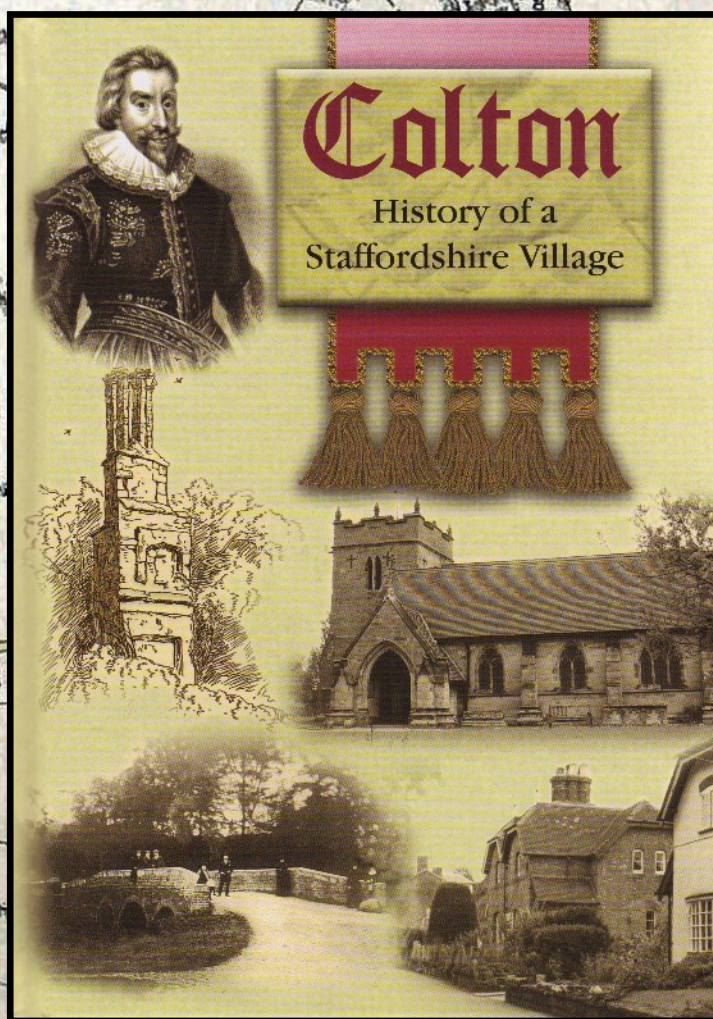


All Our Stories

Volume I

Jack Brown, David Bradbury, Lyn Collins

Hilda & Keith Williscroft



Heritage Lottery Fund
All Our Stories Project
Supporting
Colton History Society

LOTTERY FUNDED

Colton History Society

All Our Stories

Volume I

Jack Brown

David Bradbury

Lynn Collins

Hilda & Keith Williscroft



12" Black & White T.V.



Singer Treadle Sewing Machine



Girls Skipping



Lyn's 1st Milk Float



Lyn's Electric Milk Float



Outside Toilet



Dolly Tub & Posser
for washing clothes



St Mary's Church
Colton



Oil Lamp

Colton History Society

All Our Stories



Jack Brown's story

Jack Brown

S1: Marion Vernon

S2: Jack Brown

S3: George Vernon

S1: This recording is being made for Colton History Society on Monday, 11th February 2013. George and Marion Vernon are interviewing Jack Brown in his home at The Cottage, 2 Heath Way, Colton at the corner of Heath Way and High Street.

Right then Jack, do you want to just tell us a little bit about your family and where you were born and when. What year were you born in?

S2: I was born on 25th September 1927 and I was born at 26 Doddington, Whitchurch, Shropshire and the bells were ringing for church as I was being born. So I've always had that lovely ringing in my ears!

S1: Yes.

S2: I'm one of four more sisters.

S1: You've got four ...

S2: Mary, Francis, Elsie and Helen.

S1: And where did you come in the family?

S2: I came in the fourth. Then the next one was Billy, who unfortunately died because we all had whooping Cough at the same time and Billy was only a baby and he seriously upset his innards and died in my mother's arms on the way to Shrewsbury Hospital.

S1: Really. Was there quite an epidemic at that time then?

S2: Everybody had everything.

S1: Yes. How old would you have been at the time?

S2: Two. So I don't really remember it.

S1: No. How sad for the family. Did a lot of children die from whooping Cough?

S2: It was sad because mother said that I'd lost a brother.

S1: Yes. Yes.

S2: So girls were not on my menu for quite a long time.

S1: No. So when people got the whooping cough what happened? Did they used to just call the doctor straight away or how did it work?

S2: I think basically we had to look after ourselves. I know that when I had coughs and sore throats and things, mother would take me across the road to Dr McCarter's and I used to have raspberry vinegar,

which was lovely until I got a bit older and he gave me some stuff that was putrid! And do you know I think it did me much more good to take it outside by the drain.

S1: I bet it did!

[Laughter]

Is that what you used to do?

S2: Oh I did! I said to mother, I said 'Just in case I don't feel very well I'll take it out there' and I poured it into the spoon and tipped it down by the drain, next to the privy.

S1: Looking back to your childhood, Jack, do you think the winters were harder in those days or were they just the same as they are now?

S2: The winters in the 1940s were certainly colder because we were able to slide on the canal. We had a basin end at Whitchurch but at that time it was no longer used for commercial use so it just froze solid in the winter and we could ...

S1: And you used to go and play on there.

S2: Well somebody would create a nice slide and you went out and you had your working shoes on. You had two pairs of shoes: one for Sunday best and one for going to school in etcetera. And I know that our socks were always darned so there wasn't really much life in the socks, so we ended up with very cold feet to the extent we got chilblains. And then we sat with our feet in water and permanganate of potash. So we ended up with red feet.

S1: Really? That's how you treated those.

S2: Yes, we were a very poor family. My dad used to sometimes toss up as to whether we'd have a loaf of bread or he'd have a pint of beer.

S1: Really. And which usually won?

S2: Well it didn't always come right the first time. Put it that way.

S1: Right. Yes. So what do you remember wearing in the winters as a child?

S2: Not a lot. Never, ever wore anything but shorts. There weren't any long trousers about for boys so you always wore shorts.

S1: And the girls didn't wear trousers anyway.

S2: No they didn't. No. I think they had flannelette petticoats and things like that, but not for me. But we must have managed.

S1: What would you have worn, just a shirt and vest?

S2: A shirt and a pullover.

S1: No vest?

