recollections of days gone by recorded as part of our All Our Stories Project 2013

# Nona Goring

**Memories of life in Colton**

**Nona Goring.**

S1: Marion Vernon
S2: Nona Goring

S1: This recording is being made for Colton History Society. Marion Vernon is interviewing Nona Goring in her home in Heathway, Colton on Friday the 22nd of March 2013.

Well Nona, can you tell me something about where and when you were born? Your date of birth?

S2: Yes. I was born in the second cottage in Lloyd's Row, which was just round the corner from the High House where Mrs Upton kept the shop there and yes I was born on the 5th of May 1942. I had already got two older sisters: Barbara who was eight years older than me and Laura who was 12 years older than me. And obviously me mum and dad. And we lived there for quite a long time. I think I was about 16 when my mum and dad moved out of the village.

S1: So you actually spent all your childhood really in the centre of the village..

S2: Yes.

S1: Were there lots of children together there?

S2: Yes. Quite a few children. Yes. It was quite a, very happy childhood really.

S1: Yes.

S2: And the village in those days had no streetlights. No nothing. So you were brought up walking about in the dark.

S1: Did you have electricity when you were little?

S2: Yes.

S1: You did.

S2: Yes. When my mum and dad lived at the Bank Top Cottages up there they didn't have electricity.

S1: They'd already moved by the time you were born.

S2: Yes. They'd moved. Yes.

S1: So that was luxury. And how did you heat your house?

S2: With coal. My dad was a miner so we got concessionary coal.

S1: Okay.

S2: And it was like one of the ranges, the black-leaded ranges.

S1: Right.

S2: And my mum used to use that because she didn't have another cooker. She did all her cooking on it and it had two ovens I think, if I remember rightly. And …

S1: And would you boil your kettle on there as well?

S2: Yeah. Everything would be done on that. She didn't have a … We just had one main living room, if you like, and then there was what they called the back kitchen. And that just had a cold tap and then all of the stone sinks and next to that was a big copper boiler that we used to use for all … she used to … my mum used to boil the washing in there.

S1: Right.

S2: And we used to heat water for baths and things in there as well.

S1: Right. So did that have a fire underneath it?

S2: It had a fire underneath it.

S1: Would that be coal fired as well?

S2: Coal fired yes.

S1: How often would that be used then? Every day?

S2: Well, it … yes, because … At one time it was used every day because my dad didn't get a … there was no showers at the pit so he used to have a bath every day when he got home, because he was black.

S1: In the tin bath?

S2: In the tin bath.

S1: Downstairs?

S2: Downstairs.

S1: How many bedrooms were there in your house?

S1: Two bedrooms.

S2: Two bedrooms.

S1: Two upstairs …

S2: Yeah.

S1: And two rooms down.

S2: Yeah. And then there was like between … there was like a pantry that went towards the stairs. It wasn't by the kitchen it was a pantry there and a cupboard under the stairs.

S1: Right.

S2: We used to call it the 'bogey hole'. And …

S1: Yeah.

S2: And Barbara or Laura used to be put in there when, in the war, when the bomb … when the siren went out for the bombs. They used to put them in there.

S1: Did they play in there? Or just to sleep?

S2: No. Just to put them in there until the all-clear had gone really. My sister Barbara has always been very claustrophobic and she thinks it comes from that.

S1: Right.

S2: Because it was only a small cupboard.

S1: Yes. Gosh!

S2: That they used to be in. And they took the idea from, if you ever saw bombed places the stairs were always still standing. So they thought it was quite a safe place for them to go.

S1: And what about the washing then? Did your mum do it on a regular day?

S2: Yeah. Monday was always washing day. Yes. And she had a, like a galvanised tub with the hot water and the soapy water in and she used to have a dolly.

S1: What sort of soap would she use? Do you remember?

S2: I can't remember, no. That wouldn't be … I wouldn't be bothered with that would I?

S1: Not really. No.

S2: So yes.

S1: Did she ever scrub it as well?

S2: Yeah. They used to have like a washboard thing, didn't they? And scrub it on that.

S1: Do you remember doing that?

S2: Yes I do.

S1: Yes.

S2: And I can remember her … the white washing. Because everybody had white sheets in those days.

S1: Would they be changed…

S2: You never had coloured anything.

S1: Would they be changed every week?

S2: Every week. But what they used to do in those days, and my mum used to do, was put the top sheet to the bottom and then a clean one on the top.

S1: Yes. So they lasted a fortnight on the bed.

S2: Yeah. But you couldn't … I can still see all my mum's washing hanging out blowing white as white.

S1: Yes.

S2: It really … Beautiful washing, you know?

S1: Did she bleach it, do you think, to make it so white?

S2: No. She just boiled it up in the copper.

S1: Oh. She actually put it into the copper and boiled it.

S2: Yeah.

S1: Yes. And if it was wet, how would she dry it?

S2: Well, it would be just hanging round the house on, like, clothes horse things, and that' how she dried it.

S1: Steaming everywhere .

S2: Yeah. Steaming everywhere up.

S1: Was it warm upstairs in the house?

S2: It was cold. It was, even though we'd got this roaring fire, I don't remember it being over-warm upstairs. I know, in the winter, we used to get like the frost on the inside of the glass, frozen up. So it couldn't have been that warm.

S1: No. How did you keep warm? What sort of clothes did you have?

S2: Well, everyday play clothes. We just had, I mean you didn't wear … girls didn't wear trousers. The boys only wore short trousers anyway until they were about 16. So you used to wear socks up to your knees and then a skirt or a pinafore dress or something with a jumper. And that'd be it. And a coat

S1: And a coat .

S2: And a coat, yes, for outside and I think we were quite tough as children really because we played, we were out all the time. And, you know, we were encouraged to go out. And I think even when my own children were born they used to be outside in the pram to sleep.

S1: Yes.

S2: And to sit up and play. All the time. Cold weather or not. And I think we must have been the same.

S1: Yes. How did you celebrate Christmas in those days?

S2: Yes. We used to have decorations hanging up that were homemade, I think, but chains and things like paper chains.

S1: Did you make them?

S2: Yes. I think we did.

S1: Yes.

S2: And I can't remember whether we had a tree then. I'm presuming that we had a small tree of some sort.

S1: But you don't have any memories of that?

S2: I can't remember.

S1: Yes. Do you not remember the decorations or anything?

S2: I remember the decorations and I remember they used to put quite a lot of decorations around the room. You know, like I say, paper chains and things like that. And we always got a present on Christmas morning.

S1: What did you do on Christmas Eve? Did you hang up a stocking or anything like that?

S2: Yes. We hung a stocking up.

S1: Yes.

S2: Yes. And we always used to get just the usual apple, orange, and nuts, and things like that in our stocking. But we always got a present, a wrapped up gift, but you just got one each.

S1: Yes. What was your favourite present? Do you look back and remember one particular one?

S2: I think probably a doll. I had a very nice doll one year and not that long after Christmas, a few weeks after Christmas my cousin, aunty and uncle and cousin came and my cousin squashed the face in. Of my doll.

S1: And did you have a special meal at Christmas?

S2: Oh yes. Yes. A cockerel usually that my dad … it was one of my dad's own.

S1: Right you reared it?

S2: He reared it. Pigs, and chickens yes.

S1: And did you have a big garden then down at …?

S2: Yes. The garden ran from the High House where the backs of the cottages were, right up to Bank House, which is where Ascough's is now. And they ran right the way up. So they were really long gardens.

S1: So were the cottages at right angles to the road.

S2: No. They were straight to the road and then they went right back at the back and then each one had got a strip of land.

S1: Yes. And what did your dad grow in there in the garden?

S2: Oh vegetables, all the vegetables. Everything really.

S1: Did you children ever help?

S2: I don't think so. I think we were probably hindered him more than helped, but we did spend a huge amount of time with our dad as children. My dad was big on walking and exercise and I think it was because he worked in the mine and he used to love the fresh air. He always, even on a cold day, he'd be sitting at the table in the kitchen having his breakfast with the door wide ope

S1: So did you always eat in the kitchen?

S2: No. No not always. I'm telling you that was after they'd moved. They had a table in the kitchen.

S1: Oh right. Okay. Yes. Where did you eat as a family? In this main big front room bit?

S2: In the main living room, yeah, we had a table and chairs in there, yes.

S1: Would you always sit round for the meals?

S2: Yes. We all sat at the table yes.

S1: No television in those days.

S2: No.

S1: And did your mum do all the cooking?

S2: All the cooking, yes.

S1: What do you remember particularly that she used to cook?

S2: All sorts. She was a very good baker. She used to bake all sorts of things, you know, apple pies and steam puddings and all that sort of thing.

S1: What did she steam them in? Do you know? Do you remember?

S2: I think they was just steamed in a pan of water.

S1: What, in a basin in a pan of water?

S2: Yes. In the basin or sometimes they'd be in a cloth.

S1: Yeah. What sort of a cloth would she use?

S2: If it was like a roly-poly type, a jam roly-poly, it'd be in like a cotton cloth.

S1: Like a muslin?

S2: Yeah, wrapped up in greaseproof paper and then in the cloth and tied with strings both ends—like a cracker. And then that would be boiled in the water. So, yeah, that was what she did.

S1: Was it delicious? Did you have that with custard?

S2: Yeah. With custard. And always decent meals every day like we had because we'd got all our vegetables in the garden and …

S1: When would you have your main meal? In the middle of the day or in the evening.

S2: No, in the evening. Everybody then together.

S1: Yes.

S2: So you'd just have what we called lunch when we came up from school. I don't think … I think I came home from school at lunchtime. And that what … you know?

S1: Yes. What was your favourite meal of the week? Was there sort of a routine?

S2: I think there probably was a routine. I think you'd have a roast on a Sunday and cold meat and bubble and squeak on a Monday, etcetera, and maybe even cottage pie off that same joint.

S1: So how did your parents keep the food fresh? If your dad reared food … so once your pig's killed, how did you keep the …? Did you have a refrigerator?

S2: I think they cured some of it. Obviously they had some pork joints but I think probably some of that would be shared with neighbours.

S1: Yes. And would neighbours keep pigs as well and you'd share them?

S2: As far as I can remember, our neighbours didn't keep pigs. There was only our pigs in the garden like. He had, my dad had, a sty and he had this pig—it was called Sally.

S1: Oh you didn't eat Sally did you?

S2: No. And every time it had a litter, which was quite a lot, we were allowed to keep one of them and then ministry had the rest. And my dad had a horrific accident in the pit, where they didn't give the signal that they were going to blast and he got it in his face. And they took him to Rugeley hospital and then sent him home, and I can remember me mum having a turn because he was still black and he'd still got the same vest on with all the blood on and everything—nothing had been taken off him or anything. And he'd got bad wounds on his face. And I can remember even now—I was only little—I can remember him pacing the floor at night, banging his head on the wall nearly with pain. And he went down and he saw one doctor down at … they was with Rugeley doctors, one doctor down there said 'Oh take some Aspirins'. Anyway, it was a week after and he went down and he saw a different doctor and he said, 'Were you X-rayed when you had your accident?' He said 'No'. He says, 'Right. Go to Stafford and wait for me. I'm following.' And he'd got a stone that had gone in there, by his nose, and it was only a fraction from his brain. And if it had gone a fraction more it would have killed him. And he had that taken out.

S1: In the hospital in Stafford?

S2: Yeah.

S1: That was a big operation, wasn't it?

S2: Yeah. He was only in hospital about a week I think. But at the same time the pig had had a litter of piglets and she wouldn't eat.

S1: Because your dad wasn't home.

S2: Yeah, because me dad wasn't there. And me mum worried herself silly trying to get this pig to eat. And I remember the first day me dad came home from hospital she said, 'I'm so sorry to have to ask you but will you please go and speak to the pig.' And do you know, it ate as soon as it see dad, the pig ate all the cold food that, you know, and everything. It was alright after that, it was just …

S1: How long did people have to give their pigs to the ministry?

S1: Coming on to the shopping then: where would she go to buy things that she needed?

S2: Well, there was quite a few different people came and delivered into the village: the bread man came and I think like a mobile shop, like a grocery man came as well, and the milk came with Webb's from Boughey Hall—they came with a

pony and trap with a churn on it and pulled up out side the house and you went out with your jug and they'd got a measure and they'd …

S1: And you remember doing that?

S2: I can remember that.

S1: Yes. What shops were there in the village?

S2 Well, in the village there was, when I was little, there was Mrs Upton's and Miss Williscroft's.

S1: Yes.

S2: Later on, of course, Mr Brown had a shop but that was later.

S1: And he had the post office later up there.

S2: Yes.

S1: Where was the … Was there a post office when you were little? Or would you not remember that?

S2: … Yes! Of course there was a post office: it was Mrs Deakiin. Up the Martlin Lane—the end house. And I have still got—and I'll find it out sometime—I've still got my mum's savings book that she … and Mrs Deakin's signature against … And it was five shillings and five shillings and five shillings. And then she drew ten shillings out. And that's how it went. She obviously saved for things and then drew it out. But I've still got that somewhere.

S1: Did you get a little bit of interest on it as well?

S2: Yes. Probably.

S1: Yes. So how would you travel if you were going into Rugeley to buy anything for … Would you go into Rugeley for clothes? So you haven't mentioned anything like clothes or hardware in the village, so …

S2: Yeah. It would be Rugeley for all that sort of thing.

S1: And how would you get there?

S2: I can't remember when I was very little but later on there was a bus.

S1: Bus.

S2: Green bus service. So, yes, but I would imagine it just, I mean, just your bicycle or you walked it or whatever.

S1: Yeah.

S2: People walked in them days, even when I had my children small I used to walk into town with a pram. You know, you walked it.

S1: So you lived here all your life. Did you go to school in the village?

S2: Yes. Colton school, when I was five. And I, well, the September, I was five in the May and I'd started school. You didn't start before five then. And I started school after … in the September after the big holiday. And the day I started school, Mrs Shaw started teaching at Colton that same day.

S1: Was she straight out of college then?

S2: No. She'd got her children then.

S1: Oh right, yeah.

S2: Yeah. So I don't know where she'd taught before but she came to Colton the day I started school. Definitely. And her little boy, Richard, came with her. And I used to think it very odd that it was his mum and he had to call her Miss. Used to think, 'Oh, why is he calling his mum "Miss".' So yes. So there was like Mr Broughton and Mrs Shaw.

S1: Were you happy at school do you think?

S2: I think I was very happy at school. Yes. I can't remember any incidents that were awful or anything like that, at all.

S1: Did you ever have any punishments? Did you misbehave or …?

S2: I can't remember having any punishments. And I would because I'm the sort that would of never forgot, you know what I mean?

S1: What lessons did you have?

S2: Oh just straight writing and arithmetic, you know, that sort of thing.

S1: Yeah.

S2: Nothing …

S1: No crafts or anything like that?

S2: I think we did some knitting with Mrs Shaw. Mrs Shaw came and a bit of sewing, but I can't distinctly remember what they were we did. But that was definitely where I learned to knit.

S1: That's good isn't it? To start your… yes. You still knit now.

S2: Yes I do, yes.

S1: How old were you when you left Colton school then?

S2: I was 11.

S1: 11.

S2: Yeah.

S1: And then you went to where?

S2: I went to Aelfgar.

S1: Right.

S2: No bus in those days. You went on your bicycle.

S1: Right. All weathers?

S2: All weathers. And you didn't miss school either; you went. And there was a few of us in the village that went at the same time to the same school. Janet Jones, who is now Sargeant, and Eileen Duval who I used to bike in with. A few.

S1: Because there wasn't the same amount of traffic was there in those days?

S2: And you didn't have to chain your bike up either. You just put it in the bicycle shed and came out and fetched it when you were ready. You know.

S1: Different times.

S2: Different times. Yes. So.

S1: What do you remember most about the playtimes? When you were little at Colton, do you remember playing games?

S2: Hopscotch, throwing ball against the wall, or juggling, skipping, and then sometimes there'd be playground things to rhymes: 'The farmer had a wife', that sort of thing.

S1: Would you do that on your own or with a crowd?

S2: No. With all the others because …

S1: I mean with an adult or just children ?

S2: No, just the children would play. Yes.

S1: Yes.

S2: And I think, unlike today, because there is children at the village school that have out … from outside the village. But apart from the Lea … Admaston and Lea Heath children, you knew all the people, all the children that were at school with you. You know.

S1: So I suppose you'd play out of school with them as well.

S2: So you'd play out with them as well. Yes.

S1: Got to know them very well.

S2: Yeah.

S1: Yeah. Did you go on any trips from school?

S2: Yes, I think we did. I'm not sure if we went to New Brighton. Or Rhyl or somewhere like that. But they were just day trips.

S1: Yes.

S2: And you'd, I think you'd have a little package of … you'd have a sixpence I think, and an orange and an apple, you know, and things like that.

S1: And take a picnic with you would you?

S2: Maybe. I can't remember taking a picnic. No. But obviously we did; we must have eaten during the day.

S1: Unless they took you to a café or something there.

S2: I don't think that was on the cards in those days.

S1: And were you allowed to paddle? What did you do when you got there? Do you remember it?

S2: I can't remember what we did when we got there. I'm sure we were allowed to paddle; I'm sure we went on the beach. But I mean sometimes, because we went away on a family holiday every year.

S1: Where would you go on your family holiday?

S2: Only into Wales. Rhyl or somewhere like that.

S1: Always by the sea?

S2: Always by the sea, yeah. And later on when my children were small and my younger sister, Valerie—her children are the same age as mine—and we, my mum and dad used … we always used to go and have a caravan each. In a row!

S1: Lovely.

S2: And have a big family holiday with the little ones as well.

S1: Special.

S2: Yeah. So.

S1: So, looking now at the school holidays. You've told me what you did in, at school breaks and so on. Was it different in the holidays? Did you work anywhere? Did you just roam free?

S2: No. We just roamed about, ran free. Just took off and went off for the day really: roaming about and, you know, fill the day with …

S1: What would you do?

S2: All sorts of things. All sorts of things. You'd make a den or, you know, all those sorts of things.

S1: Was it boys and girls together or just girls?

S2: Yeah. I think so yes.

S1: Everybody together? Yes.

S2: Yeah. Because I don't think that we were outrun with the boys; there was only like, of the same age, …

S1: Yes. more boys.

S2: … there was only like … yeah, there was definitely more boys.

S1: Did they lead you to do adventurous things then?

S2: No, they used to try, and because I was pals with Janet and they lived up Hollow Lane and, like I've said, no street lights, so it'd be going up to Janet's house—in the dark—and you'd hear 'Ooooooh' from the trees. Yeah, they used to be trying to frighten us.

S1: Yes.

S2: It didn't work.

S1: No.

S2: We weren't bothered.

S1: So, looking at the village. What did the village offer as a way of social life? Did it offer anything for children particularly or …?

S2: Yes. And most of the things that they held in the Reading Room, parents would go and they'd take their children with them.

S1: Right. What sort of things?

S2: You didn't get … stay behind with babysitters in those days. Everybody went.

S1: Yes.

S2: So there was dances, and you went as well, and there was whist drives and beetle drives, and everything. There was lots of things. And Mr Best that lived in the Malt House farm, he had a cine camera and he took a lot of film of events in the village: the garden parties, children in the playground, the children coming out of school, all that sort of thing, and now and again he'd show them in the Reading Room and everybody could go and watch.

S1: But so you used to go down there quite … How often in the week would that be held?

S2: I can … I don't know how many times a week but I know there was something on quite often.

S1: Yes.

S2: And we had things in the village like garden parties and …

S1: Would that be for the church or for the school?

S2: Yeah. It was at the church.

S2: At the church.

S2: It was behind the Old Rectory, always on those lawns there, all the stalls round and … Yeah. I can remember it was usually Lady Baggot that opened it.

S1: Yeah. Do you remember the people who ran the stalls? Do you have any memories of it?

S2: I do remember some people. I mean, I can't remember whether it was then, when I was little, or whether it was when I was a bit older, but like the WI ladies and … like Mrs Preston and people like that.

S1: Would they run a cake stall or something like that?

S2: Probably.

S1: Yes.

S2: Probably. There was cakes and there was always … I think Miss Jones used to have a stall but I can't remember. There was somebody that always used to have lavender bags, I always remember that—I can't remember who it was.

S1: Yeah. And did you ever belong to any village organisations like the Produce Guild or anything like that?

S2: No.

S1: Did your mum?

S2: Don't think so. I think mum was a bit too busy.

S1: Yes.

S2: You know? I mean, having four … Because eight years after I was born, when I was eight, my youngest sister was born. And we were so spaced out: eight years between Valerie and me, eight years between me and Barbara, and then four years between Barbara and Laura. I think she'd sort of got children at different stages of their life to deal with, you know.

S1: Yes.

S2: Really busy.

S1: Did you go to church as a family or …?

S2: Always go to church, yes. We went to church on a Sunday and then again you went to Sunday school as well. Always.

S1: What do you remember about that?

S2: I remember Miss Rochell.

S1: Yes. Was she a teacher?

S2: I remember going like nature walks with the Sunday school. And obviously you have teachings, don't you? Bible teachings and things like that. Yeah.

S1: Yes. Enjoyed it.

S2: Yeah.

S1: Did you ever have prizes or anything like that?

S2: I don't remember.

S1: No.

S2: I don't remember. No. But …

S1: Just looking at your parents a little bit more then. Your mum didn't work?

S2: No

S1: And your dad worked in the mine.

S2: Yeah.

S1: How did he like the work there?

S2: I don't know. I don't know. If he didn't like it, he never said.

S1: Never said. No.

S2: I know he was very fond, like I said, of the fresh air; he used to be out …

S1: Yes.

S2: And he used to … we used to spend a lot of time with my dad because he used to be home. You see, they'd start work about half past five in the morning and so he'd be home early afternoon.

S1: Ah! Yes.

S2: And he'd take us walking and he'd gather children as he went.

S1: Did he?

S2: Yes! Everybody went.

S1: Where would you walk to?

S2: Well, if it … a long way. If it were with my dad you went a long way. He'd say, 'Oh we're not going there! It's only a cock's stride.' If it was a short distance.

S1: Right. Yes.

S2: 'No, we'll go up there and then we'll cut off and go round there.' But all the walks that we used to do, me and me elder sister, Laura, a few years ago now, she used to come up once a week in the summer and we did all them … and it's all still there.

S1: Yes.

S2: All the old walks.

S1: How many miles would you do then? Several miles?

S2: I would have thought so, yes.

S1: Yes.

S2: And sometimes, I can remember times, probably in the school holidays otherwise I would have been in bed, but I can remember times when it's been a lovely moonlight night with all the stars out, and my dad'd say, 'Come on! We'll go walk dog.' And we used to go all the way around Hamley and back up. Yeah. And I can remember doing that on loads and loads of times. Yeah.

S1: What happened if your dad couldn't go to work? Did they still get paid?

S2: No.

S1: A basic pay?

S2: No.

S1: What would happen then?

S2: Well, I can't ever remember a time, even when at times when my father had accidents and things like that, he wasn't off work that long. And he was a saver, my dad; he'd always got spare money. He always saved up, so that at a time like that we'd always got something to fall back on.

S1: Yes. I was just thinking, when you talked about the accident at work. It wasn't his fault at all; there was no compensation or anything.

S1: And he didn't get any pay while he was off.

S2: Don't think so.

S1: Gosh! It was a different world wasn't it really?

S2: Yeah. And yet it wasn't his fault.

S1: No.

S2: The signal wasn't given for the blast. So. But I can remember … I can't remember him being off work for a long time.

S1: No.

S2: I think he'd have been back.

S1: Pushed himself to get back.

S2: Yeah.

S1: How did he get to the pit?

S2: He used to go on a bicycle at one time and then he always had, as I got older, he always had a little motorbike.

S1: Right.

S2: Always.

S1: And did you go on it with him sometimes?

S2: Yeah. And sometimes I used to drive it.You'd, yeah, you'd get round the back lanes and he'd say, 'Come on! You have a go now.' We did all sorts. I mean, my dad, you know, the names of all the trees and all the wild flowers and everything, we learned from my dad taking us walks and telling us what they were.

S1: Yes.

S2: And he'd tell us about birds' nests and eggs, and he'd fetch an egg out of the nest to show you and he'd say, 'that's a blackbird's egg,' and he'd put it back in. You weren't encouraged to take it. No.

S1: No. Just taught you what it was.

S2: Just to show you what it was. Yeah.

S1: Where did most people find employment? Were most local people … did they work in the pit?

S2: Quite a few worked in the pit but there was other employment as well.

S1: What was that?

S2: I mean, there was quite a lot at the Trent Valley, on that estate there. There was the Colour Mill.

S1: What was that?

S2: It was for tanning; it was a tanning place I think. Where the tanning took place. And other places around and about like that, so there was more, more than the pit.

S1: So did everyone find work or was there …?

S2: Oh I don't think there was anybody unemployed.

S1: Not in those days.

S2: No.

S1: What would have happened if you were?

S2: Well, I think it was hard luck.

S1: Yes. Just …

S2: It was just hard luck.

S1: Yes.

S2: Because I don't think there was any help, you know.

S1: Do you remember being ill at all when you were little?

S2: Yes. Yes I did. I tell you what, I can remember being really poorly with it as well: I had jaundice.

S1: Did you?

S2: And I can remember being all yellow, and the all the whites of my eyes were yellow. And I wasn't very old, but I was old enough to remember it now.

S1: Do know what caused that?

S2: No. No I don't know, but I had jaundice and that was for years and years. I mean, I could do now I think, but for years and years I wasn't allowed to give blood because it leaves something in your bloodstream, the jaundice does—apparently.

S1: What did you take for it? How did they treat it?

S2: I can't remember. I can't remember what I had for it. But I did see the doctor, I know that.

S1: And would you have to pay to see a doctor in those days?

S2: Yeah, I would have thought so, yeah.

S1: Did you see a doctor very often, do you remember? Or was it a big thing to see the doctor?

S2: Didn't … No, I think it was a big thing. There was lots of home remedies for things.

S1: Do you remember any?

S2: No. I think they'd just … you'd have medicine, probably medicine that your mum bought at the chemist.

S1: Oh right. Yeah.

S2: You know, that sort of thing. Cough medicine.

S1: Yes. Cough medicine.

S2: And rub your chest with Vic, or whatever it was.

S1: Yes.

S2: And yeah.

S1: Yeah. And did you see a dentist regularly when you were a child?

S2: Only at school. Only at school. The dentist used to come to school. I don't remember going to a dentist, *a* dentist, other than that.

S1: No. And were there any other health visitors or nurses who came …?

S2: Yeah. Yes. They used to have like a … Used to have the nit nurse come to school and also you'd have a, I don't know whether it was a doctor that used to come or just a nurse, but you'd be examined. You know, listen to your chest.

S1: Did you have inoculations or anything like that? Or did you have all the childhood illnesses.

S2: You had the … You didn't have the inoculations like they have now. No. You had all your chicken poxes and measles, and I was 17 when I had the measles.

S1: Oh were you?

S2: I was quite poorly. But the usual things, mumps and things like that, you had.

S1: So it was just the norm for you really, growing up then, that things were rationed. You didn't perhaps … Did you think much of it?

S2: No. The only thing that I can remember, and that was after the war when the rationing was still on, and I can remember walking up from school and seeing all these rows of jars of sweets in Mrs Upton's window, where there hadn't been any for weeks. And I can remember bolting home and saying, 'there's sweets! There's sweets!' You know. And going and having some sweets as a treat like.

S1: Did you have pocket money?

S2: I don't think we did.

S1: No.

S2: I don't remember having pocket money.

S1: How often would you buy sweets when you were little, once they were back out of rationing?

S2: Not every day.

S1: No? But you'd buy … I mean, I can only really remember after I moved from Colton school when I was 11, and we used to sometimes call at the corner shop there by … It wasn't Jupp's then but it had been Jupp's. When my kids were little it was Jupp's.

S1: Yes.

S2: And we used to go in. That was always a sweet shop.

S1: Was Colton a nice place to grow up?

S2: Oh lovely, yes. A lovely place to be, yeah. Yeah it was.

S1: And have you lived here all your life?

S2: Yes, apart from a couple of years that's all.

S1: Yes.

S2: When me mum moved out to Brereton.

S1: Right.

S2: And then when I got married I came back. Yeah. It was only … Well, I was married when I was 19 and it was about three years.

S1: How old were you when you left school?

S2: Fifteen.

S1: Fifteen. What did you do then?

S2: I worked at Thorn Automation. And I started off at … It wasn't Thorn Automation then. It was British Electronic Products first and then it was Lancashire Dynamo before Thorns took over. And I was an internal mail clerk, so I went around the whole site and all the offices and they had trays on the desks and there was an in and an out, and they had like these envelopes with … they used to cross that name off and put who that was for. And they used to have to …

S1: Yes. Keep reusing them and turning them round.

S2: Yeah, and just turn them around. But I did end up in the accounts department and I was a comptometer operator.

S1: Were you?

S2: Yeah. And everybody from the whole site used to bring things to be calculated and that sort of thing. Yeah.

S1: And did you still work there when you were married?

S2: I left to have Stephen. I didn't go back.

S1: Didn't go back.

S2: No.

S1: No. No, that was the way it was in those days wasn't it really?

S2: Yeah.

S1: Was there anything else you wanted to tell us about Nona?

S2: Not that I can think of. I'll probably think of a load when we've finished.

S1: Well, thanks ever so much. Fascinating.

# Colton History Society

## All Our Stories

Transcripts of villagers recollections of days gone by recorded as part of our All Our Stories Project 2013

# Dorothy Bradbury

**Memories of life in Colton**

**Dorothy Bradbury.**

S1: Marion Vernon
S2: Dorothy Bradbury

S1: This recording is being made for Colton History Society. Marian Vernon is interviewing Dorothy Bradbury on Thursday, 15 October 2009. Right Dorothy, would you like to tell us something about your family, when and where you were born.

S2: Well, I was born here in this house at Bank Top Cottage. My own family consisted of my father and my mother and my sister, Marjorie, who was just over ten years older than me. My grandparents, in the time of my childhood, lived in the village in Clerks House. My early memories. The very earliest memory I hold is of being taken to see a very old lady. I couldn't name her, but I can only guess that it was Miss Eleanor Parker because I know by 1941 she was well in her nineties. I do remember, of course, the 1941 bad winter. But previous to that, in the year before, incendiary bombs had fallen in the area around Colton. I do remember that one Saturday evening there was a slight panic in the house. My father heard noises and rushed outside and saw a great glow in the sky to the north of us. He made the assumption that the bombs had fallen on Manor Farm. He rushed back in to put his wellingtons on and tipped a bucket of coal over in the meantime. But fortunately as he and our neighbour, Bill Leek, walked across the field onto the peak of the Hilliards. They could see that the light in the sky was much farther away and it was around the Blithfield area that the other bombs had fallen.On the Sunday morning I felt very pleased with myself because I went with my father, with Bill Leek, and his son Tom, who is three years older than me, on a walk round the fields to see what we could find. I was very proud that I could go in my wellies but I'm quite sure I was carried for most of the way. I had a gas mask. It was a Micky Mouse gas mask, and when I started school I took it on my back every day.