S2: And a coat. Oh no, the vest, I don't think it had been invented. And your shorts were lined so you didn't wear underpants, you just wore lined shorts. And as I say, it must have been pretty cold but we managed.

S3: Did you keep the same clothes on all week?

S2: Oh yes.

S3: Just one set of clothes?

S2: One set of clothes. And then on the Saturday we all had a bath. And the tin bath came out, put by the fire and boiler was just inside of the range, so the hot water came out of that. And I always volunteered to be the last one to have a bath because then I had the most water.

S1: Because they kept filling a little bit up each time.

S2: Well it were one and a half inches by the time I had my bath. But then, of course, it had all the scum from the others.

S1: Yes.

S2: But we used carbolic soap, so can you get an idea of what the smell would be like.

S1: What about your hair? Would that have been washed?

S2: Oh I think that was all washed at the same time.

S1: Just with carbolic soap?

S2: Yes, we didn't have any of the fancy stuff. No. No. And one thing I always remember was we had a fireguard, which of course had sort of almost diamond bits on, but we used to put our bums to the fireguard and rub from the back and it felt funny.

[Laughter]

S1: So the girls all had their baths first and then you went in.

S2: That's right.

S1: You were very gentlemanly like then.

S2: Mary, Francis, Elsie and that was before Helen arrived.

S1: Yes.

S2: So I was the last.

S1: Yes. Right.

S2: We could have had more water because in the third room down in our house there was a boiler but you had to use coal to heat it and money was always extremely tight so we didn't have that luxury.

S1: Did your dad or mum actually have any paid employment then, Jack?

S2: Any what?

S1: Paid employment. Did they work?

S2: My dad worked for WH Smiths, the founders, iron founders. At first he was the person who went out erected Dutch barns but then later on he became the furnace man and dresser. Which meant that he filled the furnace with coke and pig iron, cast iron, in the layers and then he got it all going so that the molten metal came out and it was poured out into the moulds.

And on those days I had to take his sandwiches and a bottle of tea, cold tea. And I was there in the foundry watching them make the castings.

S1: Yes.

S2: You wouldn't be allowed to be there nowadays.

S1: Health and safety, yes.

S2: And then of course the next day he would start to clean the castings, because he was the dresser.

S1: Right. Gosh. So that was quite local to where you lived was it?

S2: It was up Talbot Street, and he walked there and back. Of course we walked everywhere then.

S1: Exactly. I was just thinking of you going as a child with sandwiches and the bottle of tea. Yes. Of course there was no traffic in those days.

S2: No. Well, at first we lived at Doddington and then in 1938, when I was eleven, we got a council house. So we lived in the lap of luxury.

S1: Yes. With running water and everything?

S2: Well we had a cold tap in the back in the early days but then of course we had a back kitchen with hot and cold water in because there was a back boiler to the fire and dad wouldn't have the cylinder lagged because it made the bathroom cold.

S1: He wanted to be warm.

S2: But then the water never got too hot. But we managed. And there was actual electric lights in four rooms!

S1: Gosh. When you were eleven that was?

S2: That's when I was eleven.

S1: Until then what did you use for lighting then, Jack?

S2: We had gas light in Doddington in the living room and there was a gas light occasionally in the next room, but otherwise you had to have a candle. Candles when we went to bed. And the most difficult thing was if you wanted to go to the loo outside in the privy taking the candle and not letting it blow out.

S1: I bet that was frightening. I bet you used to have a gazunder or a potty, did you, as children?

S2: Oh yes, yes, yes. Upstairs there was always a pot under the bed.

S1: Yes.

S2: Yes. Oh yes. That was tradition. And if dad had been a gardener, of course, he would have made compost and he would have emptied the pot in the compost.

S1: Yes. But he wasn't a gardener?

S2: Dad wasn't a gardener, no.

S1: Nor your mum? You didn't grow any food there?

S2: Not seriously, no. No. It had to be bought and I once remember getting seriously in trouble because I was sent for a jar of jam and dropped it on the way home.

S1: Right.

S2: Can you imagine? A whole jar of jam.

S3: Ooh, disaster!

S2: So none of us had jam on our sandwiches. Which were called butties in the old days.

S1: You called them butties, yes.

S2: Mother liked batch loaves and cottage loaves.

S1: Right. Did she bake any herself?

S2: She only baked little bits and pieces. She didn't bake a lot.

S1: No.

S2: But then next door to where we lived was Elsemere House, which was a big house, and Eatons, the Taylor's lived there and they employed a cook and the cook used to bake two puddings, one for them and one for us that she put on our window ledge.

S3: How fabulous.

S2: Which really helped out.

S1: Did your mum ... she didn't pay for that. That was just being generous.

S2: Oh it was just something the cook because she knew how poor we were.

S1: Yes.

S2: Yes, yes. A ha'penny a week.

S3: That's how generous neighbours were in those days wasn't it?

S2: Well they were, yes. Yes. I once at school was pushed onto a corner of a wall and banged my head so I had to go home, and over to Dr MaCarter's, two stitches and as I came out Mrs Macklewain was walking up the road, and because I'd been so brave she gave me six pence.

S3: That was a fortune.

- S2: Wow! And it just happened to coincide with Harvest Festival, and at the congregational chapel they didn't give the food away they sold it on the Monday evening and I went with my six pence and bought a whole plate of apples.
- S1: And what did they do with the money when they sold it? Did they ...?
- S2: Well they'd put it into running the church.
- S1: In for the church, yes.
- S2: Mother was the caretaker in doors and dad was caretaker outdoors.
- S1: Oh right.
- S2: So he stoked the boiler at a weekend, which he was capable of doing and cut the grass in the summer.
- S1: So did you go to church a lot? The congregational chapel?
- S2: I had to go to Sunday school until I left school.
- S1: Right.
- S2: And it was a terrible thing because it occupied all of Sunday afternoon. And I didn't want that. So I left I'm afraid when I was 14, I went to work.
- S1: Yes. So you went to school in Whitchurch did you?
- S2: I went to school at the Wesleyan School and it had been condemned when my father went to it; that was the condition of it.
- S1: Oh gosh! And you went to the same school you dad had been to then?
- S2: Yes, I did. Yes, yes. It was a very old school and the first class was called the baby class, when you were five really. Yeah. And the teacher was the gorgeous Miss Pearce. Oh she was lovely. And then in the second class it was Miss Amy, Amy Hatton, and she was tubby. And her sister was, as you might call it, a peripatetic teacher, she came in and took over when the others were unavailable, and she was a thin as a lath. And when you got to Standard One you got Mrs Roberts and she was strict but fair.
- And we played in the band.
- S1: Oh did you, yes.
- S2: And I ...
- S1: What instruments do you remember having in that?
- S2: Well I had to play a triangle but I very quickly managed to get to the point where I had the cymbals, which made a lot more noise.
- S1: I thought you were going to say the drum for a minute.
- S2: No, no. The cymbals.
- S1: Yes.

- S2: Standard Two and Three was taught by the other Miss Pearce and she was fat like Miss Hatton was. Quite different the two. And then Mrs Ralph was the next teacher that was in Standard Four and Five, but by the time it got to Standard Five Mr Green had arrived. He always wore a pinstripe suit.
- S1: Was he the head teacher?
- S2: No he wasn't. He was there teaching the two classes, Four and Five. And then you moved into the headmaster's room, Mr Wood and that was Standard Six and Seven.
- S1: So how old would be at the end of Standard Seven?
- S2: At the end of Standard Seven I was 14.
- S1: So you had the whole time in the one school.
- S2: The whole time in the one school because I was given a chance to take an exam for the grammar school but I didn't really want to pass because it would have caused so much trouble buying clothes for me to go to the grammar school. And also because my sisters had been refused by my dad to even take the exam.
- S1: Right. Yes. What were your favourite lessons at school?
- S2: I liked painting. Mrs Ralph was very keen on painting and I've still got some of the things that I actually did. With ... just watercolours. Yes. But of course we had to learn reading, writing, joining and things like that. Most of the time you spent sitting at your desks.
- S1: Yes. Did you go on any school trips at all?
- S2: The only trips we ever went on were from the congregational chapel. And Richards Buses always supplied the buses free of charge. And if we were lucky we went to Rhyl, if we were unlucky we went to Tarbing, which was a farm and we just messed about at Tarbing. But at Rhyl I could stand by that window and watch the toffee being made.
- S1: Toffee being made? What was that, in a shop?
- S2: A machine, and making it in the window of the shop.
- S1: Shop.
- S2: Yes. Lovely, it was fascinating.
- S1: Were you ever able to buy any?
- S2: Possibly we might have been allowed a little bit. But when we were at Rhyl we had to go to the congregational chapel for lunch.
- S1: For lunch, yes. That was provided was it?
- S2: That was provided. And if you were unlucky you never saw the sea, it was too far out.
- S1: Yes. Aw. Did you ever go on holiday as a family?
- S2: We never went on holiday as a family at all. Sometimes I was lucky particular during the four weeks main holiday to go to Uncle Arthur and Auntie Fanny at Tiverton Heath where he had a little farm and

had Jersey cows. Lovely things. You could put your arm round them. And I remember milking time he'd pour me some milk just straight from the cow.

S1: Still warm.

S2: Still warm. It was lovely.

S1: That must have been wonderful for you going there.

S2: Oh yes! And of course if it was haymaking I was able to sit right on top of the stack of hay on a horse and cart.

S1: And did you get down to the sea while you were there?

S2: It wasn't anywhere near the sea, no. Thirty-seven miles from Whitchurch was the nearest sea. That was Liverpool.

S1: Right. So was there plenty of food on the farm when you got there? Was that a big difference?

S2: Ah well we had cooked breakfast. I mean, fantastic. And the first time I'd had tomatoes fried. Yes. And Aunt Fanny made butter. So it was lovely.

S1: I bet you had cream as well, didn't you?

S2: Oh yes, cream from the cow.

S1: Jersey cream.

S2: Yes, it was lovely. And if we went, at Christmas we went to help with the plucking because they took in birds from around the area to pluck, so you sat knee-dip in feathers.

S1: Did they use the feathers for anything afterwards?

S2: I don't know what they did with the feathers. But Nancy, the daughter who used to be the one that dress. So there was always this smell of burning because you lit a piece of newspaper and wafted it all on these birds.

Uncle Arthur was the one that killed them.

S1: Yes. And that was one of the ways of making money.

S2: Well extra money you see on a small farm. Yes. So he had a pony and trap.

S1: Quite an exciting thing to do. How old would you have been when you went down there to stay?

S2: Well I'd be sort of eleven/twelve time I should think. And usually when we went to catch the bus Uncle Arthur walked up to the bus with us and he would give me either a two-shilling piece or a half crown.

S1: Gosh.

S3: Gosh!

S1: That was generous.

S2: Yes, yes. And he used to say, 'Jack Brown, Shropshire born, Shropshire bred, strong in the arm, and weak in the head'.

[Laughter]

S1: Is that what he always used to say to you? That's lovely.

S3: Did they used to harvest in the ... did you used to help with the harvest then?

S2: They used to harvest, I suppose I was about, I mean I wasn't involved in loading the cart up because of course there was no bailing then.

S3: Was it cut by hand or ...?

S2: Oh yes, it was cut by scythe.

S3: Scythe. Incredible.

S2: Oh wait a minute, no. I think he did have a machine to cut, he did. We went down once and cut the weeds down, I remember. Just with his pony and this machine. And he said 'if you look very carefully you might see an adder'.

S1: Right.

S2: There were adders in the field.

S1: They'd come out quickly when the machine went on.

S2: Well they're very shy creatures really, yes.

S1: And so after school what did you do then, Jack? Did you look for a job yourself?

S2: It happened that Adolf Hitler had spoilt my chance of doing what I wanted to do which was to be a cabinetmaker.

S1: Right. Had you done any woodwork before that then?

S2: Well fortunately at school they didn't have a woodwork room but there was a separate woodwork room in the town over a barber's shop. Mr Greenhall ran it. And I first of all went one afternoon a week and when I was in my last year two afternoons a week.

S1: Right.

S2: Doing woodwork. Oh it was lovely. And when we went we were lined up by Mr Wood in the girls' playground and warned as to our behaviour between the school and the woodwork room as were for half term; and half term was half a day. Not a week.

S1: That was it in those days.

S2: Yes. Yes.

S3: That's a massive difference isn't it? I can remember that.

S1: Just had the Shrove Tuesday half day for half term, things like that.

S2: Was it?

S1: So you started your woodworking there and loved it did you Jack.

S2: Well I love woodwork and Mr Wood started me off by selling me some tools, very cheap. And of course Woolworths was threepenny and six penny so if I saved up I could buy things from Woolworths. In fact it's only about two years ago that I packed up using the mallet that I bought.

S1: Is that right?

S2: Yes. Mallet still ...

S1: Kept it all that time. Yeah. So what's the first thing you every made? What did you produce?

S2: The first thing you make is something using drills and little joints, and I made an egg stand for twelve eggs. That was the first thing I made. And then I made a clothes horse and bookends with an elephant on each one. Yes.