S1: Where would it be kept in the house, Dorothy, the gas mask?

S2: I presume it would hang up in the passageway. It was in a little box, and other than practices I never actually wore it.

S1: [Laughs] A little brown box.

S2: Yes. I remember the black-out, of course, and having to be extremely careful that we didn't emit any light. Albeit we only had oil lamps. There will be more about electricity later. It was far away from the Bank Top area of Colton. Although, by then, before the war had come even, the village—even the lower half of Hollow Lane—did have that facility. But the 1941 bad winter. I remember Mr Hooley coming with a horse and cart, arriving at the top of the hill and delivering us a loaf of bread. He'd taken the horse and the cart to Rugeley to collect bread for us and our neighbours and themselves at the smallholding at Bank Top Farm.

S1: Did you always get your bread from Rugeley?

S2: Bread normally was delivered by the Tunnicliffe bread bakery in Rugeley. Tunnicliffe's shop was in Market Square. Now there's probably recently been, probably a takeaway or something like that, and nearby has been recently a shoe shop, which of course in those far off days was where we received our groceries from, either by delivery or by purchase. That was a big marvellous shop to me called George Masons. When you paid at the counter your money was put in a little pot on an overhead railway in the shop, a handle was pulled and it whizzed along to the office, was dealt with and then, if there was any change, it whizzed back.

S1: Right.

S2: Although I hated, absolutely hated, shopping in my smallest days, I did like going into George Masons.

S1: And was that near to the Town Hall then?

S2: Next but one to the Town Hall, the clock end of the Town Hall where … the little bit that stands. In between George Masons and the entrance to the Town Hall … Market Hall there was the small butchers shop. But I didn't really in the war time go to Rugeley much. I had many happy hours with my granny down in Colton.

S1: Right.

S2: I'll talk about that a bit more as I talk about family. So, and also at that time in the 1941 bad winter I have a memory of seeing my mother in, what I can only term, in mourning. Wearing black clothes. Her father had died on the borders of Wales in the February of that year, and that's my first recollection of seeing my mother, I think it was rather startling to me, that she was dressed all in black. And that would be the first time I'd ever seen her dressed like that.

S1: What sort of colours would she normally have worn?

S2: She wore a lot of navy-blue. And believe it or not so do I. And sort of creams, and greys. White. In fact, I've still got a button box with buttons off a beautiful navy and white coat that she had.

S1: Right.

S2: I started school in those early war years, and of course to Colton School I went. I walked in the morning down to school. Initially being taken by Tom Leek and later on walking with the other children from the Hollow Lane area. We started school at nine o'clock and on pain of death it was if we were a few minutes late because school was quite, quite a trial shall a say, and immense hard work but it got me to the career that I was intending.

S1: What happened when you were late?

S2: You were smacked. And girls were smacked on the hand, on the arm quite hard for the slightest misdemeanour and boys were caned—including, I remember, a boy who accidently dropped his desk lid and it made a bang. And he was sought by the headmaster, come out to the front and he caned him. And I was very pained thinking that he'd … it was all an accident and yet he'd received the cane. It was a hard life under Mr Broughton's regime, but he was, I must admit, a very good teacher.

S1: Did he teach all the children?

S2: He taught all the children from the age of eight upwards. The younger children were taught in the other classroom. Those that now stand as you walk or ride past the school, on the frontage, on what is now, if you're looking at it from the road, on the left-hand side of the entrance door. The modern entrance door. But although there were four classrooms the other two were not used. In fact, the north room was used as the wood store for Mr Broughton's fire at home. We only had one cold-water tap and I'll leave it to your imagination what the toilet accommodation was like. Very, very antiquated. It did date from 1862 and it had not been altered in 1942.

S1: And were the toilets across the yard?

S2: They were outside and it was a very difficult way to get into the school garden because you went down an alleyway, which was enclosed, between the boys and the girls' toilet.It was not a pleasant journey down that little corridor. In fact you ran through holding your nose.

S1: But there was a nice garden to go after … were you allowed to play there or was it for growing vegetables?

S2: No. I don't think… the garden was used for growing vegetables. I can only assume for vegetables. Certainly they were not eaten by the school children. Those who travelled a distance to school took sandwiches and all the children from the village, including myself, had to come home at lunchtime for their lunch and be back again for one o'clock.

S1: That was quite a walk for you, wasn't it?

S2: Yes. It took about fifteen minutes to get here and fifteen minutes to get back. So I'd basically got half an hour when I got home. If I was lucky and hadn't dallied on the way.I formed there great friendships with the children from Hollow Lane, some of whom, thank goodness, are still here today. Two of them, or three of them really, two brothers and a sister still living in Colton who I see regularly. The other friends have either moved away or, unfortunately, a great friend, Mary Hardcastle, died a few years ago.In 1947 again we had an incredible bad winter. A winter where the children from the outlying areas, and also from Blithfield parish who had started to come to Colton in the early '40s because their school at Admaston was closed due to an accident that the teacher had sustained on a Saturday evening, the children were moved to Colton en block on the Monday morning. And it must have been a terrible experience for them, to come from a happy little community school, shall I say, at Admaston to face a long journey on the bus, bringing their sandwiches and also the regime of Colton school must have been much harder. But some of them certainly survived and went on to great things. So it didn't harm us in anyway.

S1: How many children were there?

S2: From Blithfield, there would be only a small number. There might have been twenty, I can't really remember. But I do remember that day being concerned that they were so far from home and the little ones wouldn't even have a chance to go home at lunchtime. Because I was very small myself at the time, I had much empathy with them.

S1: And were they mixed in the classes with you? Did they …?

S2: Yes, we were all together. To go back to the 1947 bad winter, it was quite a pleasant time at school. For most of that January to probably March, those who could got there for the usual nine o'clock and obviously we were registered and I assume we were given some work to do. But about 10:30 I would think, Mrs Broughton, the head's wife, appeared with a jug of cocoa. We all had cocoa and then were dismissed for the rest of the day. Which was lovely but Dorothy had homework to do, and when I arrived home I used to sit by the fire in our small sitting room, mum had prepared a beautiful coke fire and it was lovely and warm. I did my homework as quickly as I could because my whole intention was to get out and play with the others in the snow. There was … the road beyond Bank Top Farm was completely blocked with snow drifts, no one actually traversed the whole of the lane in those far off days because the road was blocked completely. I often remember now and visualise the very beautiful snow drifts but it was an horrendous time for the people who had to go to work or had to go shopping.

S1: What was the school like inside? Was it really cold? How did they keep it warm?

S2: It was either coke or, I think it was possibly coke-fired central heating.

S1: Oh, central heating.

S2: By the time I was there. When it was built, and still then there were the fireplaces in situ. But it was large-bore central heating pipes and very antiquated, to me, radiators around the rooms. It was actually very warm.

S1: Oh good.

S2: The caretaker came and stoked the fire on a regular basis and kept us very warm in the winter time, probably even too warm.

S1: Why do you think they sent you home then if it was warm there? Because perhaps it was warmer there for the children than lots of their homes were.

S2: It must well have been, but I think it was that was Miss, the other member of staff who didn't live in Colton couldn't get here and half the children were missing anyway.

S1: I see.

S2: Some of my friends, I believe, didn't go to school for six weeks. It didn't actually harm their education. When I think of at least two who are in the History Society today, two of my closest friends, who I will talk about in a few minutes.

S1: For six weeks the snow was here?

S2: Probably more than six weeks, yes. In the whole … but the roads were actually blocked in the outer areas for six weeks. At the age of eleven, and this is why I now in retrospect realise while I was given the homework I took the 'Eleven Plus', and in my year I was the only one—there weren't many of us admittedly—in my year I was the only one who passed and I went to Stafford Girls High School Subsequently two others followed me two years later who have remained friends throughout my life. And in previous years others had passed to go either to Rugeley Grammar School if they were boys or to Stafford Girls High School if they were girls.We travelled by train from Rugeley Trent Valley. We left Colton at about 7:40 in the morning on our bicycles and arrived in Stafford at about 8:30, if the train was on time. Many times we were late but we considered to be 'late excused', and I do remember once arriving at eleven o'clock when there was severe fogs.When I started my journeys it was steam pulled but by the time I had left some seven years later the railways had changed to diesel-pulled trains. And so I saw the emergence of the diesel on the railway and the demise of steam on the local traffic.

S1: Was that quite frightening to go down off to school … did you go on your very own on the very first day?

S2: Yes. But of course along … on the way to Rugeley I was able to catch up or was caught up by the others. The head's daughter, youngest daughter, Helen, who I still meet and speak to even today, was in the sixth form and there were two other girls from the village, Barbara Lycett and Monica Mellor, who were also making that journey.

S1: Right.

S2: And so I wasn't alone. And when we got to Stafford we had quite a long walk along from the station to the high school in Lichfield Road, and we were not allowed to go in any shops. No high school girl ever was allowed to go in a shop in Stafford. We were allowed to purchase whatever we could, be it a newspaper, a magazine, or if we had the material as ration books, sweets at the railway station. And when the train moved we could take our hats off.

S1: What did you wear? I was going to ask about the uniform.

S2: Navy, dark green and white. Our shirts were white. My gym-slips, or skirts when we reached the sixth form, were navy blue and our blazers were a lovely shade of bottle-green with the white fleur-de-lis on our badge pocket, which was the emblem of the school. And the school motto was 'Nisi dominus fustra', Accept the Lord build a house etc from one of the psalms.We travelled for those seven long years, eventually joined by two other girls from Colton, and we had great fun on our journeys and formed a very close bond of friendship.

S1: So no boys went? Into Stafford grammar school at all?

S2: No, the boys went to Rugeley grammar school.

S1: Oh, there was a grammar school in Rugeley.

S2: Rugeley Grammar School had been founded in the time of the Elizabeth I and still continued to be a boys' school until the early 1950s and so my only regret in education is that I didn't go to the school where my father had gone. He also passed a scholarship from Colton school to go to Rugeley Grammar School in 1913, and I would have loved to have thought, now in years of old age, that I was educated in the same school as my father. But it wasn't to be. However, when I finished at the high school I trained as a teacher near Warrington and commenced work in 1957 at a primary school in Brereton. Today the juniors would be called Key Stage Two. I want to talk about the people who surrounded us: our neighbours and our friends. Close by

our house were four cottages and those neighbours were immensely supportive to us and us to them in the years of my childhood. Up above us further along the lane the Hardcastles lived. Mr and Mrs Hardcastle and their children, some of whom were older than me, but their youngest daughter Mary became a very close friend. At the farm above at Bank Top Farm lived the Hooleys, incredibly good friends of ours to this day, in that occasionally I still see their son and it is a great joy when we meet. And we were also very, very close to the Mellor family at Manor Farm, something that has been retained right to this day; in that we are still in touch and still feel very close to the Mellor family, albeit now they are scattered about England and places far away.Our own house. This house Bank Top Cottage, where I was born, was first lived in, in my family, by my grandparents who moved here in 1906 with my father as a small boy. He too was educated at Colton school from 1906, albeit he had been to the infant school in Talbot Street in Rugeley. The school that still exists in Talbot Street was in those far off days the infant school and not the girls' school as it became in later years.My great-grandfather Cooper also came to live with my grandparents towards the end of his life, and so if we move forward to our son Andrew, five generations of the same family have lived in this house. A much loved house by all of us. And I have upstairs many photographs of the family and of the house.My parents moved here in 1930. They had been married in 1925 and my sister Marjorie was just about to start school when they moved here. We had a flush toilet from the day of my parents moving in. Albeit the water tank above was actually rainwater. The mains water came to Colton in the early '30s and our house was the first house to have mains water in the whole of the village, because my father fitted it himself.

As a young child in about 1940 I can remember him fitting the bath in the bathroom. By then we had a hot-water cistern, albeit the room was being prepared when war broke out but it took almost two years to get it all together. My father worked in a reserved occupation through the war and he worked for, initially, Rugeley Gas Company which became part of West Midlands Gas Board after nationalisation in 1947. And again I have many happy memories of my family in those years.

S1: So did your father … how did he learn his plumbing?

S2: He had worked in the building trade. Having been very much a hands-on man, although he was educated at Rugeley Grammar School and was, if you read the log books at Colton school, a very, very clever young boy. He worked in an office when he started his life of work in the world and he hated it and he wished to work in the open air. And so he joined his uncle in the building trade—his uncle had his own business—and he worked for many years with his much-loved uncle. One of my granny's brothers. And towards the beginning of the war I would imagine that my great uncle retired and obviously building businesses were not probably the best thing at that time. And so he, my father sought work and he found much to his great joy that he was taken on as the lorry driver for the gas board in Rugeley, Rugeley Gas Works. When he was interviewed, looking very smart—and he often laughed about this in later life—the gentleman who interviewed him said did he mind hard work, and the answer was 'no'. And he worked extremely hard but had a very happy career with the gas board.In our life in this village probably the most major feature of everything we did revolved around the church. My father had been a choirboy from the time he arrived here in Colton. My grandparents worshipped here too and my grandfather in 1930 became the parish clerk of the church, which position he retained until he died in 1944. He was a very, very committed Christian like his wife too, and they had brought my father up in the same vein. And my mother had come also from a church-going family. My mother was much involved in the Mother's Union and with many activities in the church. Brass cleaning and flower arranging were her fortes, I think. My father did much work for the church. He became a member of the church council the night before I was born and retained that position until his death in 1961.My grandfather had become one of the first members of Colton Church Council when it was inaugurated in, I think, probably about 1920 or 21 and so there had been a continuous line of the Cooper family involved in the church from the administrative side. My father also was the instigator, the architect of, and one of the chief workers in the laying out of the church grounds as we see them today. For myself, I went to Sunday School. My Sunday School teacher was Miss Rotchell, the village post lady, who was a legend in her life time really. A single lady who lived in a little cottage in the middle of Colton which had not moved into the twentieth century when she died some seventy years after the century had begun. And she not only delivered the post but she led the smaller children at Sunday School. The older children were taught by the rector's wife.

I, myself, became a member of the PCC (the Church Council) in 1961, a position I remained a member of until the early part of 2000.

S1: Just to come back to the Sunday School Dorothy, when was it held? Was it in the mornings, the afternoons?

S2: The Sunday school was held in the afternoon each Sunday and we met in the part of the church that is now called the vestry. The southeast corner of the church which is the oldest portion of the church along with the tower. We were taught there and my memory is of singing 'All things bright and beautiful', 'Loving Shepherd of thy sheep', and hymns like that.

S1: Would you have been accompanied?

S2: Mrs Goodwin after 1946, Mrs Holmes was the rector's wife before then and I don't really remember much about those years from the point of view music. But Mrs Goodwin played the harmonium which still sits in church today, looking rather tired and old but I'm sure is probably 150 years old. And it is no longer played, but we've moved on somewhat with music in the church. But she played the harmonium for our singing. And we had a prize giving at Christmas and a party at Christmas even at the end of the war. Through the goodness of our mothers we had a little party in the Reading Room, which is a story in itself. Which I can't go into today but I will mention it again in a while. The Reading Room was, to all intents and purposes, the village hall—more about that later in my memories. The church certainly played a great part in our lives and still does today. We are still much involved. I say we, meaning my husband and myself, David and myself and our

family, is still very much involved in the work and the worship at Colton church. The worship in church has changed, thank goodness, much in my lifetime. When I was a child, very small child, I would say to my sister, 'How many more pages? Show me how many more pages,' looking in the prayer book because I could count but I couldn't read when I was saying this. I must have been about four. But services were not, shall we say, exciting in anyway. They can even be boring, I suppose, to little people today; but thank goodness children are much more encouraged now than they were then .And so I'll think about our activities within the village .My father became, just after the war, a member of the parish council and through that he served as a member of the Parish Lands Trust, the Reading Room Trustees and also the School Trustees. The Reading Room. The place of gathering for the people of Colton. I believe in 1937 at the coronation then there was a party and food and a meal held, I think probably on a rota system, for everyone in the parish but certainly for the 1953 coronation it was the centre of our activities. We started there in the afternoon by having a meal prepared by the ladies of the village and then in the evening we danced the night away. In the meantime, having seen the coronation service on the television, we also made our way to the top of the Martlin to a giant bonfire. It was a very cold day for a June day, that day so long ago now, but I remember it with great affection.The Reading Room had struggled to maintain a financial balance through my girlhood. My father being a member of the trustees had to help organise fund-raising events to keep the place going and remember working at many whist drives. I didn't play whist, my parents did. But the ladies would prepare the food, serve the food, play whist, and it was a great gathering place.

S1: How much would you pay to go then, Dorothy, do you remember?

S2: Probably two and sixpence!

S1: Yes.

S2: Or something like that. Twelve and a half pence today. But my father once won a set of saucepans and I can see him now walking along the room saying he hoped he didn't get crowned with them when he got home.

S1: And who would provide the prizes?

S2: Ourselves! The trustees would provide the food, play whist and provide the prizes, and the raffle prizes.

S1: But that was quite a big prize, wasn't it, a set of saucepans.

S2: Yes. Yes. And I can see the joy on his face. He'd learnt to play whist as a child with some neighbours here in Colton but he didn't actively play whist outside until those years after the Second World War. But, as I say, he did win first prize and he was very amused by it. And so I move on to thinking about myself in those days when I was a young teacher, post 1957. I became a church warden in 1967 and as being church warden for that year, the people's warden, it also made me a member of the Reading Room management trustees but only as peoples' warden. The following year I became rector's warden and relinquished that post. But that did not stop my own activity within the Reading Room. I joined the then Entertainments Committee in 1962 and remained a member for the next ten years. Through those years were the years when we raised much funds including the years when we had the traction engine rallies here and at the county showground. And it was due to those rallies that we were able to afford the money to purchase the field on which the present hall stands. And of course it was those self-same years when I met and married my husband, who was a member of the traction engine club but worked with us to raise funds and share the profits.

I was a member of the Flower Club for the whole of its years of existence and since the beginning of the history society I have been a member of the History Society albeit I have been brought up with a great interest in history, having trained to teach geography. I am a geographer by training but a historian by love. I have been a member of Rugeley's local history society, the Lander Society, for some forty years and at this present time I am the vice chairman. I have been the chairman of that society.But my love is history is innate because of the love of history of my father and my knowledge that he had gained through listening and talking, through my mother's knowledge of the history of Colton also, and through my grandfather as well, who had somehow acquired the first edition of the great academic work of the Reverend Parker, the book is entitled *Something of the History of Colton*, shall I say *Colton and the DeWasteneys* and that is still our bible, shall we say, that we rely upon today for much historical fact about this place. In my lifetime I have obviously given many talks on history. I, through the inspiration of my parents and grandparents and their interest and knowledge, and I am a part author, a third part-author of the publication of the history society from last year and also of several of the leaflets that we produced some years ago when the history society first began its run of publications. I wrote the pamphlets certainly on the church and on the charities and some of the pamphlets as well.In conclusion I would like to say that I had an extremely happy childhood here, both in this house and amongst the friends that I made then and continue to see and love. I still enjoy thoroughly living here in Colton amongst the people that I love so much.

S1: And just before we finish Dorothy, I'd love you just to look back and tell me just a little about how Christmas was celebrated in your childhood.These days all the children are always talking about 'well I'm going to have this Christmas, I going to have that' and it has changed so much. Can you think back to what Christmas was like when you were little?

S2: I had a stocking and when I reached the age, I hope this won't be listened to by small children, when I reached the age of doubting Father Christmas I deliberately lay awake one night and only fell asleep when I'd proved who Father Christmas was. In my stocking would be very small toys. Remember I was a child of the war and to have a little packet of crayons was absolute heaven and probably a few sweets and perhaps a bit of money in the bottom as well.

S1: Oh right.

S2: That was my great joy. I do retain one very, very treasured present from 1940 and that is my teddy.

S1: Yes.

S2: He still sits upstairs and I absolutely adored him, to the point where I thought he was alive. And one day I was caught with the scissors cutting his hair. So the front of his forehead is very bald because I'd trimmed his hair because I thought it would grow again. And I cried and cried when I was told it wouldn't.

S1: And was he called Teddy?

S2: Yes.

S1: And was he in your stocking or sitting …?

S2: He was sitting at the end of my bed. And I had prayed for him. Because, as I explained, our church background, like my parents who prayed beside their bed every night, I was taught the same. And Christmas Day 1940 was on a Wednesday, and although I was very small I knew numbers and I could count, I could even count backwards because I used to say and it's only so many more Wednesday till Christmas because I knew I was going to have, I hoped, this teddy and he was just all I ever wanted.

S1: And did you have a special meal at Christmas?

S2: I can't remember that far back. We decorated the house with evergreens.

S1: Right. Gathered from…?

S2: From the garden basically.

S1: From the garden, yes.

S2: And also, obviously we must have had Christmas cards—I can't really remember much about that. But I can remember fetching the chicken from Hooleys and often I would go with a brown carrier bag to collect him and he would be dispatched at the point when I'd arrived. And I remember once carrying him along the drive and he must have some kind of a wriggle in death and I dropped the bag and screamed! That was sort of probably in the late '40s 'cause we had our milk, and might I say possibly quite illegally, our eggs from Hooleys during the war time. Previously having had our milk from Manor Farm, from the Mellors, but when Hooleys began supplying the neighbours with milk we had our milk from Hooleys because it was easier to collect.

S1: How did you collect it?

S2: In a milk can, ladled out into our can. And on the day we fetched the eggs we took an extra milk can so it looked as if we were carrying two cans of milk.

S1: Yes.

S2: And so that was why I can only assume that it was a secret that we actually had bought eggs from the Hooleys. So we did have a chicken and we still continue, if we eat here, at home today we would have a chicken but since our granddaughter was born four years ago we now have our Christmas meal in Cheshire and this year we have two grandchildren to share that meal with.

S1: Yes. Would your mum have made pudding or something like that? I know it was difficult times during the war.

S2: She made a cake, I think. And always on Boxing Day we travelled by train in the war time because our car—I've omitted to say my father had a car before I was born.

S1: Yes, I was just going to ask that.

S2: One of the first other than … the only other man to have a car when my father acquired his in 1935 was Mr Broughton, the head teacher. And my father was the second to have a car of, shall I say, the ordinary men. I don't think there were any other people in Colton at that time with cars. And it was, as I say, before I was born.The car was put away in the garage through the years when we couldn't use it during the war, and so we travelled by train to Stafford to visit the uncle who I referred to earlier who employed my father in the building trade, and we always had a very happy day with Uncle George and his wife and her niece.

S1: And how did you get to the station? Did you all walk?

S2: We walked.

S1: Across the fields?

S2: We walked down the bottom fields, as we call them. Not often these top fields to the station. We walked down into the village and went in by the war memorial.

S1: Yes.

S2: And because of my father's friendship with the foreman of the goods yard we often cut through the goods yard. We didn't actually go right round by the blue wall.

S1: That was useful.

S2: … and up the steps, which don't now exist. Up the bank. That was the official way, but we often walked through the goods yard.

S1: Yes. That was good. Yeah. And so, just coming back also to shopping. You were talking about food in Masons. Where would you have bought clothes and things? I know also you had to have coupons for clothes during the war, but where do you remember getting clothes or did your mum make things ….?

S2: My mum made things. In fact, my 'layette' as it would have been called, my baby clothes for my arrival were actually made by Miss Williscroft who was a fine needlewoman who kept the village shop in the house that is now called Cypress Cottage, well it was called Cypress Cottage then. And she made my clothes for my arrival, I do know; my mother has told me. But my mother was quite a good needlewoman and then if I had new clothes they would come from somewhere in Rugeley. I don't really remember going to buy clothes. But I do have a photograph of myself in a green skirt, well it's a black and white photograph, but I know it's green, the skirt, taken when I was about eleven. And that I know I had for Easter one year because I'd heard about this thing you had to have something new for Easter.

S1: Yes.

S2: Even to this day I perhaps don't have anything new but I always make sure my granddaughter and now it will be my granddaughters have something new as a present at Easter.

S1: And other than that you didn't used to go on the bus into Uttoxeter? Because there were buses around weren't there?

S2: Yes. If you let me talk about the buses. There was a bus to Rugeley on a Thursday, Thursday morning. There were two and sometimes even three buses on a Saturday: one morning, one afternoon, and at one point there was an evening bus as well for people if they were going to the cinema in Rugeley. On a Wednesday there was a bus basically travelling in the opposite direction to Uttoxeter. But it was only really Rugeley that we travelled to—and I didn't travel to Rugeley if I could help it, hating the queues. As a very small child and then, of course, once we could get our car back on the road after the war, which was about late 1947 or sometime in 1947 anyway, the car was back certainly on the road because I remember that incredibly well. We would travel on a Saturday afternoon further afield to Stafford and places like that.

S1: Did you go on holiday?

S2: The holidays in the war time were when my father could manage to escape, shall I say, from work—I'll explain why. The sons of the manager of Rugeley Gas Company were obviously in the forces—one in the RAF and two in the army—and when they came home on leave they would take a turn at working at the gas works and give the gas works staff a few days off.

S1: Right.

S2: And so it was only sort of by chance. My father would suddenly arrive home and say I've got a couple of days off and we would gather ourselves together, catch the train at Rugeley Trent Valley to Stafford, change at Stafford for the line to Shrewsbury, go to Shrewsbury, change again, and go on the line that goes to Craven Arms and on into mid-Wales, catch the train to Craven Arms and then go finally by taxi because it was so outlandish there, even in the war time Craven Arms was allowed to have a taxi. And the taxi would take us to my grandmother who was living on the borders of Wales near Bishops Castle for three, perhaps two, three, four days of respite. I still adore that village today, and we've been twice this year. We always go every year to that village where my grandparents are buried and I've been twice this year, and then more recently I've met a lovely Coltonian who also lives just outside that village and I've been told I must go and see him. And I've explained to his wife, if he sees two wandering people with a Discovery in their farmyard it's only two people from Colton. And so it was only after the war that we started having a week's holiday in Llandudno.

S1: Right.

S2: That was great and I still adore and we still visit Llandudno every year. Albeit for a different reason now; it's for the Victorian weekend when the men play with steam engines and the ladies shop till they drop.

S1: And just one very, very last question. What do you remember about childrens' games when you were little?

S2: We played sort of ball games, skipping games, hopscotch.

S1: Mainly at school or out of school?

S2: Outside school as well those. But also we played circle singing games. I'm sure we played the Farmer Wants a Wife and that sort of thing, but we also played a game called The Big Ship Sailed Through the Ally-Ally-Oh where the children pass through an archway of two youngsters holding their arms up to create an arch.

S1: We used to do that for Oranges and Lemons.

S2: Yes. We played Oranges and Lemons but we had … and we also played once something to do … and the song went something about the bluebells of Scotland but I can't remember much more about that. But that again was a circle game and a singing game.

S1: Yes. And did everybody get together in the village and play? Was it … or did you mainly play with the children here?

S2: I only played really with the children from Hollow Lane because of us being a bit out on a limb.

S1: Yes.

S2: And the village being a very linear village, I think the children played with their nearest neighbours and my particular friends were the Jones family from the lower part of Hollow Lane, Mary Hardcastle, and Mary and John Hooley. And once I'd attained the age of eleven also a very, very close and long friendship right till this day with Monica Mellor from Manor Farm—albeit she is no longer with the surname Mellor but she still has an extremely close connection to her birthplace here, and we still see one another occasionally. And with part sadness and part joy we were together only a few weeks ago.

S1: Well Dorothy I think you've told us loads. Thanks us very much indeed and I'm going to switch this off.

# Colton History Society

## All Our Stories

Transcripts of villagers recollections of days gone by recorded as part of our All Our Stories Project 2013

# Nev & Alma James

**Memories of life in Colton**

**Nev and Alma James**

S1: Marion Vernon
S2: Nev James
S3: Alma James
S4: Nona Goring

S1: This recording is being made for Colton History Society. Nona Goring and Marion Vernon are interviewing Nev and Alma James on Wednesday, 18March 2009.

Right then, now you were actually born in the village, weren't you so…

S2: No.

S1: You weren't born in the village?

S2: No. No.

S1: Right, can you tell us about your family and where you were born.

S2: Right, I was born at Hill Ridware, 1929. The 12th of August, the glorious 12th. I lived in Ridware until I was eighteen months old and then we moved into the village. 'Cause my mother's mother was ill at the old cottage in Hollow Lane so she came over to look after her. But at that time they … it was a bit tight for them to reorganise the cottage so they lodged with Cynthia Nicklin's mum and dad, opposite the Dun Cow, for a short while.

S1: Right.

S2: Until they got sorted out at the cottage, and then they moved back to the cottage.

S1: So was there a cottage opposite the Dun Cow then?

S2: Yes, up a long path. It was quite a big house actually.

S3: Yeah, it was.

S2: Walter Nicklin and his wife, and Cynthia was their daughter.

S1: Right.

S2: Then of course I don't remember much about moving, obviously.

S1: No.

S2: But anyway, so I was there then until … lived there until we got married.

S1: Oh right.

S2: Yeah.

S1: So did your grandma get better?

S2: No, she didn't. She … mid-1930s, about 1935, I think. She's buried in Colton church yard. Yes, she was very … my granddad was still living at home. So there was mum and dad, granddad, and me and my brother lived there. There was five of us in the family. So we lived there until, well, we got married, that was the first … no, my brother got married then we got married two years later.

S1: Was your brother older than you?

S2: Oh yeah, he was three years and a bit older than me.

S1: And did your parents work when you were little?

S2: Oh yeah, me dad was a miner. My mother was just, well she kept house and as a bit of a side line to pay for her fags she used to do wreath making and bouquets just … and she used to do a bit of poultry plucking and drawing and dressing.

S1: Did she.

S2: Yeah, she was also what the doctor called 'laying in and laying out'.

S1: Right

S2: See if anybody was on the way out she would go and sit with them when they was getting close and she would lay them out. And anybody having a baby close to she used to go and … you know, do the necessary until the nurse came.

S1: Yeah.

S2: And just about that one. In 1940 Mick Jones was born in the lane and that's when we had the heavy snow. That's when the Colton road was a yard of snow and Sam went to the phone box, which is installed by the cenotaph. He phoned Nurse Calder and she couldn't … she said well I can't get in this weather. So Sam went up to the Manor Farm, harnessed Old Jess, the pony, to the trap and he walked that pony through to Rugeley, picked Nurse Calder up and walked her back, and by the time she got back Mick was born. Yeah. But he survived and …

S1. Your mum delivered him, didn't she?

S2: Me mum delivered him, you know, because the nurse couldn't get in time, long delay.

S1: Well that was a long way to walk in the snow, wasn't it?

S2: Oh it was, yeah. I mean it was hard for the pony and Sam was leading it as well, so. But, yeah, the good old days. Good job we haven't had winters like that since, you know, it is.

S1: Yes. And what do you remember about your neighbours as you were little, when you were growing up?