S1: You didn't carve the elephant?

S2: Pardon?

S1: Did you carve an elephant?

S2: Oh no it was just a bought elephant.

S1: Yes, I thought you meant that.

S2: The tusks fell out.

S1: Oh did they!

[Laughter]

S2: And a little bookcase, which I still have upstairs, a tray that I still have that I made.

S1: You'll have to go and take a photograph of that tray.

S2: Well that's just out there.

S1: Or whatever, yeah.

S2: And the cake stand as well, with a bit of carving on it. So I'd learnt ... and, of course, it was lovely the day when you were French polishing.

S1: Right.

S2: Because your hand all got covered in this brown polish and wouldn't come off for a while and I was allowed to leave it on.

S1: And so you wanted to go into that line ...

S2: That's what I wanted to do but then I think it was probably 1939, in the winter, I was asked by Mr Grace the baker if I'd go and deliver some bread up Alkington, and I have to say that the snow drift was

15 foot high and it had been cut through. And I took a sledge and all I'd got on my hands were kid gloves with some of the fingers split. So my hands were bitterly cold.

But I remember doing that and the thing was, when you got back to the bakery you were always given a cup of cocoa.

S1: Right. And it was probably warm in there.

S2: And warm in the bakery of course. So happened when I was 14, I went as an apprentice baker and confectioner to Mr Grace, the baker.

S1: And how long did you work there then?

S2: I worked there until 1945.

S1: Right.

S2: When I was 18 and of course I was conscripted into the air force so that was the end of my baking.

S1: Right.

S2: But of course I became a cook in the air force.

S1: Did you, yeah.

S2: Well, they said 'what are you doing now?' And I said baker and confectioner, and he said 'right, we'll make you a cook'. In actual fact, if I'd have been thinking about it, I would have said 'I would like to go into the fire service department'. Because during the war I became a messenger with the fire service which meant you slept at the station at least once a week and you got a free meal and you slept on bunk beds. And if the bells went down, as a messenger it was your job to go out and knock on all the doors of the next crew and if they were needed you went out with them to the fire.

And later on I learnt how to ride a motorbike and became a despatch rider.

S1: Right.

S2: Mind you, the motorbikes were pretty poor.

S1: All for the fire service?

S2: Yes, national fire service. Yes. I've got a picture of myself as a messenger.

S1: Did you see much of the war where you were?

S2: At Whitchurch we were lucky. We didn't have any munitions or any thing that the Germans wanted to bomb. There was at Markweil in Wales, a factory making ammunition and they tried to bomb it once but they got their facts wrong and ended up just dropping them in fields. And so really they didn't think there was anything worth bothering with. Although there was a naval presence in the town, because by some fluke of nature it had been discovered that at Whitchurch they were able to contact any ship anywhere in the world.

S1: Really?

S2: Fantastic.

- S1: Isn't that amazing.
- S2: And so to have the navy 37 miles from the sea! And so that was the interesting thing. The other thing was we always listened to Hilversum T' Lord Haw Haw. And Lord Haw Haw would say 'Germany Calling, Germany Calling. Tonight we are going to bomb Liverpool but the people of Whitchurch can sleep soundly in their beds because we're dropping any bombs on you'. And do you know why that was. His name was James Joyce, and in Bark Hill, not far from where I lived in Rosemary Lane, there lived a family of Joyce's that were related to him.
- So it was fantastic.
- S3: That's amazing.
- S1: Well, unbelievable that is.
- S2: We only go the occasional bomb that dropped in fields when the Germans who hadn't managed to jettison their bombs were scarpering for home and it would make their planes lighter. And when that happened we used to go up and see if we could find any bits.
- S1: So it wasn't a frightening time for you in anyway?
- S2: No, no. The first time the siren went I was frightened. I have to say. It went late ... almost in the night and it was quite a frightening experience but, of course, then you got used to it.
- S1: And did you have air raid shelters?
- S2: There was an air raid shelter at the end of Rosemary Lane but we never ever used it.
- S1: No.
- S2: Because we just didn't seem to think we needed it. We had to have blackouts. So these were made from wood and black paper and put up every night and there were no street lights. So you couldn't see where you were going very well.
- S1: No.
- S2: Yeah.
- S1: And after the war I suppose rationing would have effected you wouldn't it?
- S2: After the war, of course, I was in the air force for two and a half years.
- S1: Oh two and a half years.
- S2: Yes, I missed the war by two months. And so I went out abroad.
- S1: And where did you meet Irene then? Here in England when you came back?
- S2: I worked for the English folk dance and song society after I'd been working at a grocer's shop in Whitchurch. I was offered a chance to become a teacher of dancing.
- S1: Right. So when you came back from the air force you worked in a grocer's shop.
- S2: I got a job in a grocer's shop. And of course this stood me in good stead with running our own shop.

S1: Exactly.

S2: And of course I still bake, so those things that I learnt are still used today. Yes indeed.

S1: So you started dancing when, what age?

S2: Well I started dancing at the youth club in 1942 and then when I came out in 1948 I went on a course of dance at Attingham Hall and Nibs Mathews was the man in charge and he taught Morris dancing and sword dancing. And I'm sorry to say I got bitten by the bug and started a youth club.

S1: You're not sorry are you!

[Laughter]

S2: No, no. No, well, you see I've been dancing all my life since 1948.

S1: Since then, exactly.

S2: And I was honoured two or three years ago by being presented with a gold badge of English Folk Dance and Song Society. And that means that I am one of the all time greats in dancing.

S1: Yes. Isn't that wonderful. And so that's how you met Irene, through those.

S2: Well, of course, Stratford-on-Avon was the place where we had a fortnight in the summer, we went and we danced. We practiced in the morning and we went out into the streets and danced and we danced on the Bancroft gardens and she came down to the dancing on the Bancroft gardens and met me there and at the end of the fortnight—it was actually only the last two or three days I saw her. And I said 'Cheerio, I'll see you next year'. And the next year I was on a course at Whitsuntide and we were dancing on the Bancroft gardens from where we were on the course, and she came down to see if I was there.

S1: Did she? She was keen then.

[Laughter]

You hadn't written in between or anything?

S2: I wrote just one letter and said 'nice to have met you'. And then after the dancing I said 'Cheerio, see you in the summer'. But in the summer I got caught.

S1: Oh right.

[Laughter]

S2: Although we couldn't marry very early. That was 1951 when we met and we didn't get married till '55.

S1: Right. And when did you come to Colton then?

S2: '55.

S1: In '55. So you got married and came straight ...?

S2: We actually got married and Irene had a holiday. In fact, when we got married we didn't waste anything because we considered between two people. So at Stratford-on-Avon there lived Jim Page

and Irene was the theatre sister at the hospital and so one of the other sisters was the—well can't call her a best man.

S1: Matron of honour or something.

S2: And Jim Page was my best man. And so we went to the chapel, the congregational chapel at Stratford-on-Avon. Mr Bowen was the minister. And so I actually was going to go just to the church but as it was raining I went round in the car and picked up Irene and Lillian and brought them to the church.

And there was Jim and his wife and baby daughter, and Irene and I, Lillian and the minister, that's all there was. And after we'd been married we went back to the Page's house; they lived in a house called 'Shangri-La'. Lovely.

S1: Did they. Yes.

S2: And we had managed to buy half a bottle of whisky and a bottle of sherry and they made some sandwiches. So that was our wedding breakfast.

S1: Celebration, yes.

S2: And then in the afternoon I had to go to Calthorpe Road in Birmingham for a meeting of the English Folk Dance and Song Society.

S1: Yes.

S2: But wind had been got round to them that something had happened. And so after the initial bit of the meeting, they said 'think you've been doing something, Jack'. I said, 'well, I've only got married'. And he said, 'well where is your wife?' I said she's in the car outside. And he said 'I think you'd better go don't you?' So that was it.

S3: What sort of car was it, Jack?

S2: Pardon.

S3: What sort of car was it?

S2: Unfortunately I'd been in accident so the Standard 8, which I liked, had been smashed. And so while I was there I had a Ford Popular, which you might call a Ford Unpopular.

[Laughter]

S2: Because it had a central system of suspension, which was awful. It was too tall for the size of it, and if it was raining you put the windscreen wipers they went slower and slower depending on whether you were going faster or slower. So I didn't think much of that car.

S1: Did you go on a journey for that? For your honeymoon there? Did you have an evening away or anything?

S2: Well no, we went up to Whitchurch to Rosemary Lane and we were there and I still had work to do so while she was on holiday we went out and did various things. Like I had to go to Burton-on-Trent I remember so we stayed with George and Helen Manning in Burton-on-Trent....And we'd better do something about that fire.

S1: So you were always busy. So after that time how long was it you actually came here, sorry. I think you mentioned it and I interrupted it.

S2: I actually was looking for a property and saw this cottage advertised for £1,200 by a Stafford auctioneer. And so I went to see the man and he said 'Ah,' he said 'my colleague George Brown is now dealing with that'. So of course I went to see George Brown and he thought I was in collusion with this auctioneer at first so got a thick ear almost until he realised I was genuine. And he said, 'oh yes,' he said, 'well how much are you prepared to offer?' I said £850. 'Ooh,' he said 'you couldn't get a barn for that'. I said I don't want a barn, I want a cottage. So he said 'Oh,' he said 'well as a matter of fact it's up for auction on 17th of February'. So we duly made our way to the auction, mind you we hadn't arranged a mortgage or anything. [Laughs]

And we got through the snow to the auction room, which was the town hall, and it was delayed for about 25 minutes.

S3: Whereabouts was that?

S2: So somebody might have been stuck in the snow, and eventually the auction took place.

S3: Where about was that?

S2: The town hall in Rugeley.

S3: In Rugeley, oh.

S2: So then it went up and we got to £850 and then another bid went on and then I thought 'ah go on have another go' so I had another go and Irene nearly fell of the chair.

So eventually we got for £890.

S1: Right.

S2: So I said to George Brown, I said 'we're going to need some mortgage. My wife's got £300 but we're going to need £600. So the solicitor said 'we're agents for the Halifax Building Society'. I said 'oh right'. And he said to George Brown 'is it worth £890?' And George Brown said yes. And George Brown was the valuer for the Halifax Building Society!

S1: all done in one place.

S2: So there were all ... So we duly got our mortgage for £600 and it was £3 16s and 11 pence a month. But then my pay was only £35 a month anyway.

So Irene gave up her job in Stratford and so we came to live here. We hadn't got a bed; we borrowed a camp bed from somebody...

[Doorbell rings]

S1: And so you just had a camp bed, you didn't have a proper bed?

S2: Well I had a Buckton camp bed and we borrowed one, and we'd been bought sheets and blankets for double bed when we got one, so we put the two beds together but one was higher than the other. And we didn't think of trying to block the one up so they were both on a level pegging.

S1: Didn't you!

[Laughter]

S2: And we ended up two on the same camp bed and split the canvas.

S1: I can imagine.

S2: So I wrote to Bukton and said the canvas has unfortunately split and they sent me a new one.

S1: So was it actually running as a shop when you bought it?

S2: Oh no, no. The shop was later.

S1: Right. It was just a cottage? Somewhere to live.

S2: The cottage, the room we are now in wasn't built then.

S1: Right. So tell me a little bit about the history of this place because it's quite old.

S2: Well, you see, the cottage originally was built about 400 years ago. And was probably owned by the people who owned Moseley Old Hall, because according to Dorothy Bradbury there were properties in this village owned by them. This could be one because it was a thatched cottage. And there was another thatched cottage up the road on the left-hand side up the Heath Way, was also a thatched cottage which was taken down when they built the council houses.

S1: Right.

S2: So we got this cottage.

S1: Was it always called Heath Way this road?

S2: It was actually a gated road. There was a gate virtually outside this window so that it was only single track and it was gated. And before our time here the cottage was not called 'The Cottage' but it was called 'The Low' and in 1748, which is as far back as our deeds go, it was occupied by Hodgekiss family and it was much more land; it had a whole acre instead of a quarter of an acre. And Bill Harvey was renting a piece of land and strangely enough that the name of Irene's brother. Fantastic really.

And it was owned by Joseph Evans and his wife Emma, who lived in Wolverhampton and he was a joiner.

S1: Gosh. Yes.

S2: So that's how we came to be here.

S1: Yes.

S2: And I was working still for the English Folk Dance and Song Society.

S1: Right. Oh that was paid employment?

S2: Oh yes. Yes.

S1: Yes, I understand.

S2: Yes. And then ...

S1: What made you choose Colton then out of everywhere you could have lived?