S2: Well, and close to us was Mrs Etherington. I remember in the mid-30s mum and dad was still alive, old John Bull, and I don't his wife's name, Mrs Bull, she was ailing. She was in a wheelchair if she went out and she was mostly in bed in the front room as they called it. And he died first, old John did, and then his wife died later. And a funny thing was, I'd never heard the expression before, but I know one day, you know, you come in as a kid and you say 'where's me mam?' And me granddad said, 'Mrs Bull's gone home and your mum's gone down to Mrs Bull.' I said, 'Gone home?' You know, I thought Mrs Bull was at home. But it was his way of saying she'd gone over, you know. And so she'd gone to lay Mrs Bull out. Mrs Etherington, her husband was a local coal man. He had a horse and dray in the place where my bungalow is now.

S1: Oh right.

S2: And he was … but he had a sudden heart attack and died sudden. So I can't remember her husband. He'd been dead quite a while. And she was Tom Preston's aunty, Mrs Etherington was. And her brother was Frank Bull, as was the bailiff for Carwarden Springs Farm, and that was owned by Dones from Blithbury, the farm was. He was the bailiff Mr Bull was. Yeah. Then across the road, where the old thatch was, Amos Thorns, the road sweeper, lived there, him and his wife.

S3: That's was Milly and Sam's .

S2: That's where … they have built two houses there.

S1: Yeah.

S2: And they had two children, Edgar and Cathy. They were, of course, quite a bit older than us they were.

S1: Were there lots of children in the village at that time?

S2: There was… there did seem to be a lot, yes. Yes, but there was always somebody to play with, you know, there was a lot of activity in the village. Of course there was very little traffic so, I mean, you could … we used to play cricket in the road and football in the road and all sorts of things. In the winter you'd be on the pools sliding. The Barcroft, you know, which used to be just over the bridge, that pool there—which is filled in now.Oh yes and on the plantation pool, that was sliding and …

S1: So were the winters a lot harder?

S2: Oh a lot harder, yes. As you had frost and snow. I mean in those days the toilet was about thirty yards up the garden so you only went when necessary!

S1: And did you have running water when you were growing up?

S2: Not till, we had a well till about 1938.

S1: Right.

S2: About 1938 we had the water laid on. The mains water. Up until then we had a well on the front, down a little path on the front yard. And that was quite, not too deep, but it had got the old windlass and bucket, metal bucket, on a chain. There was frogs and newts in it.

S1: So did they come up with the water?

S2: At times, yeah. But me granddad always said, oh, if frogs and newts live in it the water's pure.

S1: Right. So did you just drink it as it came out of the well?

S2: Just as it came out, yes.

S1: You didn't boil it.

S2: They filled the bucket into another bucket in the back kitchen but then, of course, they filled the kettle out of that bucket and then they boil that for tea and whatever, you know.

S1: Yeah. So where did you boil the water up for tea?

S2: On an old black lead grate.

S1: And did your mum cook in there as well?

S2: She did all the cooking, yeah. And there was always a dinner and a pudding. There was never just a dinner, it were … it was a dinner and a pudding. And we had good food. I mean we never … 'cause me dad kept pigs, during the war especially he kept pigs for hanging on the wall. And he used to have a bit of rabbiting at George Morris's, the farm on Bellamour Corner. A bit of rabbiting there, and you had a bit of rabbiting for Keenan's at Newlands. So there was always a rabbit. And if a pheasant got in the way, we got a pheasant. Which you wasn't supposed to do. My mother used to skin the pheasant and keep the feathers inside in case anybody knew we'd had the pheasant.Used to hide it, yeah. But, yeah, we lived well actually, you know, before …

S1: And what about your vegetables, did you grow any?

S2: Well, there was a biggish garden with the cottage and he had … where the Yates's had their log yard, that Land's Trust, he had that. We used to dig that. He used to get me helping him to dig that in the first place.

S3: Would he rent that off …?

S2: He rented off the Parish Land's Trust yes. And then he had another piece of ground of George Morris which was, you know where the lane for Wilma Farm goes up there, there was a three-corner piece there and that was a separate piece. And me dad ploughed that and used to grow spuds on that.

S1: How did he plough it?

S2: Well he used to borrow Mr Morris's plough and the horse. Mr Morris had two horses, a brown and a white one. And old George Bentley, the farmhand, he didn't like the white one, it was too active. To … my dad used always take the white one out because he used to love, you know, a horse with plenty life in it. And he used to plough that. And he used to have the plough the one up on the top of the hill as well.

S1: Yeah. So what did he grow in there?

S2: He used to grow his early spuds on the top of the hill because he said there was less chance of frost on the top of the hill. So he used to grow Arran Pilot up there and Majestic, and his main crop was always Majestic.

S3: Never bought vegetables.

S2: Never bought vegetables. And he used to clamp his potatoes. You know, put them in a pile of straw then the soil on the top and …

S1: And just fetch them when you want them.

S2: Then open them out after the worst of the winter had gone, you know.

S1: Right.

S2: So we never went hungry.

S1: What would be a typical dinner for you then?

S2: Er, well, meat. Mr Sergeants from Bromley, he used to come round with a green van to bring the meat round.

S1: But you had some of your own, you said, as well. Your pigs, your pork.

S2: Oh, the pig. Well they had the pork when they first killed them, then of course they'd salt the hams and the bacon. So, you know, the dinner was bacon and potatoes and cabbage, and poured the dip on it. 'Cause there was always plenty of dip out of uncured bacon, you know.

S1: Ah, right. Yeah. But then when you hadn't got your own the butcher came round.

S2: The butcher … got it off the butcher, yes. Mr Sergeant. Big chap! About eighteen stone he was.

S1: How did he come round?

S2: In a van. He had a green van. I think a chap named Mr Prince took over after Sergeants. Yes. Yeah.

And there were always a pudding. And people thought it strange, well you thought it strange, didn't you Alma?

S2: …we used to have a knife and fork and the knives were always like, you can bend the blade. We always had to clean our plate with our knife and have a pudding on the same plate. We never had pudding plates. And people thought it was strange, but that was the system in our house. Never had pudding plates. It was clean your plate …

S3: Your mother never liked washing up, did she.

S2: Well, no. Well it was labour saving.

S1: Yes. I suppose, I mean, you've got to heat all your water up.

S3: Yes.

S2: Yes, right. Kettle on the fire, you know.

S1: So what … how many rooms did you actually have in the house?

S2: There was a living room and the parlour. The parlour was for special occasions. You know, my granddad was laid out in the parlour, you know, that was the …

S1: Right. They did that then

S2: Yeah, they did that. Yeah. There was no chapels of rest in them days. It was always, you know, they laid them out in the parlour.

S1: Right.

S2: The parlour. Then there was a little staircase went up in the corner onto the room above the living room. And, of course, the bedroom floor was the ceiling of the living room, you know. And then there was the other room on the other side where me mum and dad slept, and there was me and me brother in the one bed and then me granddad in the other bed on the other side. So, we coped quite well.

S1: Yes. And did you have a separate kitchen then or was there … ?

S2: Just a kitchen at the back of the living room.

S1: Yes.

S2: And that's where, they put the tap in there

S3 They used to call it the back kitchen.

S2: Back kitchen, yeah. In 1938, I think, about the water came in.

S1: I bet that was good wasn't it?

S2: Oh yeah, it was. It was marvellous.

S1: Yeah.

S2: And then we had a safe with the perforated zinc, you know. Just to keep the food in.

S1: Yes. Did you have a slab or anything to keep things cool as well?

S2: Yeah, there was a cold … Settlers they used to call them, didn't they?

S2: Settlers. A settler yeah. It used to keep it cool. And under the sink my granddad used to keep his tobacca. He always had a pipe and he used to smoke Diggers Flake which was in the yellow packet. And it was a ritual with him. Rubbing his tobbaca and filling his pipe. But he kept it under the sink because it kept it nice and moist.

S1: So your mum looked after all the house, really, as well as doing all these other extra bits.

S2: Yes. Yeah.

S1: How did she do the washing then if you only had the well at the time?

S2: In the wash house. There was an extension on the end which was just a like a shed really. It's some time in the past, whether there'd been any animals in there I don't know, and you could see where the roof joists had been in the end walls but there was nothing there, just straight up to the roof. And there was a copper in the corner, you know, with old …

S1: For a fire.

S2: Fire copper. And a big old mangle with a wooden … big wooden rollers. And of course it was, you know, me dad used to … we used to get to bed half past five to go to work and that was when he used to light the fire in the copper and then washing would start on the Monday morning. And it was all steam and … I used to hate … when I used to come from

school, Tuesdays was a rotten day because it was all washing hanging out. If it wasn't fit to try outside it was all hanging in the living room, you know.

S1: Where would it hang, round the fire on a …?

S2: On the three-state clothes horse, yeah. It used to hang round there and all steam, ugh! But anyway.

S1: So Monday was wash day.

S2: Washday, yeah. And if it were dry okay it would be outside on the lines. And then if you couldn't get it all done on a … because we were five in the family there's quite a lot of washing, you know. Mind you, you didn't change your shirt everyday or, you know.

S1: Did you just keep your school uniform all week, what you wore for school, not uniform, but your school clothes.

S2: You used to change, kept them, and then you would change when you come from school, you changed into your play clothes as you called it then.

S1: Yeah.

S2: Then Sunday you did have something a bit better on, you know, for going to…

S1: Best clothes.

S2: Oh yes. And Sunday afternoon was, in the summer especially, was a walk round the village.

S3: That's right.

S2: Either down the fields past Jane Morris's down to the Railway Inn perhaps.

S1: Yes.

S2: And we'd have a Vimto and a packet of crisps and they'd go in have a drink, you know, and it was used to be... Surprising, they say your memory plays tricks, but the summers seemed endless.

S3: Yes.

S2: Forever. You know, nice weather continued …

S3: But I can remember the very first time that I ever come to Colton, we didn't even know where we were going. There was my sister and myself and we were school children, and we went … we always used to go walking on a Sunday afternoon, you know. And we were wandering about …

S1: Just the two of you together?

S3: Just the two of us, yeah. And we walked across the fields, you know, and we come to this village and we thought 'well where are we?' We said to somebody 'what's the name of this place?' And they said Colton. [Laughs] Never heard of it, you know. When I went home and told me granddad where we'd been he said, 'Did you see the stagecoach?' That was a joke, you know, with the stagecoach coming from Colton into Rugeley … shopping.

S1: So you lived in Rugeley, did you, Alma?

S3: Yes, I was born there.

S2: But in the 1930s they had quite a good bus service, the Midland Red and Wheeldon's bus, and I got an idea, whether I'm right, is the Potteries used to run a bus alternating with the Midland Red. The PMT.

S3: PMT. I remember PMT buses.

S2: Yeah. Quite a good service. And it was surprising, the Green bus on a Wednesday used to go through Sheracop Lane, that little narrow, it used to go through there to the market at Uttoxeter. I couldn't believe it.

S2: On the Wednesday for the market, for the Uttoxeter Market.

S3: We went through there. When we first got married we used to go with Lilly, you know, from next door, and we used to go to Uttoxeter. And it used to wait for people while they put their coats on at these little cottages en route.

S1: Yes.

S2: Oh they did, yes. There were happy days. I mean, my school days they were quite, I enjoyed most of them, you know. I used to get the stick pretty regular off Mr Broughton. But I mean for nothing! I mean, when you was in his class. I mean, we started in the infants, there was a Miss Hamilton—I don't know if Laura would remember Miss Hamilton.

S4: Don't know.

S2: She used to bike from Blithbury she had. Big red-faced girl, well, woman. She was in the infants and then Miss Hedgington, she was teaching the next class up, and eventually she married Miss Jones's brother, Donald. Miss Hedgington did. And then Mr Broughton took the main class. You know, he had like three classes, he did, in his classroom. But, I mean, when you're sitting … we must be getting close to time, you'd look round and he used to have a little clock in the middle room but you had to look through that screen to the clock. You'd look around, well it must be about dinner time. 'Come here, I'll tell you when it's time for dinner time.' You'd have the stick for looking at the clock. That's how he was. Anyway, it didn't stop us looking at the clock, you know, when we thought it was getting close to dinner time. But we had … it gives you basic discipline, I think, when…. He was very, very strict. I mean when you got to school you'd line up in your classes and you had to put your hands out and he'd come along and inspect your hands and your shoes, see if your shoes was clean.

S1: Right.

S2: And you'd hold your hands out and you had to turn 'em over and he said 'all right'. If not he'd send them to the washroom to wash your hands, you know.

S1: Yes. So how many classrooms were there down there, just the three?

S2: There was three, yeah. Well, there was three classrooms in use. There was one for the infants in the middle, one with Miss Hedginton and then Mr Broughton's. But at the other side there was what they called the north room which was never used as a classroom, no. What it was for really, perhaps, is when there was more pupils there, I don't know. 'Cause they used to carry on after eleven year old, you see, at one time. When Sam Jones went to school they stopped there till they left school, you see. So, yeah.

S1: What age would they leave school at that time.

S2: Well I was eleven year old when I left Colton.

S1: You left, and then where did you go then?

S2: Went to Colwich.

S1: To Colwich, yes.

S2: Nichols's bus used to pick us up at 8:30.

S3: That wasn't a very big school really, was it, Colwich.

S2: No.

S1: Was that just for children eleven and upwards?

S2: They'd got an infants part at Colwich for the ... It was a newish building that was. Now we went into the old part, you know. Went into from eleven to fourteen there.

S1: Did you enjoy that as well?

S2: I enjoyed Colwich, yeah. But, you see, Mr Broughton he, there was no curriculum as such, I don't think. He used to teach you what he thought and … I mean the standard at Colton was, we never learned much more at Colwich really.

S1: Oh really. It was high standard that he taught you then.

S2: He was, yeah. He was, yeah.

S1: So what did you mainly concentrate on, just maths and English and …?

S2: Maths, English, yeah. Maths and English and … we used to have Mr Holmes, the rector, used to come across on a Tuesday morning. That was religious instruction, yeah. We used to call him Old Tootlem Book behind his back. Well, we didn't … But you know …

S1: Why did you call that?

S2: I don't know. It was just a nickname. Tootlem. Old Tootlem Book. He used to wear a homburg hat and the steel-rimmed glasses. But just a funny story about Old Tootlem. During the war they had these delayed-action bombs dropped in Colton, there was a row of five come across. And the Suicide Squad, they called them, the soldiers come to dig them out. Well the one in the middle of the football, there was two in the football pitch: one by the centre line and then another on the corner. And the one in the middle of the football pitch was one of the last. It was the biggest one, the most difficult one. And they'd gone down quite… on a Saturday morning, of course, the kids used to go poking their nose and I went across this Saturday morning about eleven o'clock and were looking round and they'd got a terrific hole they got out. All the shoring up, timbers up, you know. And this one soldier said, he says 'pop and ask the vicar if we can borrow his saw again'. Well, borrow his saw again, well they'd had it before. But, I mean, thinking rationally down there you'd think well they'd have their own tools, wouldn't they. Anyway, so I goes trotting off down to the rectory. Knocked the door. Old Tootlem come to the door, 'could the soldiers borrow your saw again, sir?' And he looked a bit puzzled, he says 'the saw?' 'Yeah, they said could they borrow the saw again, sir.' So he said 'come with me'. So he used to have a workshop. He did some lovely woodwork, he did. He had a little gantry went across from the rectory to his workshop,

over the top there. And he went in there, he's got this beautiful saw. And I put my hand out, he said 'no,' he said 'I'm coming with you'. So he got some brown paper and wrapped this brown paper round the saw and put his hat on. So we come out, we had to come round right by the bridge. Just as we got past the school the soldiers, there were a flat-back lorry. The soldiers come past on the lorry and they were sitting on the back of the lorry, you know. Well they was laughing. They was … they'd had me, you see.

And I says, 'oh they're going home, sir'. You know, 'cause he'd got the saw under his arm and they'd … and I realised then as, well I realised after, they'd had me.

S1: What happened then, did he just go home with it?

S2: I said, 'oh sir it looks as if they're going home for their dinner see, sir'. Oh, you know. He probably realises they'd … because he was a First World War soldier. He knew. He knew what had gone on, you see, he did.

S1: So did you actually go down to the church at all from the school, or was it just that he came to you on a Tuesday morning.

S2: They used to have odd services from the school … the whole class used to go across, you know.

S1: Right.

S2: I don't remember much about the church services at that time. It was more…

S4: You didn't go to Sunday School?

S2: I did. When Miss Rotchell used to … Miss Rotchell used to take the Sunday School.

S3: She was a character, wasn't she?

S2: Yeah. In the summertime she used to take us walks on a Sunday afternoon after lesson.

S4: Yeah, I can remember that.

S2: And then she … mostly in Bellamour Park. Around the lake or just into the park, you know. Yeah it was … as I say, in them days the weather always seem nice, you know, for a walk round.

S1: And were there big festivals at the church that the whole village went to? You know, Harvest or Easter? Was it like that?

S2: They used to have—what was that day they used to call it when the church had this, they used to have like little stalls and little, little …

S3: Garden parties?

S4: The garden fetes.

S2: Yeah. Well knowing, it must have been the coronation of George VI there was a party in the village and they … and there was another one.

S1: What did they do for that?

S2: They had a sports day on the Barcroft, with the children's races …

S1: Which is the Barcroft?

S2: That's the one just over the bridge, where the path cuts across.Yes. And that's where the Barcroft pool was, which was fed out of the Morton brook.Yeah, they used to have races. And I remember when I was racing and Aubrey Hardcastle, Vic's brother, was just a little bit older than me, and on this race there was a wind-up train set for the first prize and the second prize was a tin car, you know. And I'd got my eye set on this train set and I ran my heart out. Anyway, Aubrey Hardcastle was, it's more or less dead heat, you know. But Fred Hardcastle was the judge.

S4: His dad [Laughs]

S2: So Aubrey won. Well, I was so disappointed. Anyway, I must have had a long face when they give me this tin car, you know. And I remember, Sis Williscroft—do you remember Big Sis?

S4: I do.

S2: She says 'never mind, Nev, going to take us to Rhyl in that, won't you', you know. But it was a big disappointment that was. But, you know, we used to have some good days like that…occasionally.

S1: So who would have bought those prizes then?

S2: I don't know, whether the church or the school, or where the money came from. Or whether somebody, you know, well off had donated them.

S3: But I can remember when I went to school. I started at the infant school at Rugeley and we always had a Christmas present. And it was a nice book or something like that.

S4: Yeah, we always had a Christmas present.

S3: It was a different tale when I moved to the Catholic school because you didn't get anything like that there, you know.

S1: Oh right.

S2: You had discipline in the Catholic school.

S3: Oh discipline, yes.

S2: Yes, you did.

S3: Nuns teaching you.

S1: How did you, as a family, celebrate Christmas when you were little? Do you remember much about it?

S2: Yeah. Me dad always raised chickens, cockerels and he always used to have ducks. We started off having cockerel for the Christmas dinner but then the regular Christmas was two Aylesbury ducks, two quite plump ducks, you know.That was a big treat,that was. I mean, during the rest of the year you wouldn't have anything special like that. It were just normal …

S1: What would have been served up with that?

S2: Potatoes and, you know, probably a few roast, sprouts, you know. Just like a good Christmas dinner, you know. And have plum pudding, you know, Christmas pudding. Yes.

S1: And would that have had little coins in or anything inside it?

S2: No, we never had anything, no. There was no money to spare for coins [Laughs]. I don't think we ever expected anything.

S3: 'Cause when I used to do the Christmas puddings when we first got married and Rob, he was gullible, you know, we used to have slip one in—because I didn't like to boil the coins in the pudding.

S1: No.

S3: And we used to slip on in Rob's and he always thought he was lucky because he found it.

S2: He was the lucky one, having the coin. Yeah. Yeah.

S1: So where would your mum have done shopping for, say, clothes or …?

S2: Rugeley. Rugeley, yes. I think occasionally she went to Uttoxeter because you could get more stuff at Uttoxeter, you know. Especially Elkes's Cakes, they had a big … it must have been a shop or a stall in the market on the Wednesday. And I know as during the war they used to put Golden Syrup in the cake for sweetener, and as you broke the cake it would come up in strands, the Golden Syrup would do, yeah. It was lovely. Lovely and sweet.

S3: Mind you, your mum used to have groceries delivered from Masons, didn't she.

S2: From Masons, yeah, that's right. Yeah.

S4: I used to shop at Masons when I was first married.

S2: Masons in Rugeley, yes.

S3: And they used to deliver

S2: But Charlie Dilley used to deliver the bread and he also delivered the Sharps, the meal for … you'd mix with the pig food to feed the pigs.

S1: At the same time?

S2: On the cart, yes. Used to have …

S4: Was that Co-op, Nev?

S2: That was Co-op Charlie delivered. And he used to have Indian corn as well for feeding the fowl. He used to bring that Charlie did as well, yeah.

S4: And then Marian Webb used to come round with the milk.

S2: With the milk in the can, that's right, and measure it out in the ….Early days before Marian started it, Dick Morrel used to come. No. Dick used to come before the war.

S1: With is own milk from the farm?

S2: With own milk from the farm with a horse and float.

S3: Because he went to school with your mum.

S2: 'Cause he went to Colton school, him and his brothers went to Colton school. But just a funny thing about Dick. He come one morning and he'd got a sore throat. He could hardly croak, you know. And mother says, 'You know you want, Dick, you want some sulphur'. So he, you know, come on then like. So she got a piece of paper, put some sulphur in, rolled it up into a tube and blew it down his throat. He nearly choked, you know, he's spluttering. Anyway, he come the next the morning and I say, 'How's your throat, Dick?' 'Fine.'[Laughter]He wouldn't have any more of that.

S3: Mind you, your mum used to … this is what Nev's told me. I'm just reminding him, you see. She used to take corns out.

S2: Oh yes, corns.

S3: And cut hair on the yard outside.

S2: Oh yes.

S4: She was a woman of many talents.

S3: Yeah, she used to cut the men's hair on the yard outside.

S2: I remember Fred Myatt, he used to live in Lloyds cottages, Neville Myatt's dad. He had a bad corn and so he come up to with this corn … She used to have a little thing, a little gadget with a very sharp blade at the end. And she used to keep working round and then lift the core out, you know leave a hole. And she used to tip iodine in it. [Laughter]Fred … I remember Fred Myatt, he says 'God strewth almighty missus!'[Laughter]But I don't think he had any more corns, he never admitted to them anyway, no.

S1: So would she be paid for doing that?

S2: Oh no, it was just …

S3: No, just got paid for cutting hair.

S2: For the hair. A packet of fags was the whatsit. Whether it was five woodbines or a few Players whatever.

S1: Did she smoke?

S2: Oh, she chain smoked, yeah. She'd always got a … in the top of her pinny here, hadn't she?

S3: She died with lung cancer.

S2: But mind you…

S1: I don't people realised that danger then, did they?

S2: No, but when she did know she got lung cancer, she says 'well, I know what's caused it but I enjoyed every one of them'. So, you know, she … it was no good, you know, mithering about it

S3: Also she used to—if you remember, Nev—she used to do a lot of dressmaking as well.

S2: Well s.he was a seam… she was a tailoress. She used to work in Rugeley.

S1: Did she train as a tailor?

S2: She trained as a tailor. And she made me dad's wedding suit actually. But…

S1: Where did she work in Rugeley?

S2: I don't know. I can't remember …

S3: Morris's.

S2: Who?

S3: Morris's. It was Warrilow's afterwards. I know that 'cause you told me that.

S1: Oh right.

S2: Was it Mr Morris was the boss.

S3: He owned it.

S2: He owned it. Oh well, that's who …

S1: And taught her. She would have learned while she was on the job.

S2: Yeah. Yeah. When I was going to school all my clothes was homemade. You know, they …

S1: Everybody's were, weren't they?

S2: They were, yes. Yeah.

S3: Hand-me-downs.

S2: Hand-me-downs, yeah. But she couldn't make pullovers because, I mean, my school photograph [Laughs] …

S1: She didn't knit?

S3: Well, she did, yes.

S2: She did a lot of knitting during the war because Mrs Riley from Bellamour Lodge, she was quite well-to-do—can you remember the Rileys? Anyway, her husband, Old Pop Riley as he was nicknamed, he was a managing director, I think it was Lotus Shoes, one of the big shoe factories in Stafford. They'd got pots of money. Mrs Riley used to organise knitting. The blue wool for the sailors and the brown, the khaki wool for the soldiers and they used to knit balaclavas and scarves and jumpers. So she organised … I think she was president of the WI or Women's Union.

S1: Oh Mother's Union.

S2: Mother's Union, yeah.

S3: But going back to your pullover you were on about. We've got a picture, Nev's school photograph and its got buttoned, you know, a knitted …

S1: Like a cardigan almost?

S3: No. Just at the top, buttons there. And there's a hole and it's fastened all funny, you know. But I've got one identical of me! Just the same with a hole and the button. Because we were born in the same year, you see.

S1: Just the same.

S3: That's how everybody was.

S1: And you didn't wear long trousers, I bet, for a while, did you?

S2: Not till I went to the Colwich school. Went into long trousers when we left … when we left Colton we went into long trousers, yeah. And you thought you was grown up then, you know. It was really a step up in society. Yes.

S1: Because you're talking about cold winters but you always wore shorts.

S2: Always wore shorts, we did yes. And Mr Broughton, I don't know whether he was upset with me, he always … when you'd got your pullover he always said cut some brown paper out and put a like a brown paper sheet in front and back and its surprising how warm it used to make your jumper.

S4: Because nothing could go through could it.

S1: Did you wear a shirt? A vest and shirt?

S2: A shirt anyway. Not always a vest but a shirt and then we used to have the pullover, you know.

S3: Got liberty bodice as well.

S1: Right. That's what the girls had, didn't they, liberty bodices, yes.

S2: Well at night you only have the one fire in the living room, which would be roaring up the chimney. And me granddad used to like to take the pride of place at front of the fire. He used to burn his knees. He used to keep rubbing his knees 'cause the skin … [Laughs]. But we always used to, in the winter time, we always kept our jackets on in the house, you know, at night.

S4: You were hardened, weren't you, because we didn't have central heating and stuff.

S2: No, we didn't. No.

S3: No, and I mean the bedrooms, the windows inside used to be coated with ice.

S4: Frosted up.

S2: Frosted up, yeah.

S3: Thin blankets on the bed with holes in.

S2: Yeah. I mean…

S3: Chuck a coat on.

S4: Yeah.

S3: A lot of people talk about the good old days, but I mean, a lot of them as talk about it didn't live through, you know, but…

S4: When my granddad King from, my mum's dad, he always used to say 'If anybody tells you about the good old days they weren't'. They weren't good old days.

S2: They weren't, no. But we didn't realise, did we? We just coped with it and got on …

S3: And yet I wouldn't have wanted to live in another time, you know. I mean …

S1: Coming back to hygiene in the house then. You only had a well when you were little.

S2: Well for the drinking water.

S1: Your dad was a miner. So he'd have coming back dirty I suppose.

S2: Well, no, because from 1929 they had the baths put in at Brereton Colliery. That was one of the first collieries to have the baths. So he would always come home bathed.

S3: 'Cause your dad was a farmer first, wasn't he.

S2: Well a farm labourer, yeah.

S4: Well Laura could remember me dad coming home and having baths. That was …

S2: Before 1929. Early days, yeah. Yeah. But, as Alma said, me dad, when he was … actually he was born wrong side of the blanket and he lived with, Yeomans was the family name, and he went as Alf Yeomans and then the dad died when me dad was twelve. And, of course, there was no social in them days. And he was the eldest lad, and he had to leave school and go to work on the farm to earn a crust, as you might say, you know. So he did that until, I don't know when it would be. Anyway, he was seventeen when his mother died. She's buried in Colton church yard. And in those days the system was the eldest son organised everything. You know, he took charge of the funeral and, virtually organised everything. But there was four sisters, I think it was, and a brother, two brothers. Anyway, the sisters they got a bit, when he started organising, they said 'Ay, you're nothing to do with us. You're not one of us.' So the balloon went up then. So after the funeral he joined the army and was in the First World War. He went to France. That would be 1917 'cause he … and then he got gassed when he was out there so he was invalided out then. Then they said 'This gassing has effected your lungs you need to get a job in the fresh air.' And they thought he'd gone back to farming, but he went into the pit so…

S1: That was really fresh air!

S2: That was his fresh-air job.

S3: So he went to your mother's … his mother's maiden name then was James.

S2: Yes. And you see in those days you had to declare when you got married your status. And he had to say illegitimate and I think that … so and he changed his name to his mother's maiden name. That's how … that's why we're James. And the sad thing was, really, as with some of the sisters he never spoke to them for quite a, well till he died.

S1: Really.

S2: You'd remember Billy Yeomans, wouldn't you? Ghandi. That was his nickname But Ghandi, yes, Billy Yeomans he was a character.

S3: They called him Ghandi!

S2: Ghandi. 'Cause up 'ere, just up 'ere on the other side of the road there was a thatched cottage. That's where the Gregorys lived.

S4: Yeah.

S2: And Bill used to, and Mrs Gregory was a Yeomans, you see, Elsie, Elsie Yeomans but married a Gregory. An old chap she'd married, and he'd long gone. Anyway, Bill lived there and he used to work for George Morris at Bellamour Farm, and at 4:30/5:00 in the morning Bill used to ride down to the village playing mouthorgan. And people complained about it so he had to pack that it. But he was a right character. Ghandi.

S3: Never got married, did he?

S2: Never got married Ghandi, no. Where he got the name Ghandi I don't know. He was a character.

S1: I'm going to come back to the hygiene then again. He had a bath every day when he was at work, what about you children?

S2: Well, it wasn't a Saturday night bath. It was when the copper had been on, you know. I mean, you'd have the copper on on a Monday for the washing but if it went on any other time for anything then you'd have a bath as and when there was any hot water. I mean, we never put the kettles on the fire for a bath so you'd have a bath once a week but ..

S1: Where would you have that?

S2: In the front room, in the parlour.

S1: Oh in the parlour, yeah. Not by the fire then?

S2: Oh no, no, no.

S1: Was there a fire in the parlour?

S2: There was a fire but it was only lit at special occasions that was, you see.

S3: Like Christmas.

S1: So would you go in there at Christmas, your parlour?

S2: Oh yes. Oh yes. If you have visitors, well, you had the fire lit and … yeah. It was a real special occasion to go into the parlour, you know.

S1: Did you have gifts at Christmas? Did you hang your stocking up or anything?

S2: Oh yeah. And I know you used to hang a stocking up and you'd have all sorts of games, you know, as long as you got box wrapped up, you know, that was Christmas. And you'd have some nuts in the bottom and a new penny, something like … oh and a sugar mouse. That was a regular thing.

S1: No fruit?

S2: Well, no, you might have an apple but, you might but …

S3: I used to have an apple and an orange, nuts and fruit.

S2: I know when I got older, of course when you get to school, you know, as you get older some kids said there's no Santa Clause, you know. And anyway, I kept saying is there Santa, is there. Anyway, mother, one Christmas she says 'Well, you know now as the kids have put you right so we'll just give you the present.' You know instead of having a stocking. Anyway I was in her bedroom mooching around seeing what she'd bought me, you see. And top of the wardrobe I found this box, it had got a torch in it. One of these chromium-plated torches, and I thought well there's bound to be something more than that, you know, for Christmas. But there wasn't.

S3: Because he knew.