- S2: I looked at houses in different parts and this was the one that I thought well, it's very central to Staffordshire. And as my area for teaching dancing was Staffordshire it meant, you see, that you got Cannock 10 miles away, Uttoxeter 10 miles away, Stafford and Lichfield the same. And then Wolverhampton and Burton-on-Trent a further seven or eight miles away. So it was very convenient in actual fact.
- S1: And did Irene manage to get work here too?
- S2: Irene didn't work for a while because she decided she couldn't get to work, you couldn't get to the work anyway. And so we managed on what we got. We grew what we could in the garden and sometimes we'd have a meal of peas with a knob of butter and a piece of bread and butter. So we were still poor! [Laughs]
- S1: Who did the gardening?
- S2: We both did the gardening. Yes, we came and found it was full of cabbage stalks and groundsel. So we set about and got some planning into it. Bought some fruit trees and soft fruits so that we'd have some fruit.
- S1: How did you learn about that then, Jack? 'Cause you obviously hadn't learnt it at home had you?
- S2: No, I didn't learn it at home. Irene's father was a bit keen on gardening and she brought his books that he'd bought so we looked at the books and ... it was trial and error to a great extent. Yes.
- S1: And necessity, in a way, to grow some food.
- S2: Well it was necessity to grow some food for ourselves. Yes. Oh yes.
- S1: That also gave you a life-long interest though didn't it?
- S2: Oh definitely! Yes. I've actually got a picture that I took recently—I'll show it you later—of a parsnip that's shaped like an astronaut. It was so big that it was enough for a family of six.
- S1: Gosh. Yes. So the cottage here was small?
- S2: It was very small. It was two rooms downstairs, two rooms upstairs and two pantries effectively. One pantry had been turned into a bathroom.
- S1: Right.
- S2: And I found saltpetre coming through the plaster work so I re-plastered it with sand and cement mix and six months later it did the same thing.
- S1: Right.
- S2: So it was not easy. The other pantry you're virtually sitting in it ...
- S1: Oh right. Okay.
- S2: ... because it was on this end. And when we built the extension in 1961/62 that had to come down.
- S1: Right. And is that where you stored food and your vegetables and things.

- S2: Oh yes, yes, we used the pantry. But it had a thrall but of course that also had saltpetre because of the bacon. And in the kitchen, on the wall of the kitchen they'd hung the bacon and so that had got saltpetre.
- S1: So it was used by someone with a lot of ... who sold meat and things then here. Who hung the bacon here? Not you, the people who lived here before.
- S2: Oh this is going way back in the past. If you've got saltpetre in your brickwork you can't do anything about it except eliminate it, which we gradually did.
- S1: Right.
- S3: People in the past would always rear their own pigs, though, wouldn't they.
- S2: Of course, yes. They'd have pig sty somewhere in the garden. The only thing we found was the privy.
- S1: Right.
- S2: The privy was at the corner of the garden. I've still got the door.
- S1: Have you?
- S2: Yes. We used the bricks. It was necessary to take it down and use the bricks. And we've still got some remnants of the ice plants that were on the roof.
- S1: Gosh.
- S2: Yeah, incredible really.
- S1: Yes. Right. So how did the shop come about then, Jack?
- S2: The shop came about as the result of the Society finding they hadn't got enough money to pay me. So I was made redundant.
- S1: Okay.
- S3: What year was that then?
- S2: 1959 this would be. Yes. I think Rachel was born and so we just had to think about what to do and we noticed by then there were people in cars riding... coming through the village and we thought we could perhaps start a shop. Turned the car out up the garage and that's what we did. We hadn't got much money, as you know, so we bought wood from Burton-on-Trent, there was a man who used to buy railway wagons and take the bolts and things out of the wood, put plugs in and slice it up for boards and we bought those. And so we had the shelving from there.
- I'd made the window with just wood that I managed to get hold of and the door was from the Derby Inn at Burton-on-Trent. I paid five shillings for it. [Laughs] And it was just there. And in fact I still use the bolts because the bolts are beautiful brass bolts that were on it. Yes, they're on the garage door now.
- Yes. So that's how we started.
- S1: Right.

S2: And then we started selling ice cream. We got Walls ice cream and suddenly all the children decided they liked Walls ice cream 'cause they hadn't had that facility in the village.

S1: There was another shop in the village wasn't there.

S2: There was two shops actually. There was the corner shop, Miss Williscroft. Miss Williscroft only sold bits and pieces. She was getting a bit old and so she sold a few bits and pieces. But Mrs Upton, she had the bottom shop and she was supplied by Mr Willis, who had a grocer's shop in Rugeley.

S1: Right. So you just started, just ice cream or did you have sweets as well?

S2: No we started ... I said I'm going to have David Jones, grocer that we had at Whitchurch and so we got a proper supplier, and then of course various other biscuit companies and others found us and came to see if we'd like to buy their biscuits and so we started and then this little chap turned up with toys so we started toys, and that was where the profit was.

S1: Right.

S2: No profit in groceries but the profit was in the toys.

S1: Toys.

S2: And of course we sold needles and cotton and wool, cards, birthday cards and things.

S1: Very useful things.

S2: Well the whole shops was festooned with stuff hanging or put on shelves.



S1: Yes. Did you enjoy those days?

S2: They were hard days because we started early and finished late. And eventually we managed to cut down the hours particularly when we got the post office; about 1965 we got the post office and that meant that I had to get up at six o'clock in the morning because in those days it was the post round that was delivered by bicycle. And so the post would arrive and by this time I'd built a garage for the car and we put a counter up the side so that the post could be sorted. Yes.

S3: So you had to deliver the post yourself?

S2: No, I didn't deliver the post. There was a post woman delivered the post ...

S1: You didn't employ her? Did you employ her?

S2: Mrs Collins. Mrs Collins was the one that was in ... she was doing it.

S1: You didn't have to employ her? You just had to take the post ...

S2: The post office employed her.

S1: And then you had to take the post in and sort it for her.

S2: I took the post in and signed for anything that had to be signed for and she came along, sorted it and ...

S1: Oh she sorted it.

S2: The round was allocated two hours and 55 minutes. But I did know that Vera Collins used to stop and do the washing up for them where there was a petrol station round the corner. So ...

S1: So that was Vera Collins?

S2: Vera Collins, yes, yes. She was quite large and I remember one day she handed me the bag and said 'oh just a minute,' and she had the bag back and brought out the remains of a pound of chocolate.

S1: Did she walk round?

S2: No, she had a bike.

S3: Bicycle, oh.

S1: Yes.

S2: She had a bike, yes. And she was responsible for having punctures mended. Yes. And eventually Vera gave up. She moved out of Colton and she gave up, so Blanch Ravenscroft took over. And Blanch had been the stand-in and Vera had all the time off she could have in the winter, so poor all Blanch did all the hard work.

S1: In the snow ...