S2: And it was such a let down, I thought I wish I'd have kept my mouth shut, you know, and carried on with hanging the pillow case … we used to have little pillowcase we used to have to hang up.

S1: Oh did you?

S2: Oh yes! It was magic, you know, waking up on Christmas morning.

S3: Going back to the hygiene though. When I lived with an aunt—because our mother died when we were quite young, you know, and I lived all over the place. But when I lived with these Carolls in Alma Lane and they'd got four boys and on a washday, when she'd finished the washing, if we were about, you know, playing, she'd just—me and me younger cousin—she used to get us and stand us in either the dolly tub or even the boiler! And it was still warm.

S1: So you had plenty of coal, though, didn't you Nev.

S2: Oh yes, the coal allowance, that's right. Yes. There was always a good fire going, yeah.

S1: Lots of dust?

S2: Dust, yes. And the paraffin lamp and all, if you didn't trim the wicks properly… They used to have a hanging lamp on a hook in the middle of the beam.

S3: Nan had got a funny chimney as well in her cottage, hadn't she?

S2: Yeah, because he used to come over the top for sweeping the chimneys, like a tin sheet across it and you could take it out and get up …

S3: Because there was the beams, wasn't there.

S2: Beams. But the paraffin lamp, if you didn't trim the wick properly or turned it up to high it'd spiral and go to black. And I know my mother had been to a whist drive somewhere and my granddad was in charge and she come back and everywhere was all cobwebs all round with this. The lamp had spiralled and my granddad had got bloomin' cobwebs on his hair he had. He'd just gone, spiralled up and he never notices and it just kept on and on. Yeah.

S1: Where would she have gone to the whist drive? In the village …

S2: In the Reading Room.

S1: In the Reading Room, yes. So were there lots of things down there?

S2: Yeah. They had whist drives and …

S4: People drives …

S2: And dances. Dances.

S3: We used to have a group from Yoxall, hadn't they,that used to come and play. Like a band, you know.

S2: Benny Jackson's. BJ's Rhythm Band and Charlie Robinson was on the piano, Benny on the drums, and … aye.

S1: So would all ages go, or just the adults.

S2: Well, the teenagers really, you know. Us kids used to go to the … poke our heads round the door for the dancing, you know. Just to be nosey, but we'd soon be told, you know, it's ten o'clock get lost, sort of thing.

S1: Yeah.

S3: And you must tell them the story about when you shot Vic Hardcastle… or just missed him.

S2: Yeah. When we was teenagers, when Randy Boycott kept the Dun Cow, me and Vic used to go up to the Dun Cow when we was seventeen, sixteen/seventeen. We used to go up the Dun Cow and have half a pint of cider and either old Randy or Miss Boycott as we called her, the lady who'd serve us, at the outdoor place they used to have a little place with a hatch for the outdoor sales. And we'd been up there and had a cider and we come back and me dad—me mother was away at her sister's funeral—me dad had gone playing darts, which was his hobby… that was his hobby playing darts, and my brother had gone out somewhere. Anyway, we was in the living room and, of course, in those days there was, we'd got guns 'cause me dad used to do this bit of rabbitin'.

We'd got these guns in the corner and there's an old gun there as me brother had borrowed off his mate, Porter, Tommy Porter. And it was a real old warn out thing. Anyway, so we were wondering what to do, so in the top drawer we kept… when they'd been out rabbiting they used to chuck all the cartridges out the pocket into the top drawer. So it was all mixed up; there's 12 bore, 410, No 1 bore, all sorts. So we said lets sort these cartridges out.

So sorting out, and I always remember it was a yellow 12-bore cartridge and the brass end had got a ridge in it and had been fast in the breach some time or other—got a ridge in it. And one of us said, 'well that's no good'. And I says 'oh well try it in gun'. So I went in the corner, got this gun out the corner, put it in, slammed the gun together and with it being our gun the percussion cap, the spring had gone on it so the percussion cap, the pin was still sticking out. So as I slammed the gun together it hit the cap on the cartridge, BANG! And Vic was standing the other side of the table to me. Well, it frightened both of us when the gun went off but after we'd recovered went had a look. Now there was a coat hanging this side, on the beam, it just missed it by only a fraction, and it went through this coat, through the parlour door as made a hole about three inches through. So went through into the parlour and at the back of the parlour my mother's coat was hanging on the back of the parlour door. It had took the shoulders out of this bloomin' coat, me mother's coat on the back door. Then it went along the wall, took the wallpaper off, shredded the curtains and took the window out in the front room!

Anyway, we was just …

S1: You must have been totally shocked at that.

S2: Terrified. We thought well what's … how am I going answer to this, you see. Anyway, when my brother come in, Kev said oh blimey, oh … Anyway, he said I'll have to put something in this, you know, we'll patch it up. And anyway, he says, 'you go to bed' he says, 'when my dad come's in I'll put you right'. Anyway, I lay in bed listening, 'cause you hear ever so plain through them ceilings. I lay in bed listening and me dad come in and me brother says 'Aye, come and look at this' he said, 'our kid nearly shot young Vic, look at this'. And I thought 'ooh, he's putting me right!' You know. And me dad … anyway the next morning my brother put a piece of … let a piece of wood into this hole but it had splintered the door at the back. And I don't think he ever noticed the shoulders had been tufted out of me mother's coat. Anyway we ruck all the curtains up and put a new pane of glass in the… and put some varnish on the door.They said, 'well leave the door open a bit' so when your mother come … me mother come back the day after. So when she wants to go in the parlour she won't notice if the door's open. Anyway, it happened. She went in the parlour, put her hand on the door, and she went 'What's this?' The varnish was still wet, you see. Oh dear the balloon went up. But anyway, I didn't have a good hiding which I was expecting. But mind you, I was about sixteen or seventeen so I had got past the good hiding stage really.

S1: Yeah.

S2: But anyway the upshot was, as a few days later mother went down to Gerty Uptons, to the shop, and she put her coat on …

S3: She was sitting there for an hour wasn't she …

S1: Oh you hadn't told her that.

S2: No, no. I hadn't told her that. Well, we didn't notice actually as the coat was … it was how it was hanging. It had just gone through ….stuff in the shoulders. Anyway, she went down and Gerty said 'What's up with your coat Ive?'

S4: Vic visits him quite often, you know. He comes and sits and has a natter with him, and he'd always reminding him about this.

S2: I nearly shot him, yeah. Well, it could have been a tragedy. It could have been, you know. But me mother said get rid of all them guns. She couldn't bare to have a gun in the house. She couldn't, no.

S3: I don't like guns.

S2: Well, she always said guns are dangerous whether they're loaded or unloaded or whatever. So we did get rid of them.

S1: Was the discipline quite strict as you grew up in your family? I mean, you said it was at school very strict with Mr Broughton.

S2: Very strict, yeah.

S1: And at home?

S2: At home? Well, the only real good hiding I had was off me mother for smokin'. How it happened was Bruce Molineux he used to live in the … when they did the flats in the Coachman's Walk, as it was known, they did some flats up. Old Nelson Thorns lived there and Molineux's come to live there from Colwich. Anyway, we used to like a smoke, Bruce and me and one or two of the lads. Anyway Bruce come one day, he says 'look what I got'. He'd got some Craven 'A', them with the red packet with the black cat on. He says, c'mon we'll have a smoke. So off we goes down the village. Eleanor Hardcastle was there, 'where you going?' 'Going for a smoke.' 'Can I come have a smoke?' 'No, you're not having a smoke.' So sent Eleanor off. Anyway, went up Webb's Lane, there was a barn up there, Webb's Lane. So me and Bruce goes in this barn, lit up, was puffing away merrily, you know. Next thing was the barn door opened, me mother was there. You know them sticks in Webbs Lane, they was a whippy sticks there. She'd got one of them. She didn't half lace me, I tell you. For smoking.

S3: 'Cause Eleanor had told her, hadn't she?

S2: Elena, 'cause we … Eleanor had gone and tell me mother we were going into the barn on Webs Lane for a smoke. So she had her own back, Elena did. But she didn't half lace me. To stop me smoking. I mean, so …

S3: You did do though. You never smoked.

S2: No, it didn't. No it wasn't to do with that. The reason I stopped smoking was because when we was 'tater picking at Colliers farm … we'd moved to Colliers from Frank Bull's the … where's the reclamation place? The Cawarden Spring. We moved from there because Cawarden paid half a crown a day for 'tater picking, and we'd gone to Colliers because he paid three shilling a day. Anyway, we'd been and had … come on the dray to the farm. Had our dinner in the barn. So in different one we'd got fags. I was the one without a fag. There was an old Irish chap, Oliver, he used to sleep in the Barn behind the cow stalls and …

S1: Up at Colliers?

S2: Up at Colliers, yes. And that's when Haywood's dad old George Collier kept it then.

S1: How old were you at this point?

S2: We were still going to school. We would be about twelve. About twelve.

And Old Oliver says, 'do you want a smoke lad?' I said, yeah I do, aye, so he said I'll give you a smoke. And he used to smoke a pipe, a clay pipe. And he got a short … one as the stale had broke off. He rubbed some twist up, put it in his pipe and give me this … lit it up 'here you are'. Well, I was showing off like Billy-O. Puff, puff, puff, puff, puff. And got on this dray to go back to the field. Well, I thought I was going to die. I was wishing to die. I felt so ill. I fetched all my dinner back. I felt horrible, but I never smoked again.

S3: Never, ever.

S1: And he didn't do it for that reason?

S2: No. No, he just wanted to give me a smoke but it was … it did me good really but, oh dear, didn't I wish to die that day. Terrible.

S3: But your mum used to hit you with the toasting fork.

S2: Oh… hit me and me brother, yes, if we'd done anything.

S1: On your legs or on your hands?

S2: On our bum. On our backside, yeah.

S1: Oh your bum, yeah.

S2: One of those wire toasting forks, them long ones with twisted wire, you know, with the four prongs on the end. But we used to … if we'd done anything wrong, you know, she used to go for this toasting fork. And we'd say, come 'ere Paddy, 'cause we'd got a dog called Paddy, you know. And she used to put the dog outside. [Laughs] Then she'd belt us.

Just annoying her really. That's why she used to give us the toasting fork for.

S1: Did you used to be out playing games a lot rather than in the house?

S2: Oh we did, yeah. Yeah. Come in at dark and …

S4: I think everybody did, didn't they.

S2: … in the village, I mean, there was gangs of lads and girls and you'd have the tig in the string, you know, tig. Running up and down the village and …

S1: And skipping, and hopscotch and …

S2: We used to have the big long rope for skipping, you know. Mind you, in the winter nights, I mean, we used to play pin a button on some of the houses.

S1: Did you?

S2: Yeah, aye. Tap, tap, tap.

S4: I think we all did, didn't we.

S2: Yeah.

S3: I did.

S2: It was harmless. It was harmless really, weren't it you know. It just annoyed people, you know.

S4: Yeah

S3: Knock the door and run away.

S2: Yeah. When you say that, knock the door and run away. I know me and Vic and Aubrey used to play, me and Vic mostly used to play together, you know, up at, well down the fields. And I'd been up there. We'd had a bit of a fall out this one day and I'd left Hardcastle's and went down the road. And thought, 'no, I'm not going to go', you know. So I went back and I picked this big brick end up and I threw it at their door. Their back door was straight across. So I heaved this big brick, BANG, it nearly knocked the door down. And I run off down the road, you know. Anyway, later in the day, a couple of hours after I thought what am I going to do, you know. Well, I'll go and see if they're going to play.So I went back, oh they don't know, you know. Anyway, knocked on the door, Mrs Hardcastle come. She looked at me, she says 'you hard-faced little bugger'. She knew who threw this …

S1: Had it damaged the door?

S2: No. Well it was an old tumbled-down place anyway, you know.

S3: A shack!

S2: It was a shack, yes. They brought four kids up in there, you know. It was just the two bedrooms. But that's how it was in those days, wasn't it. Yes.

S3: Didn't you say—I'm just reminding him…

S2: Yes, I know.

S3: You know the patch that was where Sam and Milly, where those houses were built…

S2: Yes, Nelson Thorns lived.

S3: They used to sell chips …

S2: Fish.

S3: Fish.

S2: Mrs Thorns used to, in the winter, used to fry fish in the end place. She used to have one of them stoves with the loose plates on, you know. Quite a big stove. She used to fry fish in the winter time and used to make ice cream in this end place in the summer time. And this Edgar and Kathy, the two children, they were teenagers like in this time, they had a tandem with the little sidecar on. And they used to go round with the ice cream, used to be one of those tubs with dry ice in. They used to round selling the ice cream in the summer and selling fish in a basket—they used to have a basket for the fish—in the winter time.

But with the fish…

S3: They wouldn't allow that now, would they.

S2: With the fish, though, Edgar used to, well both used to … 'Oh there's so many fish here'. 'Oh yeah, well so and so's dog had one when we was at some…'. They used to knick the money off one or two of them. But, funny thing, Mrs Thorn—she was a quite a stiff lady you know—and old Nelson he had a big walrus moustache, and he was a council worker, roadside sweep, you know. Anyway, us kids used to call him 'Shuffly bum' the way he used to walk, you know, he used to walk with a shuffle. Anyway, Mrs Thorn's told me mother once, she says 'Nelson's alright, he's very nice' she says, 'but he does like kissing'. So she didn't like that too much. No, you could understand that mind you. Ah dear.

S1: So, was it a nice place to grow up do you think, looking back?

S2: Oh yeah, I enjoyed it, yeah. It was a lovely place. And as long as you kept, you know, didn't do any vandalism, you know, you was alright. Because during the war Old Jack Parker was the local, was the special constable for the village.

S1: Right.

S3: Was he?

S2: Old Jack was, yeah. And …

S1: So what did he do then?

S3: He was the fruit and veg man as well, won't he.

S2: Yeah. Have you seen the pictures in Rugeley, old Rugeley about the big lorry parked in the market place. There's a big green lorry parked in the market place, that's Jack Parker's lorry and he used to park it up at his place where Jim Bailey lives now. But in the war they made him special constable. He didn't have a uniform but he had one of them bands with the black and white things round there, you know.

S1: So what would he do as a special constable then in the village?

S2: Well, very little actually! It was just a bit of status for him I think, you know. He'd probably walk around, you know, not too far, 'cause he wasn't built for speed, was he Old Jack.

S3: I don't suppose there'd be much order to keep would there in Colton.

S2: No, no.

S1: And did everybody have their own air-raid shelters? How did it work if there was…?

S2: No, no. I don't know … we had one. My dad dug one. My dad dug one in the bank, timbered it up and covered it up and when the siren first went about two o'clock in the morning, well they got us out of bed and across to the air-raid shelter. Candle in a jar, you know. Anyway my granddad wouldn't come in. He stood in the yard and lit his pipe. Well my mother went spare! 'Dad come put that pipe out', you know. He says alright. She says, 'They can see a fag from up there you know!' He wouldn't put his pipe out, no. He used to stand on the yard …. But anyway after three or four times of this happening, you know, and no bombs at that time. So we just used to, you know, ignore it virtually.

S3: Umm.

S1: Where did the siren go?

S2: Rugeley. We could hear it quite plain in Colton, yes. I think it was in the Town Hall tower, I think.

S1: So did it affect you the war an awful lot as children or did you just get on with growing up really?

S2: We just got on with growing up. And it was just, war time was just the excitement at times you know. 'Cause the airfield was at Hixon, you know. The Wellingtons, OT, operations training unit at Hixon and of course, when they train there's quite a lot of crashes round about Hixon, at Newton and round about. And we used to go on the crash sites picking the bullets up, you know. And there had three bullets, they used to be in a chain, you know, a belt. There was a double and a single and you'd put 'em together and push the bullet through to make the hinge. And we used to collect all these bullets and I'd got a belt about a yard long and, of course, it was in the shed. My mother found them and so my brother at that time worked in Stafford—he used to bike to Stafford to the uni—and she made him take this bullets in a bag and chuck up in the river at Wolseley bridge and they were found years and years later, you know, that belt of bullets 'cause Len Able told me about that.

S3: Oh yes, because he lived there didn't he. Yes.

S2: And I tell you what you used to happen as well. In the bullets there was cordite, a little strands of yellow cord, cordite. And you used to take the bullet out, take the cord out…now Aubrey Hardcastle worked at the tin works at Trent Valley…

S2: And he used to get a piece of steel pipe, weld the one end up. He used to fill it with cordite then hammer a wooden bung in the other end. Then up at the Brakely corner there was a wood just up the field there, just past them buildings there now, there was a wood there, a bit of a pit hole. Make a bit of a fire there with some bricks. Lay this thing across the top then take cover. Almighty explosion…. You know, silly things like that, really silly, but it was just a bit of excitement you know.

S1: A bit of fun, yeah. Of course you had evacuees. Did you have one with your…?

S2: We didn't, no. Well there was no room actually. But there were some across the road from us at Bill Causer's, in the houses. The Jewises they were. There was Michael and, what was his … Frank. Frank Jewis and Michael.

S3: My mum had one.

S2: Your mum had one? Oh Marcus!

S3: Marcus Allen.

S2: Marcus Allen. Dark-haired lad, he was, yeah. Aye, Marcus Allen.

S1: And of course you had soldiers down…

S2: There was soldiers in Colton House and in Aspley House, and at one time there was …

S1: Aspley House as well?

S2: Aspley House as well, yeah. And they had 'em under canvas in the school field and in Bellamour Park.

S1: So why were they placed here particularly? Do you know why they chose Colton?

S2: I think they did a bit of training and then…

S1: At Hixon…

S2: …they were in transit. They didn't stop…each regiment didn't stop all that long.

S1: Right.

S2: I know there was, I think it was the RAFC who got big lorries, big transporters and ambulances and all the lot, and they were in the village for a while. And then later on the ones that were under canvas, I know they were there one day, next day they'd gone! Just that quick, you know.

S1: Yeah.

S2: I know, they'd got the big bell tents in the school field and us kids used to go there. We used to climb up the guide ropes up the top and then slide down the canvas, aye.

S3: Wasn't Harry Secombe stationed …

S2: Bellamour Park he was, yes. That's where somebody shot, let the gun off and he went through the tent didn't he.

S3: Wasn't Spike Milligan there as well.

S2: Spike Milligan was with him as well. That's right, yeah. But when Dunkirk took place that Mrs Riley, as I mentioned, she organised collecting clothes round the village and, you know, any spare clothes, pullovers, jackets, trousers…

S1: I bet there wasn't a lot was there?

S3: No, people hadn't got much had they.

S2: People, they brought the soldiers to the grammar school for showers and change of clothes and just to get sorted, you know. Yeah it was …

S1: Did you have many holidays, Nev, when you were growing up?

S2: No. No. I main thing was the annual trip, school trip to Rhyl which was with Nichols's bus. That was the one. Sorry! From the train, we used to have a coach. We used to walk across the fields to the Trent Valley station and then there used to be a coach for Cannock, Cheslyn Hay, different villages …

S1: On the train?

S2: We had coaches yeah.

S1: Coaches.

S2: Then, that was the annual outing to Rhyl. But as I say, it was later on when Nichols used to take a coach load there.

S1: Yeah.

S2: We used to save our pennies.

S3: Did you ever go on the Working Men's Club?

S2: Only in later years.

S3: Because we used to go on that, from Rugeley that was and that was run by the Working Men's Club and it was free.

S4: Yeah.

S1: So you lived…

S2: That was a big event that was.

S3: That stopped that during the war, didn't they.

S2: They did yeah.

S3: That stopped it during the war.

S1: Then you, how did you meet your future wife then?

S2: At my brother's wedding. They had, because he married a Brereton girl and they had the reception at the—what's the name of that pub?

S3: The Talbot.

S2: The Talbot pub. In there …

S3: And I used to work with Lilly, that was the one that married Nev's brother, I used to work with her sister. And I was invited to the evening at the Talbot, you know, when we come home from work. That's where I met Nev.

S2: So at the … after the reception I'd say there was no entertainment going on, was there.

S3: No. no.

S2: Just talking. So I said to her 'You fancy going to the pictures?' So the buses ran past the door so we went on the bus and I took her to Lichfield. And of course I was committed then, wasn't I.

S3: But he'd got his two friends with him. I knew them, you know. I didn't know Nev up to that time, but I knew the other two. But I ended up with Nev.

S4: A good catch!

S1: Yes. Was there a picture house in Rugeley?

S2: They had the Plaza, yes. Oh there was, yeah.

S1: But you chose to go to Lichfield?

S2: Well, it was on the bus…

S3: I think he was showing off!

S2: I don't think I seen the Rugeley… Whatever, anyway I took her to Lichfield. Yeah, I was showing off. A bit special, flashing me money about.

S1: So were you courting for long?

S2: Two years, yeah.

S1: And then? Lived in Colton always did you as a married couple?

S2: When we got married. We got married at Rugeley church and then we had the reception in the Reading Room.

S3: 1951 that was. March 1951.

S2: And we went to live at Bank House. On the end piece.

S3: Like a lean-to really.

S2: Rita Duncan and Alec lived there just before us. They lived there for a short while. It was a bit basic wasn't it.

S3: Oh very basic.

S2: Very basic.

S3: But we were on our own and that…

S2: We were on our own anyway, that was the main thing you know.

S3: But we should have shared Mrs Eaton's kitchen. It sort of…

S2: Up the pass, along passage.

S3: …there was a door that went into the passage and she'd got only a little kitchen and I was really expected to use their kitchen. I didn't like to. And we'd got the main room and then the front room which was unusable because it was condemned really. And the ceiling you could see the rafters in the ceiling, you know. It was tumbled down really.

S2: It was yeah.

S3: So I had, there was a scrub-top table in there, and I had a bowl on it and a bucket to put the water in when I washed up and that was my kitchen. And I cooked on the fire…

S2: And the flames…there were no oven cheeks on the fire.

S3: That was broken.

S2: The fire used to come through straight into the oven.

S3: Yes, but we lived there for six months, didn't we, and then we went into the half of the cottage where Lilly and Jim lived, you know, in Hollow Lane.

S1: Right.

S4: Yes, I remember.

S3: Where O'Brians live, you know. And we had half the cottage each. And we'd got our own kitchens and main room and two bedrooms and the stairs went up the middle and we shared the stairs.

S2: Shared the stairs. Yeah.

S3: And a bucket lavatory in the yard.

S2: Yeah, yeah.

S1: Was it, yes.

S4: Which everybody had, didn't they.

S2: They did, yeah.

S3: But you didn't expect anything else.

S2: We didn't.

S1: So did they get emptied?

S3: No, well Nev used to empty it to start with and then they started having the man coming round with the …

S2: The wagon come round …

S3: …wagon and they emptied it.

S2: … and they used to empty it, yes. The council people.

S3: But it used to go in the garden.

S1: Did it?

S3: Big hole in the garden.

S4: My dad used to dig a hole in the garden for ours.

S2: Yes. Yeah.

S3: Because it was a big difference for me because I lived in a…I was born and brought up in a council house in Rugeley, which, it hadn't got hot water but it had got running water and it had also got a flush toilet and a bathroom, but only with a cold tap. You had to heat the water in the boiler and put it into the bath. So that was a bit of a shock to me but I didn't mind.

S1: You were in love.

S2: Oh…

S3: No, I enjoyed it. It was nice.

S1: And you've lived in Colton ever since.

S2: No, not ever since. No we had a break when…

S3: Well we were getting tight for room, weren't we, really.

S2: Yeah, really, yeah.

S3: We'd got Linda and Rob.

S2: Then Rob yeah.

S3: We got a house in Rugeley.

S2: We got a house in Rugeley in Arch… in a… Well actually what happened with working the pit, I asked the manager if there was a chance of a house at one of the colliery houses. Anyway this one came up by the crossings and it was mine that was, he said yes you can have it. But then a chap in Arch Street, he used to have some cattle up in Brereton—he was a Brereton chap—and he said will you do me a … he said well you've seen the manager, he was agree to a swap if I'd swap. So this house that I'd got at the colliery house, he had that and I had his house in Arch Street and that's what brought us… And it was handy, with not having any transport, close to the town. We were there two years.

S3: But we come back after Nev's mother died, we built the bungalow in the garden. That's nearly 40 years ago. So we've been back that long you know.

S1: So what age did you go down the mine?

S2: Fourteen.

S1: Fourteen. No age is it.

S2: Not really. But thing is that was the norm.

S4: My dad went when he was 13 because he was older than you and …

S2: Aye yes. Tiger. Always went as…their dad went as Tiger. Lovely chap Tiger was. I used to spend most of my childhood when I was a nipper at their house. Yeah. And I remember your dad, he used to play about with us and he used get his falsies and drop 'em forward.And I used to be fascinated with this, you know, 'cause he… and he said, do want yours to do it. And I said 'yes'. And he got his knife and he said 'do want me…'. I says 'yes', and I was willing for him to …

S1: Cut your teeth.

S2: To get like his, yeah.

S3: When we first got married and I come to live in Colton there was only Miss Williscroft's shop and Mrs Upton had got her shop and there was hardly anything in it.

S2: And she was short of cash, wasn't she, Mrs Upton.

S3: She couldn't afford to get the stock in, you know. She used to have it from Willis's at Rugeley.

S4: Yeah, I remember Willis's.

S1: Different times weren't there?

S2: They were

.

S1: Mind you, you at least you did have some shops in those days.

S3: Oh yes.

S2: And Miss Williscroft, she used to have all sorts of things. Anything, laces, torch batteries, anything.

S3: Everything, she sold.

S2: Anything she'd sell there.

S3: I always remember going in there once and there was a person in front of me—I daren't say any names—and she was doing her shopping and I was standing waiting, and then I saw this person put this jar of jam in her bag you see. So…

S2: But Miss Williscroft had obviously gone to the back hadn't she because she had…

S3: Yes, she'd gone into the other room to get something that she'd asked for. And I thought 'Ohhh' like this. Anyway, she came back Miss Williscroft did and she was reckoning her stuff up and she says, 'And so much for the jam that you put in your bag.' She'd got a mirror and she could see.

S1: See her.

S4: I remember when once when I stayed, when her eyesight had gone real bad…

S2: She'd have a shade, hadn't.

S4: He was only like four or five and he'd gone in there with his bit of money for … and he said to her 'how much are the Maltesers?' And she'd said so much, and he says 'well I'll have some'. But what he'd done, she'd got a box and separate bag and he'd, course he was talking about the box and he took the box and brought the box home. She didn't know no different, you see. So I took him back. I says no, you won't get all them for the money you had. He didn't know and she didn't know.

S2: No.

S4: And I took him back and it was explained and we swapped them for the smaller bag or whatever it was.

S1: Anyway, now is there anything else you'd like to tell us at all. I think you've told us…

S2: During the war that Mrs Riley I keep coming back to. She ran a canteen for the soldiers.

S1: Right.

S2: In the Reading Room. And they used to do beans on toast. She used to have an allowance of chocolate, teas, coffees and whatever, you know, for them. And my mother used to help out. Well a lot of the local women used to help out there. And I know, I used to go down at night, it was winter time, I used to go down at night to come back with my mother. And I went in there once, and Mrs Riley, I don't know whether it was because she'd got no lads, used to spoil me really in a way. She'd either slip me a little bar of chocolate. And one time she said, 'would you like some beans on toast?' I said, 'I've never had beans'. We'd never had beans. It was an American thing this beans on toast. So she said, 'sit you there' and she put me a round of beans on toast and I loved them. They were lovely. That was my first taste of beans and I liked it.

S3: Yeah, we never had anything like that, you know, when we were children.

S2: The Reading Room they'd got that stove in the middle and a fireplace on the other side and it was a comfy little room really at that time.

S3: Yeah, we had our wedding reception there.

S2: They made a couch in the corner for the serving in that corner.

S1: Well, thank you ever so much both you for this. That's lovely. I'm going to switch this off.

# Colton History Society

## All Our Stories

Transcripts of villagers recollections of days gone by recorded as part of our All Our Stories Project 2013

# Peggy Peat

**Memories of life in Colton**

**Peggy (Margaret) Peat.**

S1: Marion Vernon
S2: Peggy (Margaret) Peat
S3: George Vernon

S1: This recording is being made for Colton History Society. George and Marion Vernon are interviewing Peggy Peet on Friday 13th March 2009.

S1. Can you tell us a little bit then about your family and where you were born and …?

S2: I was born in Sutton Coldfield and my parents were Gwendolyn Grace and my father was Randolph Norman McGregor. We came to Colton in 1939.

S1: Where were you born?

S2: I was born in Sutton Coldfield.

S1: Yeah. And you lived there for how many years?

S2: Just eighteen.

S1: Eighteen. And you went to school there then obviously.

S2: I went to school at Four Oaks, yes.

S1: Yes. And then you came to Colton when you were …

S2: I came to Colton when I was just short of nineteen.

S1: Yes.

S2: Just before the war actually.

S1: Right. And how … why did you move?

S2: My father got a job as stipendiary magistrate, which they call area judges or something, in the Potteries. But my mother wanted to be near her family so this was just sort of halfway.

S1: Right.

S2: Colton was halfway.

S2: And then my parents saw somewhere with the estate agents that Colton House was for sale. And Colton House … we came to see it …

S1: Yes.

S2: And I think the woman wouldn't sell it or something.

S2: And then the estate agent said, well there's a house further up the road … which was Colton Lodge. So they came to Colton Lodge and lived there till nineteen. My two children were born at Colton Lodge.

S1: Right.

S2: David was born on the night of one of the worst floods we've ever had in Colton.

S1: Really?

S2: And the midwife came by boat.

S1: Really! Where was … how far was the flood up there?

S2: Oh it was up past Colton House and … but it was under the railway bridge as well.

S1: Yes. Gosh! So she really came by boat?

S2: The doctor was too late.

S1: He'd already been born. Yes.

S1: Yes. [Laughs] So what year was that flood?

S2: It was 1946.

S1: And what month was he born in?

S2: February.

S1: February! February flood.

S2: Yes, that's right.

S1: Yes.

S2: And how long did that last?

S1: Quite a time, yes.

S2: Yes. I mean more days than hours.

S1: Oh gosh! Oh gosh! So how did you find Colton when you moved in? It must have been very different to Sutton Coldfield.

S2: Oh very different. There were only five cars in the whole place. Bill Leek and the vicar didn't have one, the people at Bellamore Lodge, they had one—Riley their name was, I remember. And Miss Williscroft who had the shop, which is now Cypress Cottage.She had a car as well to go and get the papers every day at the station

S1: Yes. So how many shops were there here when you moved in?

S2: Two.

S1: Two.

S2: One's where the tall house is Mr Upton at High House. Mr Upton! He was so … We called him Spider because he sort of always sat by … there was a fire then, and he'd come out and it was all dark and he'd come so the children used to call him The Spider.

S1: Was there a fire in the shop?

S2: Yeah.

S2: Was there!

S2: Like a stove-y thing at the …

S1: Yes.

S2: Underneath.

S1: Yeah. At road level?

S2: Yeah.

S2: Then Mrs Upton took over and she was ever so nice.

S1: So he ran it first and then she took over afterwards.

S2: It was her father. Her father-in-law I should say.

S1: Right. You're talking about the older Mr Upton.

S2: Yes. And Miss Williscroft was sweet but she went blind.

S1: Yes.

S1: So did you do your shopping here in the village? Would your parents have gone …?

S2: Yes, quite a bit. Quite a bit. We went into Rugeley as well of course.

S1: Yeah.

S2: And my father going out to Hanley or Stoke, whichever it was, because he's one at Stoke one day, Burslem the next, you know, the whole five towns, a different one every day.

S1: You had got ration books. So what was on ration? Do you remember?

S2: Oh, butter of course, margarine, tea, meat, bacon.

S1: Yes. How interesting! Yeah. So you moved into Colton Lodge.

S2: I grew the vegetables.

S1: You did.

S2: And had the cow, of course. I was … I don't know if you know the awful thing about me. I was a conscientious objector.

S1: Right.

S2: And I went for my interview. Of course I was the first lot of women to be …

S1: Called up?

S2: Called up.

S1: Yeah.

S2: And I went and I said: 'I am a conscientious objector.' And the woman says: 'There aren't such things for women, it's only for men.' I said, 'Well, I am one.' And she said, 'what?' Conscientious objector, I said. And she said there aren't such things.

S1: Really.

S1: Did you go down to the Reading Room very often?

S2: Oh yes! All the do's were held at the Reading Room

S1: What do you remember of those?

S2: They had dances and people came to give talks sometimes. The soldiers used to go dancing there. Think that's where Liz met her husband.

S1: Right. How did you meet your husband?

S2: Oh. It was a friend. I had a friend who, well, he fell in love with me. He was only a boy and he asked his parents if he could have a party because we met at a party and so he asked and his parents arranged a party for him and he asked me and we went … I went into the room and facing me was a boy with his back to the window, the curtain was on the left-hand side, when I saw him just the world changed.

S1: Really? Just like that.

S2: As instant as that.

S1: Yes.

S2: And Roy said, 'This is my best friend Geoff.' And there we were.

S1: So how old were you when you got married?

S2: When I got married I were 24. I was 24.

S1: Twenty-four. Did you get married here in Colton church?

S2: No. I got married in the registry office in Lichfield.

S1: In Lichfield? Yes.

S2: I didn't want to get married until the war was over.

S2: Eight years after that I had my lovely, gorgeous daughter.

S1: Yes. Yes. So you've lived in Colton a very long time.

S2: Yes, 1939.

S1: Yeah.

S2: But about the bridge: I must tell you that because …

S1: Yes.

S2: … there's a mistake about that. And the bomb.

S1: Please do.

S2: Tell you about the … All the soldiers that … When the soldiers were there and I took my cow, they had another field round … where that, you know that yellow cottage on Uttoxeter Road? Used to be a garage at some time.

S1: Oh yes.

S2: There was a field there that we owned and I took, I used to take the cows there very often and …

S1: Did you just have the three cows?

S2: Yes.

S1: Yes.

S2: Well, I took … and the calves of course. When I took round, the cows round there, I had to walk them of course, and the soldiers would come and the American soldiers would make a noise to make the cows run and think it was funny. They didn't mean it nastily, you know, you know how it works. But when the black soldiers came they stopped their engines and let them go, always

S1: Right.

S2: And when a … with an accident … this is what this mistake is because somebody said it was they were drunk and they weren't. Some soldiers were going from Colton House, black ones, and they went over the rail…, the little bridge here, and they crashed into the wall. Two of them were killed.

S1: Oh dear.

S2: And this one, white, soldier who came up here said, he was from the Southern States, and he said, my father said, 'I was very sorry to hear about your friends', I don't think he said 'friends', but … 'being killed'. He said, 'That! Don't matter they were only blacks.'

S1: Did he really?

S2: Yeah. So that was it. But somebody said, told me the other day, that they had heard it that they were drunk; and they weren't. They swerved to avoid some children.

S2 and we had some evacuees.

S1: So there was a lot of housework to do in your home when you had all the evacuees then?

S2: Yes. There was.

S1: Who did all the work? Did everyone join in and do the work? Did the evacuees help in the house?

S2: Oh no.

S1: No.

S2: Didn't help, no.

S1: Who did most of the household …?

S2: We had two maids, I'm afraid.

S1: You had two maids?

S2: Yes.

S1: Yes. And did they do all the chores?

S2: My mother was very … she would do as well.

S1: And did you … you had, obviously, taps and so on. When did electricity come to Colton? Was it here when you moved in?

S2: It was here when we came.

S1: Yes. I thought it would be. Yes. So what sort of appliances were there in those days to help the housework?

S2: An electric iron, which came from the light which my father was always saying was very bad working it backwards and forwards.

S1: Right.

S2: And he always…

S1: So it used to swing? Did the light swing as you did the ironing?

S2: Yes. He always wanted us to turn the iron off. I do remember that. Before we used it, get it hot and then I … But of course you didn't. You didn't use it like that.

S1: No. Did you have a vacuum cleaner? Hoover of some kind?

S2: You know, I can't remember.

S1: No?

S2: Yes. I think … no I don't think we did.

S1: No?

S2: Certainly not the stairs because I remember.

S1: Sweeping?

S2: Sweeping the stairs with a hand brush.

S1: Yes. And what about the washing? Was there a set day for doing the washing or did they just …?

S2: Yes. A set day, but the laundry as well I'm afraid.

S1: You used to send it to the laundry. Yes.

S1: So how would it get sent to the laundry? Did someone come and collect the washing?

S2: Yeah.

S1: Yes.

S2: And the … We had got a boiler in at Colton. You know, we used to … they used to put the stuff in there; there was a dolly and …

S1: Yes.

S2: For the ordinary, you know. But it was the tablecloths and sheets that used to go to the laundry.

S1: Yes. And you would have had a lot of sheets.

S2: You had your name in little red letters, didn't you.

S1: And you'd have had a lot of sheets wouldn't you?

S2: Yeah.

S1: With all the evacuees and all the people in the house?

S2: Yeah.

S1: Yes. And what about the cooking? Did the maids do the cooking too?

S2: Mother usually did the cooking.

S1: What sort of meals do you remember, at home? Very simple meat and veg?

S2: Very simple. Meat, well not meat because … well, yes, meat ration for the ones that ate meat. There was some most ghastly things called, was it 'Country Pies'?

S1: Country Pies!

S2: Not Country Pies, something like that. And they were … heaven knows what they were made out of, but they were sent round to every village because people in villages couldn't get into the shops. You know, you were rationed but sometimes they had extra, like sausages and perhaps a bit of liver or something like that,

S1: Right.

S2: But people in the country couldn't, you know, couldn't get that sort of thing. So they made these ghastly vegetarian pies. They weren't Countryside. Something like that. They were ghastly!

S1: Were they?

S2: But we looked forward to them!

S1: Why did you look forward to them if they were so horrid?

S2: Looking back they were.

S1: Oh, I see.

S2: Horrid. Then there was some stuff called Spam that you could buy.

S1: Oh yes.

S2: And then of course we had eggs; we did eat a lot of eggs.

S1: Yes. With the chickens. You were lucky with that. Yes.

S2: And then I remember once, I don't know how we got it, well mother was asked if she … somebody told her they could get her some tins of salmon.

S1: Right.

S2: Which was black market.

S1: Yes.

S2: And poor mother had got 15 people to cater for and she was, she thought that would be lovely not to have to… so she said she thought she'd think about it. And she went to bed that night and she said she thought about it. [Laughs] She said 'I can't do it.'

S1: Ow.

S2: Not with your father being a judge!

S1: Yes.

S2: We never got that salmon.

S1: With the judge. Could have been embarrassing couldn't it? Yes.

S2: But, anyway, poor mother, she was so disappointed.

S1: So did the maids live in? Did the maids live in?

S2: Yes.

S1: Yes. How many bedrooms did you have at …?

S2: Seven.

S1: Seven bedrooms!

S2: Yeah. I think one … no, only one lived in. Yes. Only one lived. Oh one lived … two lived in for a time, that's right, and then one was called up, of course.

S1: Oh right.

S2: And then the other one came from right round the corner.

S1: A local girl?

S2: Yeah.

S1: Oh right. Do you remember who that was?

S2: Yes. Miss Parr.

S1: One of the Parrs?

S2: No.

S2: Emma was her mother. She was very nice. Oh she was ever so. Anyway, she died now; she died in a shop in Rugeley when she was about … under twenty anyway.

S1: Oh really? Oh, that's sad.

S3: Bet it was a lovely house to live in wasn't it?

S2: Oh yes it was. Yes.

S1: You talked about going to parties. What sort of, you know, did you have parties at your house as well?

S2: At Christmas we had relatives.

S1: Right.

S2: My grandmother lived in London: Westminster. And she used to come up, you know, quite a lot to sort of have a break from …

S1: Right.

S2: …from the bombs and things.

S1: Yes.

S2: And my grandfather on the other side, my mother's father, he came to live with us for a time.

S1: And how did you celebrate Christmas?

S2: Just all together.

S1: Yeah. What did you eat for Christmas dinner? Do you remember? Do you have any memories of it?

S2: You could get turkeys, you know, that was one. They said people in the country couldn't, but in some ways we were in a way better because we could get eggs, which … Oh, eggs of course were rationed for the people.

S1: For most people.

S2: I mean it wasn't like black market …

S1: No.

S2: … if you kept your own, if you ate them in the country. But, you know, we could get them.

S1: And did your mum make Christmas puddings?

S2: Yes.

S1: Yes.

S2: And Christmas cake. Yes.

S1: Yes.

S2: But looking back I don't think there was any fruit in.

S1: No. Quite simply.

S2: Black, black … black currents or something.

S1: Oh right. Got put into the puddings and things.

S2: I honestly can't remember.

S1: No.

S2: No, we couldn't have had Christmas cake because people couldn't have wedding cakes properly.

S1: No. How did you celebrate after you got married? Where did you … did you have a honeymoon? Did you have a wedding breakfast or …?

S2: Oh we went to Wales of course.

S1: Yes. And then did you … where did you live then?

S2: Back home.

S1: Back at home. Yes.

S2: And Geoff.

S1: With Geoff, yes.

S2: Geoff was a conscientious objector as well you see, and he worked in Birmingham at the … his father was quite a big man, he was manager for the whole of the area of The Midlands for one of the big …

S1: A big company?

S2: Insurance. It doesn't matter anyway.

S1: No.

S2: And Geoff got a job with them as well.

S1: Yes.

S2: But then when the war came … well, not came, when the war was coming, he decided that he wasn't like my father: he would be a conscientious objector. And all his brothers—he had seven brothers—and they all joined up and he didn't. So, he went to work they asked what he was going to do and he said he was a conscientious objector and the manager said, 'Collect your cards, get out, and I never want to see you again,' or something like that. Geoff did that and went home and his father said, 'You said what?' And he said 'I said I was going to be a conscientious objector.' And his father said, 'well you can get out of here then. I don't want to see you again.'

S1: Really?

S2: So, Geoff rang up and he was coming over and he said 'I'm afraid I can't come because I don't know quite what I'm doing now.'

S1: No.

S2: So my father gathered what we we're saying on the phone, and so I always remember he dramatically came across the room and picked up the phone and he said, 'Geoff, come over here at once!' So Geoff came over …

S1: Supported him.

S2: … and lived with us.

S1: Yes.

S2: So that you could say I lived with him about four years, five years before we were married.

S1: Right.

S2: But it wasn't living together.

S1: No I know.

S2: I can honestly say it was not living today, what they mean by today. We were very different in those days, weren't we?

S1: That's one of the big changes isn't it?

S3: There was rules that were kept weren't there?

S2: That's right.

S3: Was Geoff a Quaker?

S2: No.

S2: But I looked through … I could look through the window at Colton Lodge, the one facing up this way, and Geoff was in the one sticking out, the bit that sticks out at the back and we could wave to each other. Goodnight to each other.

S1: Ah! Romantic!

S2: We did blow kisses but that was as far as we got.

S1: Yes.

S3: Your dad was very kind wasn't he?

S2: Oh he was lovely.

S3: To give him a home.

S1: Geoff's family. Did they make it up afterwards? Did they?

S2: Yes, more or less.

S2: But his brothers, all his brothers were lovely with him.

S1: Yes.

S2: Especially the one … he was a major in Burma.

S1: Right.

S2: And then he had to act as... But he had to order some of his men to be killed because the Japanese were coming and they were torturing the ones that were …

S1: Who were injured.

S2: Yeah. He never got over it.

S1: No.

S2: He used to cry and cry and he was so nice.

S1: So did you have many holidays when you were growing up and in your younger years? Did people …

S2: Lots.

S2: Except for the war years.

S1: Did you go to the sea or what did … where did you go?

S2: Wales.

S1: And where did you stay?

S2: In the … A farmhouse that we had.

S2: I remember we'd go up in our car—phut, phut, phut—and they'd all come out and the villages … the friends would all come out to see our … they hadn't seen a car some of them.

S1: Gosh! No. So did they have a ride?

S2: Oh yes.

S1: Yes.

S3: What sort of car was it?

S2: A Jowett.

S3: A Jowett! Wow!

S2: It had a little dicky in the back where Michael and my brother and I sat. But if you think of driving today with children not strapped in, in the back of a car without anything over. You know.

S1: Yes.

S2: In …

S1: Though there wasn't the traffic about was there?

S2: No.

S1: And we didn't do the speed really, did we?

S2: But my father was always proud. There was a very steep hill going up North Wales. Sometimes my father, twice my father found a car stuck there, the engine wouldn't go and it was a probably a posher car, and Dad's little Jowett used to go up.

S1: Used to sail up it.

S2: Oh sometimes we had to get out and push.

S21: Push. Oh right.

S3: The Jowett Javelin was it?

S2: Oh no, long before that.

S3: Was it?

S2: Oh, Jowett Javelin? Good gracious.

S2: No, this was a dicky, a little dicky at the back, you know, we sat in it. And as I say there was nothing over our heads or at the sides of us or anything. But we had to get out sometimes and push it up. It was the only one.

S1: Right.

S2: And my brother once fell flat on his face. He was only about five I think. Hurt himself.

S1: Ah. 'Cause he was pushing?

S2: Yeah.

S1: Yes.

S3: Why were you drawn to Wales? Were you …?

S2: My grandfather was.

S3: Was he Welsh?

S2: No, he was Scottish. Yorkshire. But no he went there as a little boy, on a train of course in those days. And he loved it. And then he always went down and my father went down when he was a little boy.

.

S2: Anything else about Colton?

S1: Is there anything else you wanted to tell us really? I think we're almost at the end aren't we? You've been having to talk and talk and talk. Anything else you wanted to tell us then?

S2: Oh, the police came several times, of course, but …

S1: The police came?

S2: Yeah. Because of me being sending messages and things.

S1: Oh I see yes. When you … when they thought you were sending messages to the Germans.

S2: Yeah.

S1: Oh dear, that must have been very upsetting.

S2: Can't read my writing.

S1: So has Colton been a nice place to live?

S2: Oh, gorgeous, yeah.

S1: Yes.

S2: I wouldn't want to live anywhere else.

S1: No.

S2: The people are so kind, honestly. I just can't get over how kind they have been, honestly.

S1: Yes.

S1: Think we're about there aren't we? Thank you ever so much. It's been really, really interesting listening to you.

S2: You know there's ghost at Colton House?

S1: A ghost? No. Tell us about it.

S2: Ghost at Colton Lodge.

S1: Right.

S2: I can tell you about the ghost at Colton Lodge because it won't hurt people at Colton Lodge.

S1: No, no.

S2: When I was … my grandmother had a sort of companion friend called Miss Staunton. Miss Staunton always wore grey or navy blue and she had grey hair. Well, Miss Staunton used to come with grandma always. Grandma was downstairs, Miss Staunton … I went up, had to go upstairs and you know how you sort of glance up if you're going up stairs? I glanced up and I saw Miss Staunton standing at the top of the stairs but then I looked down to see where I was going and when I got to the top of the stairs Miss Staunton was not there. So I just went and got whatever I wanted and went downstairs and said, 'I saw Miss Staunton.' I said, 'Well how did she get down. She hadn't been up at all.

S1: Right.

S2: And I know, I know that I saw …

S1: A person.

S2: I wasn't frightened or anything and I … anybody can say I imagined it but I know that I saw a grey figure standing there. There's no doubt about it. Of course, we never told the children, the evacuees. But one day, it was the one maid's day off, and she'd gone off, so the house was empty. Mother had gone up to court with my father and done some shopping and left.. mother was worried that she would get back before they came out of school. And she came back and they were in the front garden and Muriel, who was such a character, she was lovely little girl; beautiful blonde hair and blue eyes and pink cheeks. She was gorgeous. And she said, mother said, 'Oh I'm so sorry. Have we kept you waiting long?' She said, 'No. But that horrible Miss Staunton,' she said, 'She stood in … ' —there was a vestibule there not a front door, it was glass. She said 'That horrible Miss Staunton was standing there looking at us all the time. And she never let us in. She wouldn't let us in.'

S1: How strange. Thank you very much.

# Colton History Society

## All Our Stories

Transcripts of villagers recollections of days gone by recorded as part of our All Our Stories Project 2013

# David Bradbury

**Memories of Steam Engine Rallies**

**David Bradbury.**

S1: Marion Vernon
S2: David Bradbury
S3: George Vernon
S4: Dorothy Bradbury

S1: This recording is being made for Colton History Society. George and Marian Vernon are interviewing David Bradbury at Bank Top Cottage, Hollow Lane, Colton on Friday March 1, 2013.

Right David, when we moved in to Colton in 1971 one of the early things that we heard about was The Steam Engine Weekend, 'It's the steam-rally weekend!' And we were soon involved but I think you know quite a lot more about the start of the event, so I'm going to ask you if you'd like to tell us a little bit about it.

S2: Well, the event goes back to May 1962. As you know, I've always had a lifelong interest in steam engines; although, never collected locomotive numbers—that's another story.

May 1962, my brother along with Chris Buckley, who we shall hear a little more about later on, and my lecturer, my old lecturer, at Stafford Tech, Robert Redwood. We went to the Steam Sunday at the Science and Industry museum at Newhall Street in Birmingham.

S1: In Birmingham, yes.

S2: And this rekindled an interest in steam road-vehicles, having witnessed steam ploughing as a lad during the war.

S1: Where would that be? Where did you grow up?

S2: I grew up at a little … at Gentleshaw.

S1: Right.

S2: Up on the Chase there.

S1: Okay.

S2: Father came from farming stock but he joined the waterworks company when Grandad thought he was going to work in the 1920s on a smallholding, for nothing, and of course he met mum and he was trained as an engineer at Maple Brook pumping station.

S1: Right.

S2: And then 1946 we moved to Rugeley and it was an ideal thing for me. There was the West Coast mainline across the fields, the canal, so much of interest, and although a country lad I did have a fantastic career with large diesel engines. But that's going ahead with our story.

S1: Okay, yes.

S2: And so on this Sunday back in 1962 we went to Newhall Street, we came back home and we were sitting in the lounge at the waterworks, it was just getting dusk, and we suddenly looked up and there was two steam wagons trundling along towards Wolseley Bridge and we shot out after them—and they'd pulled up outside what is now the sewage works—looking for somewhere to put them. So, made ourselves known to them and after a short discussion I said 'I think you'd better come back to the waterworks', which they did, and of course Mum with her hospitality gave them supper. And we had various conversations and a gentleman called Stan Wedgewood, who was a dispensing chemist from Kidsgrove, said, 'We've got a rally at Alton Towers in May,' sorry, in July, 'You had better come along and give us a hand.' Thought, 'Well, that's a good idea', little knowing what I was letting meself in for. And so July came along and we went up to Alton Towers, and this was long before it became the theme park it is today.

S1: Who are the 'we' you are talking about here David? Yourself with …?

S2: My brother John.

S1: With John.

S2: John. Yes, John came …

S1: And your friend as well?

S2: … with us and Chris Buckley.

S1: Yes, okay.

S2: And we had a wonderful time. It ended up with me driving a steam engine from Alton Towers to Endon because they were short of crews. So, didn't think much more of it. We did help them moving engines at odd times to the end of the season. And brother John was at Rugeley Grammar School and he came home one day and said: 'David?' 'Yes?', I

said, 'Yes John?', just like that. Chris Buckley, his mum who was secretary to the Village Hall Entertainments Committee, now that was the group that raised the money …

S1: Here in Colton?

S2: Yes. For the Colton Village Hall. They raised the money and the managers spent it.

S1: Right.

S2: They want to raise money and certainly Mrs Buckley, Phyllis, thought it would be a good idea to have a traction-engine rally. In the meantime, the traction-engine club was told 'No more events at Alton Towers. We are selling the site; various thing are happening.'

S1: Right.

S2: So I came over to Colton and of course Phyllis lived next door to The Greyhound, where Mark Bull lives these days with his family, and we had a discussion and she said, 'I think we'd better have a chat with Mr Price, who was chairman of the village hall managers, Mr Price from Bellamour Hall, and a few days later we had a discussion and he said, 'Can you take this forward from the traction-engine clubs' side? I will discuss it with the managers and the entertainments committee.' So obviously the embryo event was being thought through.

S1: Right. Had you been to Colton before?

S2: I had been through Colton on various occasions. Many years earlier with the Landor Society in Rugeley I came on a visit to Colton church and Dorothy was there with her late father who sadly I never met. And obviously, which was going to be of great interest. I approached Stan Wedgewood and said, 'Look, Colton would like a rally. We're looking for a new site for an event. There's the big field at Bellamour. The thoughts are that if the traction-engine club will do the presentation side, engines—and in those days it was only classic cars—Colton would provide the facilities, the site, people working there manning gates, and it would be done possibly on a 50:50 basis, on profits.' Which is how it turned out.

S1: Right.

S2: So things started to move along. We've made a few notes here and in the early January it was basically agreed that the two sides would meet together. More discussions took place and the dates were fixed for a rally in July 1962. '63, sorry.

S1: '63. Was that the first one in Colton?

S2: That was the first one in Colton.

S1: Yes.

S2: Now then. This is where it gets interesting. The traction-engine club said, 'Well, who's going to organise it on your behalf?' And the late John Podmore, treasurer, said 'I think David ought to organise it from our point of view'. I thought, 'Thank you very much John. But we'll have a look at it.' Well, 1963 there was probably no more than 15 rallies in the country; it was a completely new venture.

S1: New thing, yes.

S2: So I thought, 'Well, how am I going to deal with this?' Started to find out, and with brother John and Chris Buckley and another friend, Graham Cox, we went all over the country looking at events. And started looking at what was good and what was not good.

S1: How did you travel around the country?

S2: I had a Morris 1000 Traveller then.

S1: Did you?

S2: Lovely vehicle. It was a wonderful machine that was. And we had a look at it and of course various discussions started going on with the entertainments committee and I was virtually left to me own devices, you know, told, you know, 'Get on with it!'

S1: Do you remember who was on the entertainments committee at all in those days?

S2: Well, Mr Price was the chairman as the owner of the Bellamour Lane, lands. Mrs Buckley was secretary. The late Fred Hardcastle from up the road. A certain Dorothy Cooper …

S1: Right.

S2: … who I got to know very well later on. Mrs Hardcastle I believe was on it. Now, Dorothy can add some names to that.

S4: Peggy Bannister, who is still with us.

S1: Yes.

S4: Rose Duval was certainly another member. And pretty quickly at that time Pete Everall came on to the committee and at that point in 1963 the committee was very much enlarged and it included John Doughty who's still with us, and various other people who've now left the parish, or sadly who we've lost.

S1: Yes. Oh.

S2: All these people made me so welcome; it was like of home from home. And of course it was just over the other side of the river from where I lived.

S1: Yes.

S2: And we moved on; there was a lot to be done. And things like the printed programme, which, I've got a copy here. Again the traction-engine club says, 'Well, you're local: get on and do it!' At least I had the programme from Alton Towers as some guidance as to how it was going to be laid out, but I went round various traders in Rugeley and got adverts. There's a lovely one there for Craddock's the newsagent, which was John Craddock from Newlands, it was his parents' business. Brereton Wharfs, the coal merchants, I said to him, 'Can we have an advert?' 'Yes.' And I said 'I want ten tonnes of best Welsh steam coal': ten pound a tonne—these days it's 120 pound a tonne and you can't get Welsh coal. Delivered to Rugeley. And they said, 'We will bag it for you and stay on the field all weekend and deliver it to the engines.'

S1: Wow!

S2: So much of that went on. Printing of posters.

S1: Do you think that was just goodwill or do you think it was for advertising?

S2: A lot of it was goodwill.

S1: Goodwill! Yes.

S2: That's how things were.

S1: Yes.

S2: 1962, '63. And in the meantime the Colton committee, bless them, the WI got involved—they dealt with refreshments, both for personnel engine crews also the visitors and other guests we had. They had brought the WI really into it. And like the … we had a football club; they helped with it. And I see quite elderly people these days and I think 'I remember those as lads helping on the field.'

S1: Yes.

S2: And it was a …

S1: So where were the refreshments served on the field?

S2: We had a marquee which, if my memory serves me right, the late Norman Bruce acquired it because he was very much involved in Scouts.

S1: Yes.

S2: Go on. What was it then?

S1: No. It had been hired. Norman Bruce hadn't come to Colton. until '65.

S2: Sorry, I got it wrong. We had a marquee. That'll have to be edited out.

S1: Yes, that's fine. Yeah.

S2: But it was a very tatty marquee. I don't think it was hired, as such; it was acquired.

S1: Acquired. Yes.

S?: Mr Price's staff.

S2: And then of course we had Mr Price's staff. Janet Jones, bless her, now Janet Sergeant…

S1: Yes.

S2: living out at Telford. Reg Martin was the farm foreman and of course his family got involved, there'll be a little bit more about that, and Alf Haynes was up on the farm, and all these … the farm staff were bought into it. And the week before the rally, I had a week's holiday and I was living on the field and Janet came to me—the first time I had really met Janet—and she said, 'Ten o'clock and three o'clock, the kettle's on up in the office.' And that's how it went. Going back to Reg Martin, bless him, a lovely man, he said, 'With publicity,' he said, 'if I make a big vat of paste up, we'll go fly posting.' Well, in 1963 fly posting was accepted.

S1: Yes.

S2: And there was Reg, my brother John, and Anthony Martin now, as a little lad, he came with us. Or was it Terry?

S4: Terry.

S2: It'd be Terry. Came with us and we went all round if …

S2: … we saw somebody doing fly posting we'd put it up there.

S1: Yes.

S2: So it came on. And on the week before, we set the site up on the big field at Bellamour by the railway line. In the meantime, Cut Lane, which is now fenced off, we put over there nearly 600 tonnes of ash from the waterworks. And Mr Price, at that time.

S2: … had a tipper lorry and somebody else, I don't know who it was, had got a very early JCB. So this was loaded up at the waterworks, brought over there, spread, and then the following Friday, one of the exhibitors with a steam roller actually rolled it.

S1: Really?

S2: But …

S1: How useful!

S2: That Friday was frightening because we'd … it was started about midnight, on Friday morning, started to rain. And it rained, and it rained, and it rained. And somebody came to me and said 'What are you going to do if it rains tomorrow?' I said, 'I haven't thought about that.' And it was then I discovered the beauty of that field at Bellamour: it was on the gravels and as the rain came in it just …

S1: Drained away.

S2: … drained away. You won't do it now because modern-day farming, with it being deep chisel ploughed and de-stoned, the water does not go away. Monday … Saturday morning came, the sun came out and it was just unbelievable. The gates were open at ten o'clock, we opened the gates at ten, and people started coming. Prior to that we'd had discussions with the police at Rugeley and they said, 'Oh, it's only a bit of a country do, they'll be no problems.'

Saturday, I think they were beginning to think the other way. Sunday, they came to me about one o'clock and said, 'What are you going to do with the problems with the traffic?' And I said, 'It's not my problem; it's yours.' There was traffic back up Sandy Lane, into Rugeley, there was traffic on the way to Stafford, Wolseley Road. Rugeley was gridlocked through this little village at Colton putting this event on.

S1: Because everybody's trying to get there?

S2: Trying to get to it. Because such events were …

S1: Rare.

S2: Rare. And what we did, we opened up various fields. Some were Mr Price's and some were not Mr Price's, and just got the traffic off the road. And right up until the end of the rallies at Bellamour here, 1967, when we moved to the showground, we were getting crowds like that. And we've never seen them like that. I know the festivals have been successful but the traffic we got there was just absolutely unbelievable.

On the Sunday …

S4: Saturday.

S2: On the Saturday, I should say, I walked into the caravan belonging to Mr and Mrs Howel. Mr Howel was the chairman of the traction-engine club, and I walked into the caravan and I thought 'I know that gentleman'. It was the Bishop of Lichfield in mufti.

S1: Was he interested in …?

S2: He was very interested. And …

S1: Who was he? What was his name?

S2: Stretton Reeve, wasn't it? Lovely man. And I had a long chat with him and I said, 'Tomorrow we've got a service at 11 o'clock being taken by the reverend Stanley Tolson who's rector of Colton, and I think I know how we are going to plan it. We're going to have the engines in a circle, we've got the choir here, they've got a little harmonium which we affectionately now know as the pandemonium, and we shall have it together.' He said, 'Well, are you going to have an event next year?' I said, 'Well, it looks as though this one will be successful and if we make some money for the village, that's it.' He said, 'I will have a word with Mr Tolson. I will come and preach next year.' And so that was kind of next year fixed up. But of course on the Saturday night we had a barbeque there, we had country dancing in and out of the marquee, and we had the county Country Dance band and again it was another wonderful evening. Some

people stayed but it was mainly the exhibitors and people from the parish. It really, as I keep repeating myself, brought people together, which was absolutely fantastic. And, really, that's how it went along.

S1: So what did they manage to serve up refreshment-wise? Just in the marquee. Did they make things and bring them from home?

S2: Sandwiches, mainly, wasn't it?

S4: Sandwiches and homemade cakes.

S2: Homemade cake and tea and coffee.

S1: How did they boil up the water?

S2: They'd got some gas urns there and in charge of boiling water was dear Morris Williscroft.

S1: Right.

S2: Morris was, I say, in charge of that. he did a wonderful job.

S1: Yes. And of course all the water had to be brought for the engines as well.

S2: The water came from the Lodge, where Dave Astle lives now, a lovely brother and sister lived there—Jim Burns and his sister was always known as Sis. And there was just one water tap there and Mr Hardcastle, has his plumbing business, he tapped into the water supply and that's where we got all our water. The water for the engines came out of the pool at Bellamour.

S1: Right.

S2: Which now, due to damage to the supply from the brook, is virtually dried up, the pools there. But that's where we took the water for the engines. And of course one thing, 1963, the railway was changed over to diesels. But on the Saturday afternoon the Emerald Isle Express, from Liverpool to Euston, which connected with the Irish boat, day boat, at Liverpool, I looked up and there was a beautiful, immaculate LMS-type Duchess steam locomotive. And we've since found out that the driver, from Crewe, was a steam enthusiast and he found a fault with the diesel and he knew the spare engine was going to be a Duchess, and he came down passed the fields, slowed down to about ten miles an hour, crept down with the whistle held down.