S2: In the snow and everything. Yes, yes. I did occasionally do the post round.

S1: So, just coming back to shopping. Shopping was very different in those days. People didn't go off to the supermarket and ...?

S2: You mean in Colton?

S1: In Colton here, yes.

S2: In Colton it was good because there was very little in the way of transport to go there. I did a round three times a week.

S1: Did you.

S2: So I went round; 26 miles it was.

S1: Right. What would you be delivering then?

S2: Any groceries or anything.

S1: Did people send in orders or how was that ...?

S2: Well, I did load up the back of the van but if somebody wanted it...I mean Lady Baggot used to—I don't know whether I rang Lady Baggot or she rang me—but I supplied groceries to Lady Baggot.

Yes. And so that was that. And went round to Blithfield and round the farms.

S1: So you just had things on ...

S2: Just I had things on and people would have them.

S1: More like a visiting shop than delivering orders.

S2: Yes. Well I ...

S1: Travelling shop. I didn't know that.

S2: I remember one snowy day, going to the Old Rectory at Blithfield, you had to go up this track and I said to Watty Norman, who lived up Heath Way—he was an insurance agent—I said, 'will you come with me just in case I got stuck'. So we got up as far as the gate and I said, 'right, we'll have to carry some things'. We climbed the gate because of the snow and we went to Dicksons, who lived in the Old Rectory which had been bonfired, but the one piece at the bottom was all right.

So we went there to deliver what we could, and she was grateful of course.

S1: Yes.

S2: And she said, 'have you got any gravy browning?' And [laughs], you know, would I have put gravy browning in the basket. So I said 'oh dear, no I haven't got any' and Watty Norman says 'you can burn sugar'. And she said how do you do that? 'Chuck it on the fire!'

[Laughter]

One of those little laughs that you can have.

S1: Different time wasn't it. Did you feel as if it wasn't so hurried in those days.

S2: Oh it was much nicer than now. There's too much happens, it's a rush now. I don't rush the same as I used to do but it just doesn't seem the same.

S3: What sort of van did you deliver in, Jack?

S2: The first three vans I had were Austin 7s. I should have kept the first one because it was a beautiful van and gradually they got worse. They changed the engines and things. And then it was Hillman Imp, and that had the engine underneath the bottom of the ... in the back. So I had two Hillman Imps before moving to Simca vans.

S1: So while you were out delivering Irene was running the shop.

S2: She was running the shop, yes.

S1: And managing the children as well?

S2: Yes. Well it was interesting when she was having Timothy because there was only room for her and Tim behind the counter.

[Laughter]

S1: I can imagine.

S2: So she had to move into a corner if I wanted to get through to the garage out back.

S1: So you did have like refrigeration for things that you were selling in the shop?

S2: Yes, we bought an old refrigerator which went into the garage and that was really a very good old one. Yes, when the chaps came once to repair another of the deep-freezers he had looked at that one, he said 'insulation on that, 100 years'.

S1: Is that right.

S2: Insulation on this new one, ten if you're lucky. Yeah. Yes we had one of the deep-freezers delivered through the window. They took the actual window out and brought the fridge in through the window and put the window back in again.

S1: Did you have a fridge counter?

S2: Oh yes, fridge counter. That was useful.

S1: So people could see what was ...?

S2: That's right. And a bacon slicer. We've still got it.

S1: Have you.

S2: Yes. It's one of these drop feed. I remember once, I think it was Charlie Banister was in wanting some bacon and ham, yeah. And I sliced this ham and I said to Irene 'you better take over,' because as I sliced it I took a bit off my thumb, and I knew I had.

S1: Yes. 'Just take over dear!'

[Laughter]

S2: Take over, I'll go ...

[Laughter]

S3: What were your opening hours, Jack?

S2: At first we opened from about eight o'clock in the morning till 7:00 at night.

S1: Did you close at lunch time?

S2: Yes, we did. Closed at lunchtime. Didn't seem any point in not having a break in the middle.

- S1: No. And I expect you had busy days, like when it was family allowance day, or ...
- S2: Well family allowance day was Tuesday and they would come in for their family allowance. Whereas pensions were on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday mainly.
- S3: Did you have a half day?
- S2: Yes, we had a half day on a Wednesday. We had to do that because we had to go out and perhaps buy some birthday cards or go to Bell & Nicholson's in Birmingham to buy some stuff to sell.
- S1: Did you have any awkward customers? Do you ever remember people who were very eccentric or ...
- S2: Well not really awkward customers. We had two people who managed to not pay their grocery bill, which wasn't very nice but that's how it is. But when we had the post office to begin with, this chap used to come up from the bottom for his pension and I think he had an idea that if didn't turn up straight on the mark there wouldn't be any money left for him.
- And at first he came into the shop and smoked and I realised that it wasn't very nice so we had to put some 'no smoking' signs. So he came up and sat on the wall outside for the five minutes before it was nine o'clock and he could have his pension.
- What was his name? Bluit or Dewitt? And Irene always said that his boiler suit was more patches than boiler suit.
- Yeah. Otherwise most people were very good. But eventually, of course, when somebody got a car they all loaded themselves up in the car and went to the supermarkets.
- S1: Yes. It was the death of the small shop wasn't it?
- S2: Oh it was indeed. Yes, we found we were working virtually for nothing. And Irene had decided anyway that the time that we finished was the time she wanted to. And then I became an odd-job man.
- S1: Right.
- S2: And I've been an odd-job man ever since. And I also started to do barn dances.
- S1: Yes.
- S2: And barn dances in those days were so popular that I had earmark days or evenings when I wasn't going to go out.
- S1: Really. So you used to run barn dances in the village?
- S2: Oh, not in the village, no. Out and about.
- S1: Right.
- S2: You know, Halesowen, Wednesbury, Wednsfield, Uttoxeter, Stafford, wherever anybody wanted a barn dance.
- S1: What sort of social life was there here in the village?
- S2: Well of course we've been members of the Village Produce Guild a long time. So the Village Produce Guild started in perhaps the middle of the 1950s I would suppose so I've been a member for well over 50 years.

There was the WI and Irene was treasurer for quite a number of years and Ivy Preston was always the president.

S1: Yes.

S2: Because when it came to voting for the president and they said 'do you want to carry on Ivy?' And 'I don't mind.' So they carried on.

S1: Yes.

S2: So that was the other thing. I don't think they had a youth club as such, perhaps we tried once or twice but ...

S1: Did you ever take a role in the Produce Guild?

S2: I was Chairman.

S1: I thought you might have been, yes.