S1: Purposely?

S2: It's one of those lasting memories.

S1: Oh yes! How special that was!

S2: It was absolutely … we just couldn't believe it.

S1: Did you ever manage to speak to him?

S2: I spoke to him through a lovely friend of mine called Alan Baker, whose father was our commentator for many, many years.

S1: Right.

S2: And I have a debt of gratitude to Steve because it was through Steve, who let me first have a go on the microphone in 1962, and it's developed from that.

S1: Yes. So did he commentate at yours?

S2: He commentated first at Alton Towers then at Bellamour here.

S1: Yes.

S4: And County Show here.

S2: And in those days commentating was very gentlemanly. You didn't start until two o'clock and the show's finished about half-four. Well, these days when I'm commentating, I'm in the commentary box at nine and come out at five and get a break, but that's a … But I have cut my teeth on events here, helping Steve. And then we also had a wonderful event in the evening called 'Traction Engine driver of the Year Competition'. And I used to do that and that was absolutely wonderful.

S1: What did they do to do that?

S2: We would take engines into the arena, parking them with a trailer, reversing into that.

S1: Were the public still here when this was going on?

S2: Public could stay if they wanted to see it. We were very conscious of health and safety in those days, which they won't allow us to do it today.

S1: No.

S2: But that's another story isn't it? But the loveliest one was a little later when we moved to Stafford. Will Deakin, who comes to Colton now, he'd got his father's engine and he actually beat his father. And Jim didn't speak to him for a fortnight.

S1: I thought that wouldn't go down too well.

S2: But we used Jim's engine, Winnie, as our emblem.

S1: Oh right.

S2: And all the posters had that engine on it. And there's the photograph there of it.

S1: Would you like to hold that up to the camera.

S2: As you can see there. That with Jim on it and the late Don Potman

S1: And how much did people pay to come into the steam rally.

S2: Half a crown.

S1: Half a crown. Was that on the front of the …

S2: The programme was one shilling. Ten pence. Ten pence the …

S1: Ten pence for the programme.

S2: … programme. Half a crown to come in.

S1: Right. And did big families come? Did lots of children …?

S2: Oh, families, lots of children, and we had events in the arena, like the ladies' steering. We had, allowed children onto the engines *with* adults.

S1: Yes.

S2: And everything to that to get them interested.

S1: So was the ring actually made by ropes, things that they'd already got from Alton Towers?

S2: No.

S1: No?

S2: Mr Price provided the stakes and we used a single strand of wire, which was absolutely lethal if you think of a child running into it, it would decapitate them.

S1: Yes.

S2: And I also had … the mistake I made, the first year I made me arena far too big because every event I'd been to it'd been small. And we got it right; we learnt an awful lot from that.

S1: Right.

S2: And the event progressed. These, I can tell you all sorts of wonderful stories there. One year a gentleman who's a professional engineer with a fire pump was only trying to pump water to touch the national grid going over the site. I went and just pushed him away.

S1: Gosh!

S2: Frightened me to death.

S1: Yes.

S2: There's a lot of stories I can't repeat.

S1: Yes. No. So that was the start was it?

S2: That was the start and it carried on at Bellamour.

S1: With just as much popularity?

S2: With as much popularity. It was getting bigger and bigger. 1966 we had to cancel because of the tragic foot and mouth epidemic.

S1: Yes.

S2: And the pig farm there at Bellamour, of course…

S1: Had you done a lot of planning before you cancelled it or was it cancelled?

S2: After you'd organised the first event it virtually ran itself.

S1: Right.

S2: Like marquees and things, it all came together. So we decided to cancel. Mr Price altered his farming plans and he said, 'I want to plough up the big field by the railway. We will move up to the top field beyond where David Astle lives, overlooking what is now the Barns at Bellamour. We moved up to their and we realised that we were getting short of space to present the event. And also car parking was becoming a problem; we were getting more and more cars. And that year we got people parking on the road, we opened the field opposite the … what was the old entrance to the farm, which is now basically the entrance into the Bellamour Barns. We opened that up. And we knew we were being limited into what we could do.

S1: Right. Was that because of the change of farming policy really?

S2: Really, people turning up. It was a wonderful day. Probably 1966, we were probably still only charging 25p to get in, you know, it's …. So we got our heads together, the two committees met, and it was decided we would move to the County Showground at Stafford. It enabled us to raise more money, but straightaway I could see it was causing a problem with getting personnel from Colton to go and work there. We still relied upon them. But nevertheless we went; we decided to do it. And with me being … my employment was in Stafford. As soon as I knew, every time I went by the showground I would walk over the field, sorted out whether the weather was wet, dry, sunshine, rain, or what have you.

S1: To gauge what it was like.

S2: So we knew what was happening.

S1: Yes.

S2: In the meantime, prior to that, a lovely lady well-known to many in Colton, now sadly passed, Mary Taylor, bless her, took over the sorting of trade stands out. We were developing that. Trade stands was a great revenue and I shall never forget it, the first year we were at the showground, 1968, Mary said to me, 'Well, how are we going to lay this out?' We came up with a system of pegs. We'll say, George and Marian Vernon, fancy toys, you've got 12 foot. There will be a peg there and there and then Dorothy Bradbury selling cakes and so on, and how it … and that was how we did it.

S1: And what would … people brought their own tables and everything.

S2: Brought down these, we were using trade stands, their own tentage and what have you.

S1: Yes.

S2: And on the Saturday morning I had to smile: one of the officers at the County Show says, 'Oh! They've turned the place into Petticoat Lane.' I thought, 'Yes, you're getting quite a good income out of this.'

S1: Yes, did it cost a lot to hire the showground?

S2: I think it was probably about £200 then.

S1: Right.

S2: I can't just remember.

S1: So you went from having … to paying nothing out?

S2: Nothing out. We had to hire the ground there, you see.

S1: Yes.

S2: So obviously it was taking off. We then started to have tractors, motorbikes, all that sort of thing.

One of the problems which beset me as organiser was the engine paddock was probably 200 yards from the arena. And we were the first event in the country to actually run to a timetable. The timetable that … the times went in the programme and they had the Grand Parade at two o'clock. But the engine paddock and the arena personnel, we did like the railways: their timetable was five or ten minutes earlier so we could get them down into what was the collecting ring at the showground and it just went absolutely like clockwork.

I must mention somebody here, a lovely gentleman, a bachelor called Jim Sears from Stafford. He was a traffic clerk at

"Norms Jim took over organising water because in those days there was a shortage of water on the showground. And when people started milking from three o'clock onwards there was no water up there—not even for the toilets or anything.

S1: Right.

S2: And the fire brigade loaned us some tanks and dear old Jim, he was a … and everybody at Colton loved him, he was a typical bachelor, wasn't he Dorothy? And everybody made a fuss of Jim. You know, he needed mothering, bless him, but he was a great guy. So the show went on from strength to strength.

S1: What about the water for the drinks and things like that then? Was there a refreshment area there?

S2: We used the …

S1: The building?

S2: Building.

S1: Yes.

S2: Which was the present pavilion. Another little side issue of this came up: one night the phone rang and Dorothy said, 'Oh, it's you is it Mr Woodward, Sidney Woodward from Blithfield, Abbots Bromley, he was president of the show that year, he said, 'David, I want a bit of help. Can you guide us?' 'We're going to build … We've seen the success of your event; we're going to build a bit of a shed on the showground.' That 'bit of a shed' was Bingley Hall. So Bingley Hall has its roots to a rally there which started at Colton.

S1: Yes.

S2: And it went on from success to success but early 1970s I could see that people at Colton were struggling. It was such a long way to go; it was getting bigger and bigger.

S1: A lot of traffic when you got there. I remember the year we went, we went over there and … '71 wasn't it?

S3: Yes.

S1: And, you know, you had to queue to get there.

S2: Yes.

S1: You did have your parking permits and so on but …

S2; It became … yes.

S1: timetable of ladies doing the teas and … yes.

S2: It wouldn't have been such … It would not have been successful if it had not been for the parishioners of this parish, bless them.

S1: Yes.

S2: Everybody threw in but by the early '70s it was becoming struggle.

S1: Do you think it was partly because the ownership wasn't quite there? It wasn't on their own patch?

S2: Correct. That was part of it, I'm sure.

S1: Yes.

S2: The good thing of it was it raised the money to buy the field that the village hall is now on.

S1: Yes.

S2: Also for improvements to the Reading Room, which, and then of course, eventually we were able to take it forward when the new committee was formed which I had the great privilege of being the first chairman. We were able to go forward with the hall we've got today.

S1: With the new hall, yes.

S2: And of course on a personal side, on the first rally, on August following the rally, we had a social afternoon and evening. We had a cricket match on Bellamour and there was a young lady on the Colton team in a lovely red kind of gym skirt playing cricket, and I'm afraid she stole my heart. And that lady is Dorothy, bless her, and has supported me in all these efforts.

S1: Yes.

S2: And of course, you know, the rest is history. We were married and you came and joined us in High Street.

S1: That's right.

S2: And really it's made my life at Colton because, as you know, I had many, many years on the parish council and I'm still able to help with the parish, which all goes back to the roots of these events here at Colton.

S1: Yes.

S2: And even now I talk to people and we can be at all sorts of functions and we get talking, 'Ah, Colton.' And they'll say to me, 'Do you remember the traction engine rallies there?' And this is how it is. I think it's still … It'll be in living memory in … at people of Colton and Rugeley until their dying day.

S1: Which was the last one that took place then? What year was the very last one?

S1: '72.

S2: '72, yes. That was the last one at Stafford.

S1: And do you have any idea how much money was actually raised? Or did it just … is it written down somewhere, anywhere?

S2: It … Well, sadly in those days it was still the entertainments committee.

S1: Right.

S2: And what has happened to their minute books and records I do not know.

S1: Oh right. Okay. But obviously it was quite a sum of money.

S2: It was a large sum of …

S1: And did it always go 50/50?

S2: Always went 50/50.

S1: Yes, that's amazing really. What … But what a wonderful way to raise funds by bringing something like that to the village as well as raising funds for the Reading Room and the new village hall.

S2: That's the beauty of it. I can say this: and the sad thing was that you had these wonderful group of people raising money and the managers had decreed on how it was being spent. And there was little or no consultation with the entertainments committee. They were told 'this is what we're going to do'. And the implications of that is another story which is …

S1: Yes.

S2: … not the place to talk about it.

S1: No.

S2: But it is thanks to that that we've got the village hall we've got today.

S1: Absolutely. Yes.

S2: And what more can one say?

S1: Would you like to hold up the pictures just for the camera David?

S2: Yes.

S1: There's a lovely one look.

S2: That's a lovely little one what we call as showmen's tractors, but we also had fairground organs and we had a wonderful fair.

S1: Did you? Yes.

S2: I was the ogre to the Showmen's Guild. They tried then to say they'd got Showmen's Guild rights. If they'd been to a show the year before they said they could come again. And I said 'No, you can't'. And we ended up the first year at Stafford with a bit of a standoff and I told them they could all go on the Tuesday night and we could manage without them.

S1: Right.

S2: Oh, and that started all sorts of things. And after that, nobody now at any rally in the country, and bear in mind there's 50 or 60 rallies, nobody now has Showman's Guild. So Colton with the North Staffs club and meself, we set the scene for so many of events as it went along.

And then of course another lovely wagon belonging to a gentleman called Alan Williamson from Endon [35:25]. Oh! Coming back to '63, a similar machine to this we took down to London in May for the historic commercial vehicle run from London to Brighton. Went to Brighton on the Sunday and Alan Williamson, bless him, said, 'How am I going to get it back home?' And the late Jim Deaken and myself, we both drove it back from Brighton at about 20 miles an hour. All through the night.

S1: Wow!

S2: Through the centre of London. One of the posh hotels in Park Lane—we pulled up to clear the fire—the doorman came out and said 'Having trouble gentlemen?' And we thought, 'We're in trouble.' 'Oh. No problems,' and they brought us out coffee on a silver salver. It was absolutely wonderful.

S1: How nice!

S2: And we hit the national press and television with that.

S1: Wow!

S2: And it gave good publicity to the rally. So.

S1: Yes. Did you ever get any … much … Did you get much press coverage when the rallies were on?

S2: Oh, and awful lot.

S1: Yes.

S2: The *Rugeley Times* was in being then, I think the *Staffordshire Advertiser* and *The Mercury*. We had such wonderful coverage.

And then there's a lovely picture here—I've got to put me glasses on; it's out of the paper—shows some of our members there: Little Mac is an engine that still comes to Bellam … Colton now. And when David Dale passes, we park down at the Rydal, he always whistles as a tribute to the show. And we are still getting sons, and grandsons, and even great-grandchildren now becoming … come to see us when we have the engines here for our events and of course this year, 2013, will be 50 years since the first rally and our little gathering round The Greyhound falls on the same weekend in date-wise as the …

S1: Really?

S2: Sorry. I've got it wrong.

S4: The week before.

S2: The week before. I've got that wrong. You see? It happens. That's what commentators do you see, let people pick it up.

S4: They have wives.

S2: The dates of the anniversary of the rally, 50 years, fall on a weekend.

S1: Right.

S2: So it's as though it was made to be.

S1: Special.

S2: That's it, yes.

S1: Lovely. Thank you very much.

S2: So that's a little bit of the history. I said I could tell you some wonderful stories of …

S1: Is there anything else you want to tell me just before I switch these off?

S2: No. So it's absolutely …

S1: Thank you so much David.

S2: Great.

S1: That's really fascinating and that's lovely to have it recorded for future generations.

# Colton History Society

## All Our Stories

Transcripts of villagers recollections of days gone by recorded as part of our All Our Stories Project 2013

# Lynn Collins

## Memories of Colton's Milk Lady

**Lynn Collins. (Colton's milk delivery lady.)**

S1: Gill Sykes
S2: Lynn Collins
S3: Nona Goring

S1: Right. This recording is being made for Colton History Society by Gill Sykes and Nona Goring, and we are interviewing Lynn Collins on Wednesday, the 13th of March 2013.

Well Lynn, you're famous in Colton for a very particular job that you did for how many years?

S2: Forty years almost. Almost 40.

S1: Forty years which is quite something then isn't it?

S2: Yeah.

S1: I don't know whether there are many people could claim to have done their, a milk round, for that long. I've jumped the gun haven't I? Done a job like that for that long, but you're famous for being Colton's milk lady for 40 years, which I think everybody pretty well in Colton knew you didn't they?

S2: I should think so yes.

S1: So that's what the interview is going to be about.

S2: Right.

S1: Because we feel that that's what people in Colton of the future would like to know, because I'm sure you will have witnessed loads and loads of changes in that time. Right, so, when did you first become a milk lady in Colton? Well, when did you first become a milk lady?

S2: It was 1970 I think it was, '70 or '71. 1970. The, almost the summer and it was more accident than design. I'd worked for Lichfield Laundry.

S1: Oh yeah. I've heard about them, yeah.

S2: Yes, that's right. Well I'd … that's where I met Les, working for Lichfield Laundry. And Diane Peat was working, just part time—she was at university at the time—helping Bob out. And she'd got to go back after the holidays and she wanted a holiday before she went away and Bob had heard that I'd been made redundant because the laundry had closed down, and asked me if I'd like to do a few days for him. Specially for Len, Len Rowe, who did Abbots Bromley.

S1: This, this … Bob was the chap who had a milk business?

S2: Bob Grimley, yeah. And as Len hadn't had a day off for 14 years. And at that point he was working seven days a week. It wasn't as it is today. So I said, 'Yes that would be fine.' He says 'Well, you can do his Wednesdays. He'll have a Wednesday off.' So he says 'Well, you can go with him for a fortnight and learn the round and see how you get on.' And I said, 'Well, it'll only be temporary.' I says 'Because, you know, I am after a full-time job.' And 'Okay,' he said, 'Well just do it until you find a full-time job,' which I never did.

So yes, I went with Len for a fortnight. The first day was quite a shock on his wife because he always used to go home, mid-way, for his breakfast. He was a stickler for being at everybody's house exactly on time because some he had to knock up, and the first thing he did when he got into Abbots Bromley was pick up a load of papers, newspapers, and you had to deliver them to various houses around the village. So, that he wouldn't be early with having somebody with him, he used to time waste. He made sure you didn't slam gates, you didn't slam bottles into the crates, and you was really quiet. We delivered to the colleges and things, churns at the time, but when he got to his wife's house and he brought in his little blonde it was … 25. No, I wasn't, I was 23 I think. She had a little dicky fit. But still, anyway, she got used to me.

Anyway, I went with Len for a fortnight and learnt his round so I could do his round on a Wednesday. So the next week came and Bob says, 'I haven't had a day off for a while. I think I'd like a day off. Will you do my round?' And thinking, 'Well, yes, he'll teach me where to go.' No, no, no. He came round on a Monday night and put a book down with names and what they had, and that was it.

S1: Straight in there.

S2: Straight in. I hadn't got a clue who a lot of these people were, because I hadn't been in the village that long. And with working on the laundry I was working out side of the village. So I'll have to leave it to Les to tell me where most of them was, and as it was nearly every house, I think all but three, it wasn't too bad. So I went from one to the other and then I went on the Len's on the Wednesday and then Bob says, 'Well, I think I'll have another day off.' So he came on the Thursday. And then he decided that he'd like me to come and help him collect. So he says, 'Because you're good at maths.' And I says 'Yeah'. 'Okay,' he says, 'well you can come with me Friday morning and then you can come and help me collect Friday afternoon.'

S1: This is collecting the money?

S2: Collecting the milk money, yes, because it was while he was delivering in a morning so many paid you and then in the afternoon we would walk round the village or drive a little way and walk the rest. And do the collecting. And then he says, 'Well, you might as well do Saturday.' So by, come Monday—Monday was my day off and I was working the rest of the week, which included Sunday. Because he says, 'Well, you know, it's only for an hour or two on a Sunday.' So okay, fair enough.

Then it didn't seem no time at all it was Christmas and he said, 'Well, my wife would like to go to Switzerland to visit the family, and so I've decided you can do the Christmas.' Well, I'd no idea what it entailed. And Len didn't want to do the ordering. So he says, 'Well, you can do the ordering.' And I'm thinking, 'Well, I don't know what I've got to order.' 'Well, I'll give you a rough guess of what I want and then you just have a stab in the dark of what you want for a couple of days,' because you only had Christmas day off then. And so he says, 'Whatever I tell you double up.' So okay, I got these and I had a rough guess of what I'd want, doubling everything up. And I ended up with about 40 crates of milk too many. Couldn't get them in the fridge. But fortunately that was sorted out. They took them back and it was okay. But it was a bit harassing with not having done it before, but.

S1: Where was the collection point?

S2: Well, the dairy was, of course, it was on the corner of Heath Way here at the back of the Dun Cow car park. Because the car park at that point wasn't as long as it is now: it was more narrow and more this way. And then the dairy buildings was there. Bob lived, Bob Grimley and his family at first had lived at the house on the corner there but they were just in the process when I started of moving into the Larkin in Hollow Lane, because Bob kept hold of the house because of the dairy buildings being there and also he'd hoped, when Mrs Wooley who owned the building passed away, he was hoping that he could buy it. But that wasn't to be because she left it to her son who wanted to sell it for development. That's when the car park at the Dun Cow went back that way so that they could have a wider access to get to the houses. It was meant to be four bungalows and then the three massive big houses went up as they do.

Yes, and anyway, then I worked, still doing Len's round on a Wednesday and he also he had a week off some point, doing that and helping Bob. And this went on for a while until Chris, well, Chris had left school.

S1: This is …

S2: Chris Grimley.

S1: Bob's son.

S2: Bob's son. Had left school and he'd gone to work at Stafford but unfortunately one night he got done for drink driving. Not just once: they loosed him out to come home with his, saying he could go to his sister's who lived in Cannock, and then they caught him again about an hour later. So, so that he wouldn't lose his licence Bob said 'Well, you'd better come and work for me and say you drive for a living.' And so Bob says 'I'll semi-retire and you can go with Len.' And that's what happened. That's how Chris come to come onto the milk. And I got on really well with both Bob and his family really. Yes.

S1: So, your round to begin with. Was it just in Colton or was it further?

S2: The round to begin with started off on the corner there and did the houses at the back here, that up the High Street and those houses. Then up here.

S1: Heath Way.

S2: Heath Way. And zigzagging as you do and doing the rest of the village and then we went round the main road towards Rugeley, doing the Fog Row and ARM and that, and the station. But Bob had an agreement with Rugeley dairies, who had the same milk delivery people because they all come from the same people then, that Bob wouldn't take any of their customers over the river bridge and they wouldn't come this side. So then we went up the Blythbury Road and up as far as—where Willy Haynes lives now, can't remember—Hadley Gate then back down Hollow Lane. And that was it. That was it to start with, yes, that was it to start with.

Len's round was the whole of Abbots Bromley and Bromley Wood and also Admaston, Blithfield Hall, and then down, back down. Later on they bought some rounds off the Co Op. Well we, as I say, there was only three people in the village who didn't have milk off me and they had it off the Co Op. So I had those three and I also had Newton and Lea Heath and Newton Hurst

S1: So it's quite a round that is isn't it? Yeah.

S2: So that was … yes. So, which, I'd still got them at the end. Bob, he done a bunk with an old girlfriend and Chris took over the …

S1: Business.

S2: The business. And run it. And anyway then, so then we'd moved from … by which time then, because Chris had got married and Bob had bought him a business in Abbots Bromley: a shop on the corner of Goose Lane. So the dairy was moved over there; it was moved to Goose Lane. And so we delivered from there for a time. Then once, in his infinite wisdom, he decided he was going to buy me an electric float.

S1: What had you used up until then?

S2: Well, we'd used all manner of different vans. When I first started it was a little Austin A35 pickup. Anyway, one Saturday morning, because we used to have the Saturday kids used to help us then, and Chris Greaterix was helping us and he left the door open, or he opened the door when Bob was reversing and knocked the door off. For months we was going around with just one door on. And then I had a Hyace, which was quite high at the back, especially with the sides up, and I couldn't reach very well. Once that broke down and they hired a flat-wagon lorry and Chris was driving and I had to be on the back throwing things to him. On the Abbots Bromley round it was a Ford Transit and we used to have the ten-gallon churns and the eight-gallon churns against the back and then the crates to hold them on, but I was …

S1: So that were you picking the churns up then as you were going around.

S2: No. I put the churns on and when I got to college, you see the girls' college at Abbots Bromley used to have the churns.

S1: Oh right! They didn't have it bottles?

S2: There was always about five different places that you used to have to leave them around the college.

S1: Right. Was this because of the quantity of milk that they wanted, I see.

S2: Yeah.

S1: Yeah.

S2: They'd have like three ten-gallon churns a day or four, I think, at Saint Mary's, four eight-gallon churns. And then there was Saint Bridget's, oh, as I say, there was about five different places. There was the croft. I can't just think of the name of the other place. But then you'd pick the empty ones up from the day before, you see, and put them back on the van. The empty ones were okay to lift up but the ten-gallons were a bit of a struggle. Get them over the edge, cling on, and drop them down. But I was coming down Admaston bank one day a bit too fast and they all come off. [Laughs]

S1: Oh dear. Rolled over the road.

S2: Rolling down the road! Yeah, fortunately there wasn't the traffic there is today and I managed to retrieve them all. Yeah, but I'd got this Hyace anyway and Chris thought it would be a good idea for me to have an electric float. Well, they're okay for in-the-town delivering because it had got a door in the middle, in the cab, and you could go down each side. So if there was traffic coming it didn't matter, you could get down the other side. But the headlights were like something searching for low-flying aircraft. And in the middle of the night there wasn't a great deal of traffic but whatever traffic was coming towards you, they was so blinding and I used to have to turn them off and there was two little, tiny candle lights—so I couldn't see a thing. Otherwise I would just blind these people coming the other way. Going down potholes was awful because there was no suspension on them and it was a steel seat with a cushion in the middle, which wasn't very wide and it was very …

S1: Hard on the bottom.

S2: Hard on the bum. And, as I say, the potholes didn't do it any good. The highlight of my day was going down Admaston bank, going back to Abbots Bromley. Used to bat down there like a, I don't know what, just so you could get on the other side. If it ran out of charge, which it invariably did, you could usually find that it would go in reverse but it wouldn't go forward. So sometimes I had to finish the rest of the round going in reverse. Reverse it back. So I'd go down the Lane in that case and reverse all down the Lane and back to the yard.

Then I was going up between The Greyhound and Williscroft Place one day, I hadn't had this instrument—electric truck—I suppose I'd had it about 12 months. And I used to back right up, deliver Peggy's, Peggy Pete's and then come back down the lane and of course you had the steps up to The Greyhound then, so I would yank the handbrake off, on I mean, and jump out before it had actually stopped. And as I was jumping out something went with an almighty crack. And anyway I delivered my milk, as I used to walk straight across Williscroft Place then, straight down and back again and the Greyhound and … and it wouldn't move. I thought, 'Well, I'm blocking the entrance here. I've got to get it moving.' Anyway it kept sparking and banging, for some reason, I don't know quite why, I think it was because I'd had a puncture or something but I'd got some plier things and I thought 'I'll stop you from sparking'. It kept sparking and jumping out of forwards. So I got hold of these pliers, I was holding them and forced it forward and although I did get it forwards it was twisting the chassis and I did about £2,500 worth of damage just getting it down the drive.

S1: Oh dear.

S2: That was the end of the electric truck, which I was very pleased about. The scrapyards was welcome to it. So then he decided he'd buy me the little trucks, the little Honda Tenakis, those little, tiny ones which suited me down to the ground.

S1: And you were happy with that?

S2: Oh I was. Those little trucks would take me anywhere. Flood, blizzard, any weather what so ever. As long as I'd got the weight on the back they'd take me anywhere.

S1: It was much improved.

S2: Oh it certainly was.

S1: You've mentioned that you … you mentioned then about being out in the dark. Well, in night time.

S2: Yeah.

S1: I mean what were your hours? You know, did they change over time or?

S2: They did change over time. I mean when I started on Len's it was five o'clock.

S1: In the morning?

S2: But it got earlier because people started going to the supermarkets. Once they started going to the supermarkets your round started getting bigger. Because as the milkmen were leaving so they were not taking on more milkmen. They were spreading the rounds around. So, yes, I ended up leaving here at one o'clock in the morning, so … just because you'd got to beat the supermarkets somehow and, plus, a lot more people were working and they wanted the milk on the doorstep to take in before they went to work, or best they could.

S1: So then what time would you finish?

S2: I got as I split the round in two, because it was on a six-day but to two three-days. Because by which time I was doing Wolseley Bridge, Colwich, Haywoods, Bishton, all the Haywoods, Hixon, Weston, Salt.

S1: So your round had got a lot, lot bigger didn't it?

S2: Yes. It was almost into Stone.

S1: Right.

S2: And then coming back and then I'd got Stowe-by-Chartley and all Abbots Bromley and still my Newtons and Lea Heaths and all round here.

S1: That's a good few miles.

S2: So, yeah, it was, with running backwards and forwards both to the yard and then back home, it was 106 mile a day.

S1: Crickey! Yeah.

S2: So I had to split it so that it … I was delivering Monday, Wednesday, Friday or Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday because it was … the hours was ridiculous. Considering that you'd got to go two afternoons a week collecting then. It was … I was doing, at one point, I was doing 88 hours a week.

S1: Goodness me!

S2: So I just couldn't keep that up.

S1: No.

S2: So it cut it down to about 68 hours a week. I mean I'd split it down to the two three-days with the collecting, yeah.

S1: And you also mentioned then and … weather conditions you were talking about flood and whatnot. I mean…

S2: Oh yeah.

S1: I mean you must have gone through some pretty grim ones. Are there any that stand out?

S2: Oh yeah. Many stand out.

S1: Yeah?

S2: In particular I think the worst one was when we had the blizzards in the 1982—was it? Something like that.

S1: Something like that wasn't it? Yeah.

S2: We knew it was coming. I'd got me little Tenakis then, which I was grateful of. So Chris says, 'Well, I'll ring you just as soon as the milk comes in,' which he did. So it was about quarter past one on the Sunday afternoon when I went up and loaded everything I could load including extras because I knew with the bad weather people would come out and say, 'Well, leave me extra milk just in case you can't come again,' and what have you, especially on the outlying ones. And so I went out at, as I say, it was about quarter past one, and I started doing the round backwards because I did the far-reaching ones first.

S1: So you could get back.

S2: And it was a blizzard; it was a horrendous blizzard. And I haven't been out in anything before or since that was so long lasting or so bad. I've had deep snow but never under them conditions. Knocking people doors. I had to say that,

because I knew that there was snow coming down, they wouldn't find it. They'd probably kick it over before they'd find it. And I finished at about quarter past nine, at the same time as the snow did. There was so many people out in the village walking, walking in the snow, and I came in and had a hot bath because I was drenched through to the skin. The lads had been to help me for so long but they'd got too cold to continue so once we got back into the village here they came home. There was only three people I couldn't get to and that was Hadley Gate, again, and Mrs Davis down Stonyford Lane because Rob Ray, who lives up at Blythbury had decided that The Bull and Specs didn't sell his type of tobacco so he'd tried to get to Rugeley and he'd gone across the Blythbury Road, crossways. So I couldn't get through. So I turned round and come back and my little van trundled through. So I didn't have to go out on the Monday and… fortunately; I did on the Tuesday. It was difficult to get up to Chris's from here but anyway the little truck managed it. It got up there. Still a lot of people wasn't moving about because of the … there was a lot of cars on the main road.

S1: Just stuck.

S2: There was buried under the snow. I think Cliff's was one of them.

S1: Yeah.

S2: And was yours? Yeah. Yours was one of them. And on the Wednesday, the same again. I went out and it was me day to go up to Newton. So I trundle off up Admaston, halfway up Admaston Hill up to Newton and there was a tractor had gone through, and the snow was higher than the little truck but fortunately the tractor had made a bit of a rutted way, so although it was like this, rocking backwards and forwards, I managed to get up there. And people were coming out and saying, 'How the hell have you got here? Nobody's moved; we can't get out of the village. How have you got up here?' So, yeah, that was quite an accomplished thing that I'd managed to do.

S1: Managed to get through.

S2: Yeah. I couldn't get from … if you go from Newton to Dapple Heath then there's quite a drop down the back end of the reser and up the other side, so I wasn't going to attempt that, thinking 'Well, it may not get up there'. So I went back the way I'd come and over the reser and round the other way to go and take their's.

S1: You're pretty tenacious weren't you? To do all that!

S1: Determined! Yeah, so and then there was floods.

S1: I was about to say, I mean, Colton's known for its flooding isn't it?

S2: Yes.

S1: So what about those then?

S2: Many a time with the floods but there was once when it came over the school wall.

S1: It was Saturday.

S2: One day, I think it was a Friday, I'm not sure, but the rain was horrific and the floods from the brook was up almost as far to The Greyhound. Then again, I'd had a heck of a way when I'd finished the round to get back. I'd had to … because at that point I was at the Rugeley dairy, so I'd had to come back through Colwich, through Hixon, through Newton, and through Stockwell Heath. Through some pretty bad floods but little, yeah, little Tenaki took me through no problem.

S1: Took you through.

S2: Yeah. And when I got down to The Greyhound, I just … I'd got me wellies and me wet suit, and …

S1: Waded through.

S2: … just waded through. And I just got down. Yeah, it was a bit hair-raising going to the vicarage but I went round the church that way rather than go through the worst of it. Yeah.

S1: Yeah. Were there any other sort of incidents that you can remember that were hairy?

S3: Did you get frostbite once Lynn?

S2: I got frostbite. That was when I got me electric truck. That was … yes. The cold weather, as you know, doesn't do anything for your bladder. And it isn't so bad when you've got an ordinary truck. If I got down the village, needed toilet, I could pop back up; but not with the electric truck. As I say, it used to run out of power before I got back so I couldn't chance taking it off its route. And I wanted a wee. So I knew there was the outside toilet at the church; and I wanted a wee. So I delivered Mrs Freeman's milk and I went to this toilet. Well, of course there was no heat in the truck so I was already cold and the temperature that day was 17, or that morning, early, dark, it was 17 below. It was at that time I was getting frost after frost after frost. So I went into this toilet, well it had got slats on the door. So everything was all frozen up and I thought 'Well, a little bit more won't hurt.' And I fetched my clothes down for a wee but, oh, I was so cold it took me ages because I'd got me tights and me trousers and me, you know, thick trousers on top, to pull me trousers up. Well, that lunchtime when I'd got back I'd got in the bath and everything and I come up all in these blobs. All at the top of me legs and me bum. And I thought, 'Well, it looks like chilblains. I realised what I'd done but I thought 'I'll go over to old doctor Salter'.

So I went over to doctor Salter and he said, 'How … what … what can I do for you?' I said 'Well, it's a bit embarrassing but I think I've got chilblains'. 'Let me look.' So he took a look and he says 'Well! There's a thing!' And then he says, 'Ah, you know, I've seen frostbite on hands and feet but I've never seen it there before. I think I'd like you to go and see a skin specialist.' 'Oh. Okay,' I'd got to go the next day and see a skin specialist at Burton. So got me this little letter that he'd had to write out and off I went to Burton the next day, still blobbing out, by which time the top of me legs and me bum was black and there was these red blobs all over it. And the man must have been a big friend of doctor Salter's because he looked about the same age and about as doddery, but he was a nice man. 'Do you mind if I bring somebody else to have a look?' there was me lying on the couch with me bum in the air. And I said, 'Well, yeah, well, okay.' So off he goes and then he traipses in with all these students. Embarrassed or what! Yes. They all decided yes, I'd got frostbite of the bum and gave me some cream. But, yes, they did. It was quite a novelty. Quite a novelty to have frostbite of the bum.

S1: And that was an incident with you. Can you remember if, you know, of all the people that you used to deliver to, where there any sort of characters or incidents with … when …?

S2: Oh I had some wonderful characters.

S1: Yeah? Were there?

S2: Absolutely wonderful characters yes.

S1: Yeah. Any that particularly stand out?

S2: There was all different types of character. When I was working with Bob there was an old gentleman; he was a bit of a randy so and so.

S1: I think we'd better leave names out here.

S2: Yes. Definitely. Well, I won't even say where they lived.

S1: No.

S2: But Bob, it used to amuse Bob to send me to him to get his money and he used to stand back laughing his eye up. And oh, he used to 'fancy a little blonde' and all this, that, and the other. And I said, 'oh get away, leave me alone.' His wife was a lovely lady, she is a lovely lady, but she did suffer a lot of ill health. And he used to say, 'I shall be glad when she's gone and I can have me a little blonde like you.' So Bob used to say, 'Well, if I see you with a new coat on, I know where it's come from.' And I say 'no way!' Anyway, as it happened, when his wife passed away he died within half an hour of her.

S1: Crickey!

S2: So I thought that was rough justice. But that was one sort of character. Another sort was a man, he lives at Dapple Heath, and he is such a character. He's so funny. And I used to take them papers and I used to take the free papers to 'em and he would always torment me and he would always like to pay me in pennies. So he'd say. 'How much is it?' So I'd tell him. And say, 'Right, there's a penny. Now how much is it?' And it would take him ages and ages and ages to pay me and his wife used to say, 'Paul, will you pay the girl and stop tormenting her?' Anyway, I used to take him the free papers and the one was the … oh what was that one we had?

S3: *Rugeley Times*?

S2: Post. The Post? *The Post.* And inset at the beginning of part of this free Post was all about colleges and that. It was getting that time of year. Enrol here and all this, that, and the other. Well, when I went to him, after I'd been to him I used to go next door and always have me cup of coffee. And when I came back out, stuck under the wiper blades was saying 'I don't want this part of the paper. I'm no longer eligible for the education.' So I put it back in his post box and say 'I don't want it either'. And so the next time I come it was shoved in the crate at the back, rolled up. Well, 'give it somebody who does want it.' So I'd got a bit of string so I put it on a bit of string and he'd got a pond and he'd got a overhanging willow tree. So I climbed, because the milk truck was flat then it had got a flatbed on top. So I climbed on the flatbed at the top and I hung it in this tree. And I say 'Well you're going to have it whether you want it or not'. And there it hung for many a many and many a while. And he was a great character.

S1: It sounds as though you had some fun with people.

S2: Yeah.

S1: Yeah Yeah.

S2: I used to take the leaflets out for different stuff especially for the orange juice and it at one point the leaflet for the orange juice was in verse telling why people should drink this orange and how good it was. And so he reversed the verse saying where you can … where you could stick the orange juice because it wasn't any good to him because he suffered with something or other.

S1: From what you say it's …

S2: But it was quite hilarious. I think I've still got it at home somewhere and if I've have had more notice I would have found it out but it was quite, quite funny.

S1: From what you …

S3: I just say tell her about the slugs eating the notes.

S1: Oh yes.

S2: Oh yeah. They were hilarious. The bane of me life were the slugs. Slugs… well snails. Slugs and snails. And they loved paper and the loved the piece with the pen on it. So you'd get the note out; the snail was probably still hanging on or he'd drop into the empty bottle. And then you've got a hole with a piece of paper round it and it would 'p .. un' yeah. Hadn't got a clue what they wanted. Not a clue! Extra pint? No milk today? Whatever it was, the snails had always ate the middle piece. And of course, you get 'I left you a note out.' And I'd say 'well I know but the snails ate it.' 'Ugh, yeah, likely story'. But they had! They used to eat the blummin' notes the devil dicks.

But I used to get some funny notes as well. Yeah I used to get some notes. I remember one from Mrs Eaton, she lived down here, didn't she, at the bungalow.

S3: Next door to me.

S2: Yeah. Well this was when she lived at the top here and she used to ask me to please close the gate as something was pecking the top off her bottles. So!

S2: I'd get them with like, 'Save our pussy cats and leave extra milk'. [Laughs] I've had some really, really funny notes.

S1: Sounds from, you know, just the way it's coming over that you obviously enjoyed your job, didn't you.

S2: Oh I did, yes. And 90 per cent was really, well 99 per cent was good. There was a few odd incidents. I've perhaps seen a lot of things I shouldn't have seen. For instance, once man running off with another man's wife half an hour up the Newlands. And then her husband chasing up and down the village for her. And then witnessed the outcome in a huge row, and then they come back together.

Another man, this was down at Hamstall, because I also did Hamstall Ridware as well, and there's some flats—you know them, don't you, the flats there. And you'd deliver so many at the front and so many of the doors were at the back. But there wasn't a street light at the back so I used to drive round and put my lights so they just shone down the pathway. The one man came to the window to see who was wondering about in the middle of the night, why they'd suddenly got light, but he'd only got a net curtain, but he hadn't got any clothes on. I've also seen people wondering around in the, you know, all-together and things like that; mostly that's summertime. Umm yes, I've seen a lot of things that I shouldn't see. But I remember one Christmas. Shug used to come and help me.

S2: And he used to come and help me at Christmas Eve. He used to love to come and help me Christmas Eve because we'd got such a lot to put on, creams and all the different stuff. And The Dun Cow was always open till the last one had actually decided to wonder out, and so the back of the van was really choc-a-block with stuff and Shug was helping me deliver. And we'd got down as far as Bill Brown's there or just before Bill Brown's, and a couple from down the road, he was trying to get his wife down the road who was drunk as a skunk. And he wanted me to give him a lift. Well, I said, a) I couldn't and b) I wouldn't. I mean she was drunk as I don't know what. 'Well you can help me out. You can her down', I says 'I'm not'. I says 'I've all this cream and all this milk as I've got to deliver' I says, 'no'. And he was insistent, anyway Shug says 'She's told you no, and no it's going to be'. And he's never let us forget it.

S3: He never.

S2: He never let us forget it, no. Not nastily, he's been quite alright about it. But yes, 'She told you no…'.

S1: So it was 40 years you did this wasn't it.

S2: Yes, almost 40 years.

S1: Forty years, yeah, yeah.

S2: Yes, almost 40 years.

S1: It would be interesting to know how many other milk persons, we've got to say that these days, lasted that long.

S2: Yeah.

S1: Now I know towards the end of your career you got an award for something didn't you?

S2: I got, yes, it was a New Year's Honour Award.

S1: Will you tell us a little bit about that?

S2: Yeah, it was Chris Turner. It was for the *Lichfield Mercury* and Chris Turner nominated me for this. It was after we'd had this blizzard and different things, no matter what the weather I was, you know, I bought a milk. And yes, it was quite … I felt, yes, honoured. I was really overwhelmed by it. She'd put me up for this New Year's Honour for … So, yeah, I had to go to Lichfield…

S1: After 40 years of service to the village it was well deserved, wasn't it.

S2: I was most, I was really honoured as well by the whole village when I retired. They put on a surprise party and that was …

S3: It was lovely.

S2: It was lovely. It was lovely! It was something I didn't expect and I was absolutely overwhelmed with it. It was smashing to think that they'd do that. The, you know, I mean I love the customers. I loved the natter, the banter, all the different things. Yeah. There was only two incidents really that ever frightened me. Well, I would say it's three. Once two lads, I was outside The Dun Cow and it's when Brian and Vicky were there, and I'd seen these two lads. And I wouldn't get out the van and I locked the van doors and I opened the window. I actually had seen these lads in Rugeley pretty often wondering around, so, they'd said they'd broken down in Hollow Lane and they was looking for a garage and I said 'well you won't fine one round here'. I knew that was a lie because I'd come that way and I'd only done a few deliveries up the village here. And then they'd tried all ways for me to open the van or take them to Rugeley and I says no. I says 'I'll tell you what I'll do' I say 'I'll go and ring up for a taxi for you.' I says 'I'll dial 999.' Anyway they scarpered off down the village.

But it's a bit, you know, I've got my wits about me but Brian said 'Well if you'd have pipped your horn I'd have come and told 'em what for.' So at that point I knew what I was and I'd got rid of them. I could have just drove off at any time. The one was at one side, one was the other who was trying the door; they couldn't get in.

The only time that anybody had ever seriously tried to attack me was in Rugeley, 'cause I delivered some in Rugeley. And it was when I was collecting. And it was coming up to Christmas and they was going to put the lights on in Rugeley, and they used to have—they still do, I think—they have a market and all the shops are open. There was a lot of noise coming out of the town and this was on Fortesque Lane. And I was collecting from this house, there was a row of cottages and this house just stood back and the van was over here. And I'd got to go actually to the house over there, but as I come down they were sort of by this driveway there, and they said 'oh let's get her.' So I run to the van, fortunately it was one of these flick things and it worked straight away. Got in, flicked it again to lock it and I shot off up Bush Drive because, I mean, you can't get through there. By which time they were trying to break the windows and shaking the van. And, yeah, that really shook me up.

S1: Bit frightening.

S2: That frightened me. But that's the only time that I've been really threatened. But a couple of more funny incidents was I was again at Rugeley Dairy and my first port of call was going up the Blythbury Road towards Hamstall Ridware and that day. Well as I was going to work I'd seen a lot of youths about on Trent Valley corner, round by the pub there. Anyway, I went and I loaded up and come back out Well, as I went up past Tony Hill's there was a body lying with just the head in the grass and the feet out here. And I thought 'oh God, somebody's dead'. [Laughs]

Anyway, I didn't stop at that point because I thought … you know, at this point they were laying traps to stop people weren't they. But I couldn't' see anybody else about but of course there was a ditch. So I went just a bit further up the road and I rang the police, and they come flying out to look for a body but it wasn't there. And they said 'well it wasn't dead but it must have been dead drunk!' Probably one of the friends had come, or either that or they'd looked across the fields and they could see footprints so they think that they'd probably wondered across the fields and gone away. But so [laughs] that was me body.

A couple of times I've seen… I've been to places where there's old people and they've fallen and I've had to lift …

S1: Oh yeah, and you've had to help them.

S2: Pick them up yes. Yeah, pick them up because they couldn't get back up. So it is very rewarding, it was very rewarding in a lot of ways and it was lovely, it really was. Yeah, I thoroughly enjoyed it.

S1: Well it's nice to be able to after 40 years say that you thoroughly enjoyed it.

S2: Oh, I did. And I miss it. I don't … the last place I went to, which was Dairy Crest, wasn't as enjoyable. I'd always been my own free agent, because no matter what yard I was running from there wasn't a manager. So I'd had to order my own stuff in and loaded my van up just as I wanted it loaded. So that it came off at it's nearest point. But my last port of call was Dairy Crest at Chase Town. Well Chase Town. And it had got a manager and an under manager and it was 'you're not doing things right'. And I was saying, you know, 'Don't teach your granny to suck eggs. I'll do it as I've always done it and if you don't like it tough' because I was franchise, I was my own boss. But … and it didn't go down well. So, where everybody else had got a number I got initials. It was PIA, pain in the arse. So, because I wouldn't conform to all their wishes. And there was a lot of changing about.

S1: Perhaps a good time to finish.

S2: It was definitely a good time. There was three, four of us, sorry, from …. There was four of us gone there and they didn't welcome us with open arms because we started more or less the same time as a lot of them others started so we were taking up their loading spaces and we weren't doing things as they wanted them to be done. So we didn't seat very well over there. So I was glad to have gone from there but I wasn't glad to have gone from the job. I loved the job. I loved the people. All the people, they were great.

S1: Well, I think that's a nice time to finish isn't it. Thank you Lynn, that was a lovely and very interesting interview. Thank you very much indeed.

# Colton History Society

## All Our Stories

Transcripts of villagers recollections of days gone by recorded as part of our All Our Stories Project 2013

# Nev James

## Aeroplane Crash Landing 1944

**Nev James.**

S1: Marion Vernon
S2: Nev James

S1: This recording is being made for Colton History Society on Thursday, 22 October 2009 by Nev James and Marion Vernon.

The following request was received via the History Society website on 27 September 2009 from Mr Gary Shaw of Sheffield.

The message reads:

"On the 20th of July, 1944, my father-in-law Flight Sergeant Ronald Turner we flying from RAF Hixon when the aircraft number DK280 developed a fault and crash landed in a field next to Boughey Hall Farm. He is now 89 years of age and wondered if there are any records of this or photographs in your archives."

So Nev, would you like to recount your memories of that day.

S2: Yeah. Of course, big event in the village and the word soon went round there was a plane as had landed behind Boughey Hall Farm, and of course the kids and some of the grown-ups converged on it. And this plane had come down … there was a bit of a cart on the edge side, Web's farm track and when we got there, he said he come, it like belly-landed and there was two blokes in RAF uniform and they were talking to the, quite a few grown-ups—I can't remember the grown-ups. I remember one grown-up was Harry Shipley.

And they were saying as they'd run out of fuel. The pilot, the pilot I thought said he'd run out of fuel and he'd put down and he wanted a phone. 'Where's nearest phone?' And they said up the village by the war memorial and the first thing he said was 'are there any police about as can look after …. While we get the phone?' So Harry Shipley steps forward and said , 'Home guard here', and they said, 'well will you look after the plane while we go and phone and explain what's happened?'

And so Harry took charge of the plane. But the kids from the village were all over it. I was as bad the others probably, but a lot of them were sitting along the fuselage and it had landed on its belly, ripped a lot of the coating underneath it, it was all shredded. And I grabbed a piece of this partly torn off on the bottom. Because there was no wheels. There was no wheels, whether the wheels had folded or what, or whether he just belly landed. But I got a piece, ripped a piece of this stuff off the bottom for a souvenir, and a lot of the other kids did the same.

Oh they were sitting along the fuselage, bouncing up and down, rocking it like rocking horse.

S1: You couldn't get inside it?

S2: No, couldn't get inside it. I couldn't say whether it was a closed cockpit or an open cockpit. I don't think it was an open cockpit but … Apparently they said—I was earwigging there—they said it was a German plane that had been captured in North Africa, in the Middle East, and there was quite an interesting modification, or alterations on it from ….

One of the things I can recall it was been modified to make it look like an inline engine, the front end. How, whether it was a regular engine or what, it had been streamlined at the front end. And they were doing some, checking it out to see what … it seemed to take the eye of the RAF people. And I don't know whether the chap as he took off without fuel whether he'd get … but he'd … perhaps he ended up as a corporal or something or an LAC.

But, yeah, and of course after all the excitement it just fizzled out and it was fetched back. But I didn't know at the time it had come from Hixon. We just didn't know where it had come from but apparently it had come from Hixon. And I kept my souvenir for a bit with other things, you know, other collectibles, and where it went goodness only knows.

But it's strange, a lot of the small—it was a smallish plane, single engine—a lot of smaller planes had like a canvas or linen and rope on to stretch it out on the framework. This had got like a cardboard plastic. You know how the milk cartons are? They're like a, not the plastics ones, but the cardboard ones with the coating on.

S1: Yes. Like a wax …

S2: Like a waxing, yeah. Whether they first development of plastic or whatever, but it was quite tough. You could rip it once it had been started like that had. You could rip pieces off it. But it was a funny skin, that was, you know. Whether that was something as they wanted to look at particularly I don't know. Strange. I'd mentioned to one or two. Now whether anybody else, somebody like Les Deval or Les Martin, you know, whether they can remember it. I never spoke to them about it to be honest but now it's come up I'll probably ask Les.

S1: What colour was it? It wasn't camouflage painted or anything?

S2: Well it could have been. Well it was like a grey or dark colouring anyway. It wasn't a light colour.

S1: No.

S2: And I don't … it must have had the RAF roundels on it, you know, flying about there. But that was details we never looked particularly, you know. It just … it was a big event at the time really, you know.

S1: Yes. About how big would it be? Sort of how many paces would it have been?

S2: I would think about 20ft I should think or something like that. About the length of this room; probably 20ft I should think…

S1: Yes. Looking back it's hard to remember.

S2: … from one end to the other. But the belly seemed to be, a rounded belly then the fuselage tapered off up towards the tail plane. But it wasn't a big plane by any means.

S1: And did they come back the two RAF men?

S2: I can't recall them coming back, no. Once we'd got our souvenirs and you know, we …

S1: What that home guard fella do while you were …

S2: He did nothing, Harry did. He just stood there talking to the other people as had gathered round, you know. I mean, he was in charge of the plane …

S1: He didn't realise that the kiddies were taking it off.

S2: Well, I think he did but he …

There was nobody took off with it, so he'd probably done his job you know. But it was …

S1: Was he a local character?

S2: Harry was. He was Maureen Shipley's dad. Maureen Dicks's dad, aye. But I don't know whether Maureen would remember it, I don't think. I don't know whether she was born then. I don't know.

S3: She'd be a bit young then.

S2: A bit young then, I think, Maureen would be, yeah. But ay, I say, nothing official was ever put in … I don't think it was even in the local paper, The Rugeley Times.

S1: Right.

S3: They wouldn't have printed it, would they.

S2: Perhaps not during war time, perhaps no. But they wouldn't have much detail about it.

But as I say, the interesting thing to me was it was German plane, it was a German plane which they'd brought from Middle East somewhere and they were doing tests on it or whatever, examining it.

But why he took it off with no petrol, no fuel, I don't know. He'd look ?? [08:05] of '89.

S1: Thanks very much Nev.

# Colton History Society

## All Our Stories

Transcripts of villagers recollections of days gone by recorded as part of our All Our Stories Project 2013

# Frank & Olive Bollard

**WWII in London**

**Frank & Olive Bollard**

S1: Marion Vernon
S2: Gill Sykes
S3: Olive Bollard
S4: Frank Bollard

S1: This interview is being recorded for Colton History Society. Gill Sykes and Marion Vernon are interviewing Frank and Olive Ballard at their home, 20 High Street, on Friday, June 14th, 2013.

S2: Although Frank and Olive have lived in Colton for many years—in fact, we've just found out it's fifty …

S3: Seven.

S2: Fifty-seven years. They were not born here so you might wonder why we're actually interviewing them. Frank and Olive were born in London and we decided it would enhance our oral history project if we recorded their war-time experiences; two children growing up in the capital city through the Second World War. This will, we think, make a really interesting contrast to the experiences of the children of the small rural village of Colton.

We'll start with you Frank. Where and when were you born?

S4: In 1927 in Brownhill Road, Catford, Southeast London.

S2: And you Olive?

S3: I was born in 1933 at Lewisham Hospital. I was taken home to Catford. That's a mile or so away from Lewisham where Frank was born.

S2: So you were how old when war was declared then Frank?

S4: Twelve.

S2: And Olive?

S3: I was six.

S2: Six. Can you actually remember war being declared?

S4: Absolutely.

S2: What do you remember about it?

S4: We were in the choir and it was eleven o'clock.

S2: Which church was it?

S4: St. Mark's church, Lewisham, which is now, I think, demolished. And the siren went and that was the last time we were in the choir at St. Mark's church.

S3: You were sent home, weren't you?

S4: Well they expected that we would have an air raid straight away of course, but nothing happened for ages with the air raids. We just went home and that was it.

S1: So had there been air raid, had there been shelters prepared ready? Were people expecting the war to start?

S4: They'd issued us with gas marks about six months before and that's about all we had.

S1: Yes, and had they built shelters or anything like that?

S4: They had these Anderson shelters which most people hadn't got by then.

S1: Individual ones at each house or one a street?

S3: Andersons were the ones that were built in the gardens. You had a big hole and metal over the corrugated iron and then that was covered with earth, and people used to grow things on the top of them sometimes.

S1: Did they, yes. So did you have to dig the holes yourselves, the families, or did people come and erect them for you?

S4: They did both. We were given the whole thing to put together in our garden because other people didn't want them. So they were given free to these people.

S2: And did they give you the gas masks at school or were they handed out to you?

S4: Gas marks were issued about six months before the beginning of the war, at the local church room.

S1: Did some people not want them? Did everyone go and…?

S4: Obviously everybody went.

S2: And were you asked or told and did you have them with you all the time?

S3: At that stage we probably did, yes.

S4: In the beginning, I think we did. As things went on, when the real bombing was going on we did.

S1: And was it similar for you Olive?

S3: Well, we were issued with our gas masks obviously at the same time. I remember my mother having a young child, I suppose that was later on when Shirley was born, and they had one of these cot gas masks that went over… the baby was in a sort of enclosed tomb thing; it was pretty horrible.

S1: Gosh, yes.

S3: We had to practice at school wearing our gas masks but war for me, I don't remember the day war was declared but I'd started school at three and a half, nursery classes and so forth. So this was Sandhurst Road School—and the reason I'm telling you that because it's part of my history later. We were preparing for evacuation and I think we were evacuated just before war was declared, I'm not sure. But our preparation, we had a little garden attached to the school and we used to have to come to school with little knapsacks on our backs with basic things in them. You know, toiletries and a change of clothing and we had to practice in the gardens, in our classes. But if you had a sister that you had to look after, which I did, she was aged four in the nursery class. You had to practice walking round in twos. Round and round the garden with your knapsack on your back and your gas mask in front of you and your label with your name on the side.

S1: So you already had your labels?

S3: We were made ready to go so that on the day itself we were simply told to where you're going, I suppose. I don't remember. But I remember going down the Hither Green Station in our twos and my mother saying to me: 'Look after your sister'. Well, for a six-year-old to look after a four-year-old was a big responsibility. And I remember people lining the streets and waving goodbye to us and …

S1: What did it feel like …?

S3: Tremendous sadness, but it was not something that I was aware of at that stage as affecting me as deeply as it did, which I found out much later in life.

S1: And were people crying or were they all putting a brave face on?

S3: Some were, some were not. Lots of parents were sad. They were trying to put brave faces on, be good children and this sort of thing. But in a sense, corporately, because we were a class and a group it was a sort of adventure, I suppose, but scary. And we arrived down in the most stupid place, a little village near Rye, in Sussex.

S2: On the south coast.

S3: Near the south coast.

S2: Which for people who don't know, was probably equally if not more dangerous than London at that time.

S3: Well it became much more dangerous especially …

S4: Daylight raids.

S3: next year, next year when the threat of invasion was very close. So, anyway, we queued in the school room and we stood like good children in rows and people walked round and picked us out. And there was my sister and I, and a lady came and said I'll have those two and we were taken to the big house; we were very lucky.

The lady of the village in the big house had us. I don't remember much about living there except that on Sunday afternoons I was taken—I might tell you that my sister became ill quite shortly afterwards, quite seriously and had to go back to mother, she couldn't cope at four years old with the separation. So I was left on my own there and the big treat of the week for me was being taken by the gardener round what, to me, was enormous gardens and I remember the bluebell woods. And the bluebell woods—I'm quite emotional!—because they were very special. And after the walk round the bluebell woods, the gardener would take us up to the lady of the house and she would ask how our week had gone and she would toast crumpets.

S1: So were you the only one at this point or were there other children there as well?

S3: Oh other children at the school and so forth. I don't remember so much about the school, I don't remember much about the rest of that time. But because next year, the threat of invasion was so great and shelling and bombing was going on. I mean, not in the village at that time but my mother had decided unilaterally not waiting for the rest of the school to come back to London, to register us both at a school which was Brownhill Road School, which was nearer our house.

S2: This is back in London?

S3: Back in London. And they were about to be evacuated down to Cornwall so she actually brought me back and set me going to this school with my sister. And that's when I experienced my first experience of bombing.

S1: So what was happening to you in this period then Frank?

S4: Well, there was a, I can't say exactly how long, but there was a period of nothing, you know. We had no air activity over us at all until this certain day when they decided to bomb London. And a lot of aircraft went over, obviously German air craft and they were tending not to bomb Lewisham but they went on further up towards the city.

S1: Was this in the daylight?

S4: Daylight, yes. About four o'clock in the afternoon.

S1: So were you watching the planes go over?

S4: Yes. Yes, well they weren't dropping bombs.

S1: No, but you saw the planes.

S4: Yes, yes. And, the thing is that my father who was very clever, he had bags packed and he was working at the Co-Op at Catford, which was only two miles away, he came home and he immediately got hold of us and the bags that he'd had packed and set off for Shepperton to get out of London. And he knew exactly what was going to happen because no bombs were dropped in Shepperton, but London was heavily bombed you see.

S3: But you weren't in Shepperton long, were you.

S4: Well, for most of the naughty bits, you know.

S1: What was there? Was there a house there, or a hotel, or where did you stay in Shepperton?

S4: Well, we stayed with relatives.

S1: Oh, I see. You had somewhere to go.

S4: Oh yes. And obviously the relatives got a bit argumentative, you know, what it's like in the family.

S1: With too many people in the house.

S4: Yes.

S1: How many were there in your family then Frank?

S4: Four was it. But you see a lot of people left. My brother was in the army; one brother didn't come. He just stayed in London. He liked it.

S1: Was he older than you?

S4: Oh yes, I was the youngest.

S1: Yes, so he was at work was he, perhaps, the older one.

S4: He'd be at work, yes. So he stayed in London.

S3: What about Doris, your sister? There were five of you.

S4: Doris was …

S3: Was she called up?

S4: Called up into the women's air force. What was it called? WRAFs. So she was away anyway.

S1: So your father had to travel back to work, did he?

S4: Well my father worked for the Co-operative Society, a big Co-op in London, and he was giving out the dividend cheques. And he would be going round to all the Co-Ops, one by one, paying out this dividend. And he was at Catford but normally he worked in Woolwich, where the headquarters of the Co-Op was.

S2: Can you remember your feelings? Did you feel frightened?

S4: Not really, we hadn't experienced anything like it, had we?

S2: Were you even perhaps a little bit excited by seeing all the planes go over?

S4: We saw them go over, fortunately they went over and didn't drop. But, no, it was an unusual experience and my father came home and we went to this railway station. The railway had been bombed so we caught a bus to the Central London and we were able to get out to Shepperton from Central London and we arrived there at about 3:00 in the morning.

S1: Oh gosh! How far is it then Shepperton?

S4: Oh, not far at all, just about 15 miles.

S1: Yes.

S4: But it's enough to be away from central London, you see.

S1: How long would you have stayed down there then?

S4: Six months, something like that.

S1: I was just wondering how your father got to work from there.

S4: My father had to stay in London.

S1: Oh he didn't come with you.

S4: No.

S1: Oh, I understand.

S4: He came with us to take us and then he went back and poor man was at Woolwich in the thick of it.

S3: Because Woolwich Arsenal was nearby?

S2: Exactly.

S4: Yes he had a nasty war.

S3: But then you came back didn't you and started at the technical college.

S4: We came back when the bombing had virtually finished. You might have just one or two nights of heavy bombing.

S3: But you were there when the Lewisham raid was on, weren't you?

S4: We decided to go to the Chislehurst Caves.

S3: Oh yes.

S4: And it was completely bombproof so you didn't worry. As long as you could get there by train.

S2: Can I ask what Chislehurst Caves were?

S3: Oh gosh! Well, they are underground caves and it was like a little town down there. You had…we went down at one stage in the war, and I can't remember which stage. I don't know quite how many miles away Chislehurst is but you could get the train from Hither Green Station.

S4: I think it was eight. It was eight to Battersea power station and it was eight to Chislehurst.

S3: Yes. And you could get the train down and people had, well our family had, their own family bunks, and you reserved them. So you had two bunks and you'd all cram in and you'd have little curtains for a bit of privacy. But there were things like hairdressers and a medical centre and, what else?

S4: Shops.

S1: Were there toilets down there?

S3: Oh yeah, there had to be. I can't remember the state of them but obviously, I mean you didn't wash down there, did you. There was nowhere to wash, was there?

S4: Towards the end they made some lovely washing facilities but nobody ever used them 'cause it was cold water.

S3: Yes. Yes.

S4: And people went home unwashed.

S3: It was very damp and very smelly and all your bedding and things were damp, weren't they, yeah. But you felt safe down there.

S2: Were there hundreds of people down there?

S3: Oh gosh, yes.

S4: Thousands at least.

S3: I mean the caves go on for quite a long way and … yeah, it was very busy but you had your own private little, your little home was the two bunks that you had.

S2: So you decided, your mother and father decided to take you there obviously for safety.

S3: Yeah. I don't think my father, my father was on civil defence—he had a squint so he couldn't be called up.

S4: And your mother never came, did she.

S3: Oh mother took us.

S4: Did she?

S3: Oh yes!

S2: What was your father doing, what sort of things in civil defence.

S3: In civil defence? Oh well, he was digging out people who had been bombed. Early in the bombing he had to dig out my God Mother.

S2: Goodness me, yeah.

S3: So I never knew her.

S2: Was this besides his work or was he doing it as well?

S3: It was his job. That was his main job. Before the war they'd been on, he'd been unemployed and on means test, which he recounted afterwards to me was the most humiliating thing in his life. He had to go and stand in front of a panel of people and explain why he couldn't support his family. And in fact he'd been a hotel porter and when he got married he was sacked. They weren't allowed to be married.

S2: 'Cause he was married.

S2: So he was going in around areas after the bombing and …

S3: After the bombing, yes.

S2: …and getting people out of houses and rescuing them.

S3: Yes. Yes. Later in the war, which I'll tell you about this particular episode. He had a terrible experience which my mother said he never forgot. I mean this is much later in the war—do you want to know about that now?

S2: Yes, that's fine, yes.

S3: Well, we went down to Cornwall and we were evacuated safely and then, with my sister, but I became ill with a paralysis in my face, bells palsy. And there was no possible treatment in the little village at Gunnislake so I had to move to Tavistock where I could go for this electrical treatment everyday. Which now would be considered child abuse, I'm sure! Terrible experience, but I was living with the gardener. And then my sis … we used to go on the gardener's motorbike and sidecar out to visit my sister, to Gunnislake, every Sunday and she and I would go to a little Sunday School in a little chapel with a corrugated-iron roof, and many, many years later—probably half a century later—we actually went down to Gunnislake and there was still the little tin chapel with its iron roof. Standing, not any longer in use. During this time my mother had another baby and in those, in that time of bombing they didn't let pregnant women stay in London and she had to come down to what was the workhouse and had the baby there. And it was a very harsh regime. They had while they were there to scrub floors and things like that.

S1: Was that near to you down in Cornwall?

S3: It was in Tavistock. It was outside Tavistock as a workhouse would be. And then my mother actually, my sisters, my younger sister was evacuated to a farm. There were three of us by then, and then this was the fourth baby. And at one time my mother, I think probably after the baby, stayed at this farm with my younger sister. And then got a little cottage on the moors which she could rent very cheaply and had us all there.

S2: Oh how wonderful.

S3: But my mother was not a rural housewife. We had to pump her water, chop her wood for fire, and walk about half a mile or more for milk. We actually were sent over the moors, the two of us, once, Irene and I—that is the one who is 18 months younger than me—and arrived at school like little drowned rats because it was such a long walk. I don't think we ever went to that school again. But I'd had a year in Tavistock with the treatment and going … They said 'do you want to go to school' and I said 'of course I do'. But because the bells palsy has such a bad effect on your face they thought I might not want to go because of the children taking the mickey. Which, of course, they did. I was an isolated child then.

But anyway, my mother gave up the cottage when she found an adder in the woodpile. And a snake in the woodpile she could not cope with so we went back to our foster homes and she went back to London.

S2: Did she take the baby back with her to London?

S3: Yes. But I think at one stage then we all went back to London for a short period and we went back to Brownhill Road School. Now dates are very confused in my mind.

S1: I'm sure they would be.

S3: With all this coming and going and so forth. But you will know the date the history books of what was called the 'Sandhurst Road bombing'. Now Sandhurst Road was the school that I'd originally joined and had gone for three/four years with the evacuation. But I was now at Brownhill Road School and food was short, it was getting very short, but we always had a school lunch. And you went, and particularly for the people who'd been bombed out, there were what they called 'feeding centres' and we had our school lunches down there. So, well it was the main meal for us of the day because there just wasn't much with the rations.

And that day it meant crossing Brownhill Road and walking down a side road to get to Placey Road School. So you had these three schools, Placey Road, Brownhill Road and Sandhurst Road. And apparently the Germans had got a message that these schools were hiding something to do with the war. Now in fact Monty, I think was his planning team hiding in St. Paul's School in the centre of London and they had got the message that this was going in one of these. So they sent a daylight raid in the quiet period on those three schools.

S1: Oh gosh.

S2: Goodness me.

S3: And we were going down to lunch at that feeding centre, Irene and I, and we came out of school and my mother met us and said don't go down to lunch today, we'll, um, 'come home, I've got something nice prepared for you'. She'd managed to get something, I don't know what.

As we, we had to cross on a Belisha beacon crossing and as we were crossing the siren went. And we hadn't heard a siren for a long time, so we rushed back because there were street shelters built all round in London in those days. And there was a double street shelter there. When we got there it was locked.

S4: To keep people out!

S3: They'd been vandalism, as you know, empty places for a long, quiet time. So we crossed over and there were some shops here and there was a sweet shop; big plate-glass windows. And my mother rushed with, she'd got the baby in the pram—this was little Shirley who was probably about 18 months or two, I'm not quite sure—and Irene and I; I don't remember Phyllis being with us, she'd perhaps stayed at home.We went into the shop and the lady's name was Mrs Pauline. She said, 'you can't stay in here'. Because, you know, the sweet shops in those days were full of glass jars and she said if the bomb lands the blast will bring all this glass down, you must go. So we came out, turned the corner and there was a wall there into this parallel road and we stood by that wall because we heard the plane coming and we looked up and this very, very low plane almost touching the rooftops came across and as I looked up the German pilot was looking down at me. And we learnt later that he went on and machine gunned people in the park, in Ladywell and so on. He didn't machine gun us, he just looked down on us.

We were so terrified that we tried to go back round the corner and as we turned the corner, the bomb had dropped, well there was three bombs, but one of them, the blast caused the whole of the sweet shop's window to fall out at the feet of my sister in her pushchair and not a bit of glass touched her. Which was an absolute miracle.

But what had happened was, the bomb intended for Brownhill Road he'd dropped too soon and it hit a house two roads away. The one intended for Placey road feeding centre had dropped on the road where we would have been walking. And the Sandhurst Road bombing was a direct hit and all the children were in the dining room. They'd been told to get under the tables when they heard the siren and the plane. And a huge number of children and staff were killed. A lot of them were blinded by dust and things. And my father was on civil defence duty digging those children out for three days and three nights and watching his friends come and identify their children.

S2: Goodness me.

S3: And my mother said afterwards he never got over that. He died at the age of 52. He had a heart attack. He never, ever got over that.

S2: What an experience.

S4: I was in school at that same time. It was on top of a very high hill, called Hilly Fields, and this school could be seen from miles around and they didn't come over to us.

S3: They weren't after that one, you see.

S4: So we had the teachers coming down saying 'oh, they're over there, they've shot the balloons down'. The barrage balloons, to keep the, stop the planes coming down and doing exactly what they were doing.

S3: But for young children the earlier part of the war was an experience and sometimes excitement. In that period between coming back from being evacuated down to Cornwall we'd have to go down into the Anderson shelter, in the garden. And I can remember a raid and looking up and seeing fireworks, you see. Which was, you know, exciting. My dad was saying 'come in, come in' because shrapnel and we were wanting to go to the door and see all the fireworks. Because at that point we didn't appreciate what was going on.

S2: And what about your food situation then Frank, was it very similar?

S4: Very similar, yes. Rationing was pretty tight, and I think what we did, you could get chicken food and keep chickens and this way you would get ten times as many eggs as you would if you relied on the shops. You might get one egg in a month! Whereas if you had chickens in the garden you had three or four eggs a week when they were laying.

S3: You had to be organised and you had to, I mean the people who lived next to us, he was a gardener and he would go out … we had deliveries of milk in horse and cart, and he would always follow the horse up the road with a bucket and spade to get the manure. And he had a good garden and grew food. But my parents were not organised, just coping with four children completely threw my mother, which always washing and things like that. It was dreadful.

S2: You were really relying on those rations.

S1: Was she perhaps not very well? Did you think?

S3: Well I think that, well, I mean what is there. Sort of every two years a baby came along, it was only 18 months between Irene and myself. No, that's not quite true. There was a four-year gap between number three and number four, which was the beginning of the war and all that unsettlement. But shortly after, I mean two years after Shirley was born a little boy was born and he had a tumour in his neck and died at six weeks. So, and that was a big upset to my father because it was his first boy, and that was very sad.

S2: I mean, they'd be thousands of people injured as well as those that died. I mean, if you needed medical treatment in London at that time, how difficult or easy was it to get it?

S3: I don't know.

S4: We had hospitals and …

S3: Lewisham hospital was still going.

S4: There was, but nobody suffered.

S2: Presumably they would be taking in a lot of the wounded, wouldn't they.

S4: Yes, and the hospitals would be out further, they would have some at Chislehurst and places like that. Nobody ever was lying there wanting, you know what I mean. They were always dealt with immediately.

S2: Which is incredible really when you think of what was going, isn't it.

S4: Absolutely, yes.

S1: Was there public transport running at the time?

S4: Absolutely, yes. It ran as much as it was allowed to. [Laughs]

S1: I mean a lot of the men had been called up, hadn't they, so were the women starting to drive and take the buses round and things like that.

S4: They'd have been on the trams and buses. And 'Clippies' they called them, didn't they?

S1: Conductors was that?

S4: Yes, that's right.

S3: But food wise we were very short in the house. I mean you had a small amount of butter; you had ration books of course. But the children, the babies, had green ration books and they were allowed some concentrated orange juice in bottles and dried baby milk of course. And we used to love those. But at a certain stage in the war, when I was evacuated, the babies had cod liver oil as well. They all had an issue of cod liver oil, didn't they?

S4: Uh hm.

S3: Horrible stuff, it stank! And… what was I thinking of? Oh golly.

S1: Food.

S3: Yes. I mean the banana state, well of course we couldn't get bananas in the war and when later after the war bananas began to be available you could get them on the green ration book, so my mother would send me out with the green ration book to queue up for a couple of bananas. Yes.

S1: So did you have to queue for a long time?

S3: Oh yes. You'd queue up. You had quite long queues for that sort of thing 'cause that was very special. But the basic food was tough too. And I can actually remember porridge. We used to obviously have porridge in the mornings when we could, but my father used to make bread and milk, and that was quite a luxury 'cause he'd got a good way with it, you know. Bread, milk and sugar. But I can remember at least once having to have bread and hot water and salt and pepper because …

S2: Couldn't get the sugar.

S3: Well, there was no sugar and no milk. You know.

S1: Was that your breakfast?

S3: Yes, that was breakfast. Yeah. And of course no sweets. And when we eventually got sweets, after the war, my sister got such a passion—this is the sister that lives now Denmark—she has never lost her passion for sweets. And I've never lost my passion for bananas!

S4: Regarding milk delivery, it's quite amazing that I don't think a day went by when you didn't have your milkman come. And when they bombed the bottling places and smashed all the bottles, you'd have a tin. A tin left. You know.

S3: Of condensed milk.

S4: Of condensed milk.

S3: Condensed milk. We used quite a lot of condensed milk in the war.

S4: We were never short of that.

S3: I think you could buy dried…

S4: You know, however bad the blitz was they still delivered the next day.

S3: You could buy dried milk couldn't you?

S4: Oh yes, we had dried milk.

S3: Not just the baby milk. We had dried milk.

S4: From America. I think we had stuff coming in.

S3: Yeah.

S2: And had you got many bombed houses around where you were living Frank, or were they further into London? What was it like in the area that you were?

S4: Where we were, there were just one or two places within perhaps a quarter of a mile. In other words, it wasn't that bad.

S3: Was St. Mark's at the top of the road was bombed, wasn't it?

S4: I'm not sure. We had a bomb dropped, there was a massive number of roads all coming into one and a bomb dropped into the middle of that. Made a *massive* hole! [Laughs]

S3: I lived in Angas Road and a bomb dropped on the house next door, not when I was there. It didn't explode. It just went straight through and took the house down and sat in the cellar. And of course that happened quite a bit, and they had a squad that would come and, of course, you had to evacuate when they were defusing the bomb and taking it out. But then at one stage they started dropping landmines.

S4: Oh yes, they were terrible.

S3: And they dropped a landmine at Angus Road and that wiped out, oh it must have been … you remember that bomb site at the top, don't you, because we used to go courting on it.

[Laughter]

S4: That's right. I remember us creeping by Olive's house and they were calling 'Olive, Olive' and we went right past to the top of the hill and we sat in in this place and had fish and chips.

S3: Well that was post-war, wasn't it.

S4: Oh yes, that's after, yes. But there were still gaps, you know.

S3: I can remember going up the road past this crater and seeing rats …

S4: Oh dear!

S3: …coming, you know, from under. And of course when they did that sort of thing it would affect your gas supplies and your water supplies and all that sort of thing. Which made life so impossible for a mother trying to do all the family's washing and that.

S1: How could people cope, Olive? Was there a lot of camaraderie, were people helping each other out?

S3: Yes. Yes.

S1: Yes. People didn't shut themselves away, they helped each other out.

S3: Well, I mean, my mother had lodgers to help… I mean financially it was a terrible struggle to cope, so she took in lodgers. And there was a lot of TB around because people were huddled in these shelters together, and in caves and places like that. And of course it's very infectious. And so Frank's brother got TB and died of it.

S4: He died, yes.

S3: And this man …

S4: He must have been weak, he had pneumonia when he was a young boy, and he got TB and died.

S3: And our lodger died of this, this TB while he was living with us and I know a neighbour took us children in when he died until, you know, he'd gone.

S2: Where did the lodgers come from? Were they people who'd been bombed out of their houses?

S3: Yeah, well Frank's family took in a boy who'd lost … what was his name?

S4: Yes, one Wednesday afternoon there was a massive bombing of Lewisham, and this boy's mother and daughter were killed in an air raid shelter …

S3: His sister, dear, not his daughter.

S4: [Laughs] His sister, that's right. And he stayed with us for six months at least, I think, until he was called up.

S1: Did you know him before?

S4: I think my brother knew, he was at school, you know.

S1: Yes. Oh that was kind.

S3: Yes, people helped out, didn't they. I remember one, you see there was a quiet period when we all came back to London and then towards the end of the war when the V1s started, we went to the street shelter. We had Morrison shelters indoors and they were pretty horrible things; huge. I mean take up half this room with a very heavy metal tops and a grid, metal grids down the side and metal bottoms. And the idea was that you slept in those or went in them during a raid. So you'd put your bedding in and you'd all, all of us children would cram in there to sleep if a raid was likely. But also you would go to the street shelters. And I remember V1 raid where I was asleep on a, they had bunks in them, I was asleep. And I dreamt that Goebbels was making a speech and it was so violent and I was so horrified, and I was sort of obviously having a nightmare and my mother had her arm around me and said, 'don't worry dear, it's alright, it's alright'. It stopped. And we knew that if this V1 stopped overhead you were safe because it floated on and killed somebody else.

S2: They made noises?

S3: Oh yes, pap-pap-pap-pap-pap-pap. Wasn't it. A phap-phap-phap noise. Can you remember?

S4: I suppose so.

S3: Yes, yeah. And once that cut out, the engine cut out, then this V1 went. But then …we took the V1s remarkably calmly generally. Was it a V1 that hit Lewisham Market that you heard coming?

S4: Well, I was out , finished nightshift, came home, was trying to sleep on the sofa in the front room and I heard this noise, and it was the noise of a doodle-bug. And I shot through…

S2: Was a doodle-bug a V1?

S3: A V1, umm.

S4: A V1. I shot through the house and dived into the air raid shelter, and just as I was diving I saw it go by; it missed the roof two doors further away, but it then it dropped down in Lewisham Market and killed 200 people.

S3: And then you went past and saw them didn't you?

S4: The dog was late, he caught the glass [laughs].

S3: He survived.

S4: He was slow. [Laughs]

S1: So you'd started to work by then, had you?

S4: Oh, I was at work yes.

S3: You started at 17 did you, 'cause you'd gone to the technical college.

S4: At 17 that's right. Technical college. I was put into Battersea power station and I used to peddle from Battersea power station to Lewisham and Lewisham to the caves. Eight miles each, and we did this every day so I was doing 32 miles cycling. That why I'm so tough now.

S2: Was Battersea power station the target?

S4: That's right. Oh no, it wasn't ...

S3: A V1 came through the stacks, didn't it?

S4: They weren't aiming at it. It accidental, one or two little bombs, you know.

S3: 'Cause there were fire bombs as well.

S4: If they were aiming, if they were aiming they would have it, you know, because it was a very big place.

S2: You mentioned firebombs, how did that effect places? Was there are fire storm or …?

S3: Well you had, lots of people had …

S4: They had incendiary bomb attacks.

S3: They had fire wardens with stirrup pumps and sand, and I suppose we all kept … did we all have sand to put out a fire bomb?

S4: We did.

S3: Yes, I thought we did; buckets of sand.

S4: But I think when they were needed we weren't there.

[Laughter]

We'd gone!

S3: I mean it was, it was chance. And I mean a lot of people said oh I'll take my chances, if it's got my number on it. And in fact that happened to your aunt, didn't it?

S4: Umm?

S3: One of your aunts wouldn't go down to the caves and got killed.

S4: Hm.

S1: Going back to the street shelter, sorry, you said that in Chislehurst you had your own two bunks that made you feel safe.

S3: Yes, yes.

S1: If you just went into a street shelter …

S3: No you didn't …

S1: …there were bunks there but …

S3: There were bunks but you didn't have your own, no.

S1: So hygiene-wise and fleas?

S3: Oh, it was fleas, we all …

S4: There were no toilets or anything.

S3: … we all had fleas and … yeah. This, the humiliation of being a child in the blitz and in the bombing was *horrendous.* So you had, I mean my poor mother was constantly pouring horrible stuff on our hair and combing them with nit combs and things.

But we also, there was another terrible thing called scabies, which is insects which get under your skin, and we once got scabies. And that remains the most horrendous memory of my life. Because you had clinics with a nurse in and you had to go down and they put you in a scalding-hot bath, really scalding hot, obviously to open up all your pores, and then you would stand on some sort of stand—I can't remember exactly—stark naked with your legs apart, you know naked, and you were painted all over with some kind of disinfectant, I don't know what. For a young pre-puberty girl most horrible embarrassing experience.

S2: I can imagine.

S4: Those nurses were terrible. I could hear the kids screaming, you know, they had no … they weren't gentle.

S1: But in those shelters, I was just thinking was there any camaraderie down there? Did people sing together? Did you have games?

S3: Oh well, in the street shelters not so much because it was very much a crisis thing. You know, it was 'are we going to get through this night' really, and what are we going to find when we come out.

S4: Yet the caves were a completely different thing.

S3: The caves were different; that was a life …

S4: I helped the electrician there. I did a lot of work with the electrician putting electric lighting throughout the whole caves.

S3: A few years back we did a sentimental journey and rang them up and they took us on a private pre-tour tour to see some of the places where we'd, well…

S1: Is it still open to the public now?

S3: Yes.

S4: Absolutely, yes.

S3: Yes, it's a sort of historical site now.

S4: Once I came out of the caves, there had been a power cut and it's very dark when there's no power, and I managed to get out of the caves.

S1: Because you knew it so well.

S4: How I did it I don't know. I think there was one lamp and once I got to there, there was a very long thing and you could see the light way ahead and I went for that.

S3: It was probably an emergency light of some sort.

S1: Did people not have torches and so on then?

S4: Well we should have had but we didn't! I didn't think about it.

S3: Probably batteries were quite short you see.

S1: And I imagine you weren't allowed to use torches much with the light, you know, having to be very dark, wern'tt you, inside the cave. But going out …

S3: Oh outside you had torches which you had to put like a paper over, didn't you. Do you remember you used to cover them with coloured paper and …

S4: Yes, you produced the light and then you got rid of the light by …

S1: Yes.

S3: Yes. Yes. There was that.

S1: Were people smoking down there too?

S3: Oh yes, everybody smoked. Well, I mean all the films were full of this. If you got to a cinema but … and I mean cinema was an escape if you could get to it.

When, if I go on with my bit, after the V1s got intense, then they started with the V2s and a V2 you didn't have any warning. You didn't have the phap-phap. There was this terrible explosion and really immense damage they did, didn't they. Terrible rockets.

S4: Um. Not many of them. Sometimes just one a week. Sometimes two a week.

S3: But it was a terrible experience because you had no air raid warning, nothing.

So one day my mother said to me, I was ten—1944, that would be around right wouldn't it—coming up to be 11 you see. And I'd been at school, although we'd missed bits of school, I'd missed bits of school here and there, nevertheless I'd had enough schooling for them to know I was going to get the scholarship. In those days you all went to a secondary school if you didn't get the scholarship, and if you got one you went to a grammar school; and they knew I'd get it. So my mother actually, you had to pay otherwise to go to a grammar school. My mother enrolled me at the Roan School for Girls and paid for me in the summer term to go, knowing that I'd get the scholarship. And she said to me one day: 'Olive, we've got you through the war this far we're not going to lose you in one of these stupid V2s.' And I didn't want to go, I wanted to stay at home. I was fed up with being evacuated. But she said, no, you're going to this school.

And so she put me on a train, all by myself, and sent me to Ammanford in Wales, where the Roan School had a department that was evacuated to. And that was another part of my life. Another foster home, which was harsh. I was met by a member of staff and taken to this gardener, again, of Ammanford Park and they were an old couple, they'd had evacuees earlier in the war and they didn't want any more. So they used to keep me shut out of the house in the evening until nine o'clock or some late time like that.

S2: Just in the garden?

S3: In that park, which it was adjacent to the park

S2: Yes.

S3: And, I mean I'd play, you know, with people and other school members there and … But I'd have to stay outside until really late and when I came in there was a window seat and I had to sit there, and that was it. I mean they fed me, they did what was necessary. But a concerned music teacher at the school, I'd started piano … well, I don't think I'd started piano lessons with her then. But quite early on two members of staff found out what was going on and came with a little wooden cart and put all my things on it and moved me to another home. Which was the home of the coal merchant and his wife, who had no children and were wonderful to me. But the things I remember when I went to that house, she was a very proud housewife. Of course there was a front parlour that you didn't use except for visitors. And the coal merchant would come home and have a bath in a tin bath in the kitchen before supper. And I mean that is a vivid place.

But when I first went there I had a bath … and every time I had a bath, I think it was once a week there was a new bar of soap. And of course in London soap was so precious, and in a big family you never, ever saw a new bar of soap. And in the corner she had a huge bag, you know, a hundred-weight sack of flour, which she made her own bread and things like that. She was a really organised housewife. And this is where my London experiences and my Welsh experiences clashed. I was old enough at 11, well I was 11 in the July, to realise that when Mrs Owen sent me out with a covered basket empty to certain places and I came back with a chicken and eggs for the Sunday lunch, they got an extra bag of coal didn't they. And I was so cross because I knew how people in London were starving, really, and it made me very socialist for the rest of my life!

S2: That age you …

S3: That age you are impressionable and you knew that your mother couldn't feed your sisters properly and how much problem there was in getting food there. And chicken for us in London was, you know, the Christmas lunch.

S2: Unless, as Frank said, you had them in …

S3: Unless you were organised and had them, yes.

S2: And going back to you Frank. Cycling around backwards and forwards to Battersea power station. I mean, you must have been seeing an awful lot of damage and things like that.

S3: Well, you passed the Lewisham bombing, didn't you, and legs all over the place.

S4: A lot of it would be in the country. You see Chislehurst to London, they would, half the journey towards London would be just in countryside; no bombing at all.

S2: What about when you got into London? I mean what sort of sights … I mean what was it like? What did it look like?

S4: Um, a number of times we've had the doodle-bugs coming over while I'm cycling [Laughs]. But others you just kept your head down. I remember once I was coming home and I was coming under a railway bridge in Lewisham and this

doodle-bug was right on top of us somewhere, and in fact it dropped just a 100 yards along the railway. And I was under the bridge and 100 yards away it dropped on a cinema, you know. But it's one of those things.

S3: There were some horrible stories and you didn't …

S4: It's just a matter of luck, you know.

S3: You didn't hear, you know, the propaganda wouldn't tell you of these awful stories of… I mean there was one, people used to shelter in the underground and there was one underground that was bombed, wasn't there.

S4: And I think more damage was done by panic at one of the entrances, do you remember? Where they, hundreds of people were…

S2: Trying to get in.

S4: Getting in and a lot were injured.

S3: Crushed?

S4: Panic sets in.

S2: You two were young, but I mean it's hard to … probably say, asking about state of mind really of people. I mean these were horrific experiences, weren't they, for everybody. How were people coping.

S3: I think they made you very nervous. Oh, I think a lot of people had breakdowns and things but you … I mean it just, I think you know, when I think of my mother coping how she got through it I just don't know.
And people internalised. Because you had to be brave to help other people. People like my father, you see, would have all gone and he never seemed stressed until the end of his life. And then he got stressed just before he had his heart attack.

S1: Do you think, Olive, that people hoped it was going to end all the time, or did they just get so used to it, it seemed as if it was interminable?

S3: Well it was your life. I mean children just except what life hits them with.

S1: Yes. And that was just what life was like.

S3: That's life, yes. I mean you … I'm sure adults hope, you know, followed the news and hoped it was going to end, but I mean children go from week to week, don't they. You go to your school lessons and in Wales we'd go to the cinema in the afternoons, on Saturday afternoons. We'd go at least once a week on Saturday afternoons to the cinema. Once you were in the country you'd go swimming in the river …

S2: So you'd left it behind.

S1: You left it behind you then.

S3: Yeah. I mean you had but from Ammanford you could see, oh, the bright lights of Swansea being bombed for instance, or Camarthan, I can't remember which big town it was. One of my huge memories, though, was the Victory in Europe day because Ammanford has this central park and it had a bandstand in the middle. And we all gathered in the park and as it got dark the mountains all around Ammanford had these beacon bonfires lit all night. So that was magic. And the MP, I remember Mrs Owen saying, 'that's Mr (can't remember his name now), our MP' who came to talk to Ammanford, you know.

S2: And where were you on that day, Frank? Can you remember?

S4: I wouldn't remember, no.

S2: No.

S4: Probably at Battersea power station.

S2: Working.

S4: Or between Battersea power station and the caves or something.

[Laughter]

S3: We came home for VJ day, and another baby was born actually on VJ, on VJ period. And my brother was named David Victor Gilbert. And so I remember the street parties. I don't remember much in the way of celebrations in Ammanford apart form that, the mountains. But I do remember the street parties in London for VJ day. And that was …

S2: Can you remember those as well Frank?

S4: Yes, I remember peddling out and standing there. We didn't have one in our road, but some other roads were more friendly, you know, and I just stood there and watched for half an hour.

S3: Well you were a big boy then, weren't you, you see.

S4: That's right.

S1: He'd be working wouldn't he.

S3: Yeah, exactly. Yes. Whereas I was 12 I suppose for VJ day.

S2: That seems to be a …

S1: So in London did people have any entertainment? Just one extra thing came to me. You were talking about going the cinema when you were in Wales and so on, did London people go out to the cinema and things much?

S3: Well certainly in the centre of London they were, I mean there was a famous period, Harriet Cohen, wasn't she, kept playing, giving recitals. There were one or two people who were in the centre of London. And there were nightclubs that stayed open particularly for the forces and things.

S1: Yes, they did yes.

S2: For people trying to enjoy themselves.

S3: Yes. And I'm sure we must have had some cinemas.

S4: I remember going to the Gaumont and it came up on the screen 'Air Raid', you know, and I left!

S3: Yes, they evacuated if there was an air raid warning, yes.

S2: Well thank you. That's a good place to end, isn't it? It's been a fascinating interview, and what a contrast.

S1: Indeed. It's totally different to people just living in the country.

S4: Really.

S3: Well yes, this is what I found when I was in Wales.

S2: Yes, that's lovely.

S1: Different wars.

S2: Well thank you both very much.

# Colton History Society

## All Our Stories Project 2013

Colton Windmill by Thomas Peploe Wood

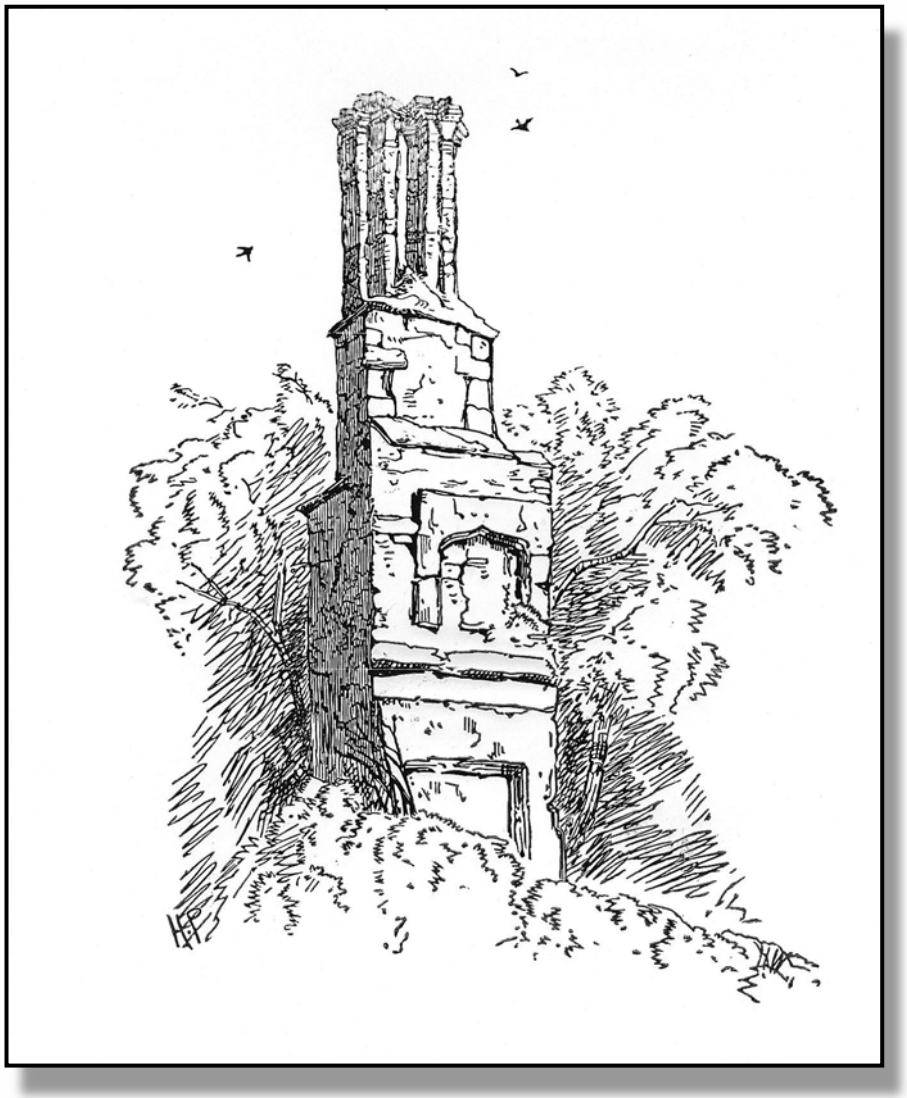
# Colton History Society

## All Our Stories Project 2013

St Mary's Church & Tithe Barn

# Colton History Society

## All Our Stories Project 2013



Little Hay Manor House Chimneys