S2: Yes. The first chairman was Bob Brundle and I think he might have served three years. And he handed over to Jim Toy. Jim Toy was the butcher from Rugeley and he was a rough diamond. His wife was the teacher for the what you might call the 'baby' class.

S1: Right. Yes. And eventually came to live up at Stockwell Heath.

S2: Yes. And both of them smoked Players.

S1: Did they used to buy them from your shop?

S2: Yes. Yes, they did.

S1: Yes. I suppose you would have sold a lot of cigarettes in those days.

S2: Oh yes, yes. I mean you just sold them to anybody. There was no serious restriction like there is now. In fact, I remember Amanda Wright, she still lives in the village, coming down and she said 'more dem bags'. Her mother had sent her down for a packet of cigarettes. 'More dem bags'!

S1: You had to translate it.

S2: And Yampy, we call him, rides on his tractor and trailer—Greatrix, young Greatrix. I remember him coming down and he said 'coince a wib'. [Laughs] What's 'coince a wib'? Two instant whips.

S1: Two instant whips!

[Laughter]

S2: So, you got a little laugh from these things.

S1: Yes. Aw. Do you remember any festivals or anything special that was celebrated here in the village while you've been here?

S2: There were lots of festivals, yes. We celebrated. We dressed our windows and once we dressed our, well they were cart shafts we had has a gate in those days, and we dressed those up for one of the Queen's celebrations. Yes, we did very well for festivals.

In fact, one of the festivals we raised £1,000, which was a lot of money and we were envy of all the villages round because we had such wonderful parties.

S3: Right.

S1: Yes.

S2: So that was rather nice.

S1: So the local people knew how to celebrate and enjoy.

S2: Oh yes they did. As of course they always have done according to the photographs when they had a May pole and a May Queen in the old days.

S1: Yes.

S2: And erected a marquis and had May food. It must have been quite nice really.

S1: Yes. Were you glad you'd chosen Colton to come to?

S2: It's been wonderful living in Colton.

S1: Yes.

S2: It's just a sort of lovely place, and it's so relaxing.

S1: Yes.

S2: And Jerry Bowman, who lived in Solihull, used to come for weekends sometimes and he'd arrive and sit down and say 'oh isn't it peaceful'.

S1: Yes. I expect you noticed a massive difference when they built the houses along Heath Way though didn't you?

S2: Heath Way houses were built when we came here but we could look over the back because it was Nicklin's field.

S1: Right. Yes.

S2: Nicklins lived in one of the old houses that's now a bungalow on it. So we remember that. And there was also an old house facing the Dun Cow.

S1: Yes.

S2: Well the Waynes lived in that.

S3: Ahh.

S2: Yes. So I remember all these little things.

S1: Yes. Is there anything you'd like to tell us about, Jack, or have we covered most things?

S2: Well, let me see. What is there else to tell? I do remember in the 1960s that the school didn't have flush lavatories, they had a sort of privy-type system with a slab of concrete running the length of the

lavatories. And it was Reg Banister's job to scrape it all out at the end of the day. And I don't know where he put it.

S1: Was it really? Oh gosh.

S2: And of course that was a problem of possibly dysentery. And there was one time that Rachel brought dysentery but we both had it Irene and I but fortunately not at the same time, so the one with the dysentery operated the post office and the other one the food counter.

S1: Oh gracious!

S2: Yes, I remember that.

S1: Umm. Very difficult when you're ill and you've got a food service isn't it.

S2: Well that's it, you see. And of course you can't just say to somebody 'take over'.

S1: No.

S2: In fact we went on holiday once to Jersey for a weekend and it took us six months to make sure that everything was priced and my brother-in-law and sister-in-law from Birmingham looked after it for the weekend while we were on holiday.

S1: Gosh. Yes. Were they able to run the post office then?

S2: We did have the post office then, yes, so they were able to look after it for us. But of course they didn't have to do the booking because I'd do that when I came home.

S1: It's very difficult to go on holiday when you've got a shop. Yes.

S2: Perhaps we didn't have the post office at that time, they just did the shop for us I think. And the round, Arthur did the round and Gladys looked after the shop while he was out. But we had to be sure that everything was right, ready for them to do it. In fact, it wasn't many weeks before then that my dad died. And that caused a lot of trouble because when me dad died I had a word from my mother and we went over on our Wednesday afternoon off and she'd arranged to have the funeral on the Saturday morning. I had a grocery round so there was no way that I could leave my customers to go to a funeral. So we actually left mother a piece of money, because we knew she'd need some money. Dad said he'd saved enough up for his funeral. He'd got a post office account.

And my sister, Francis, who lives in Suffolk, ran to say would I order some flowers on her behalf? The trouble was that in Whitchurch Wednesday was there half day as well so there was no chance of ordering flowers when I got there so I said to mother 'would you please order some flowers for Fran and she forgot. So after the next week I had a nasty letter from Francis and that was that.

So she's never spoken to me since.

S1: Is that right.

S2: No. It's funny, deaths are like that aren't they sometimes. And then when my mother died I had a phone call from my sister Helen, who lived in Whitchurch, still does, it wasn't Helen who rang it was her daughter Ann, to say Helen was so distraught would I organise everything. So I went and organised the funeral.

S1: And were you retired by then from the shop?

S2: The shop wasn't there then, no. So I went and organised it and mother, who had been moved into a home at Market Drayton said 'Jack, I want to be cremated'. She said 'I enjoyed your Uncle Jack being cremated and your Uncle Sam, and will you see that I am cremated.'

My sister Elsie wanted her buried, she wanted to weep in church and then go all up Mile Bank, which was a long bank, for the cemetery. So, of course, as they hadn't been to see my mother in the home for nine months and suddenly found that she was really ill, they hadn't been talking to her.

S1: They didn't realise what her wishes were.

S2: Pardon?

S1: They didn't realise what her wishes were, I suppose.

S2: Well, no. It was too late then. So Elsie had to ask my permission to have her ashes, which were duly put on top of Dad's grave, and really and truly Mother would be absolutely horrified to have been put on the top of Dad's grave because I've heard her to say sometime 'you miserable old bugger I'll be glad when you're dead!'

[Laughter]

S1: Oh dear. So just coming back to the shop. Were you sad when it closed? Were you sad to make that decision?

S2: No I don't think I was. Because it gave me an opportunity to do work for myself and I wasn't tied to the hours of the shop.

S1: No. Free from ...

S2: That's the thing. And, of course, the other thing is that while we had the shop there was no chance of me going and enjoying Morris dancing except once a year at the feast.

S1: Right. So it freed you up. Yes.

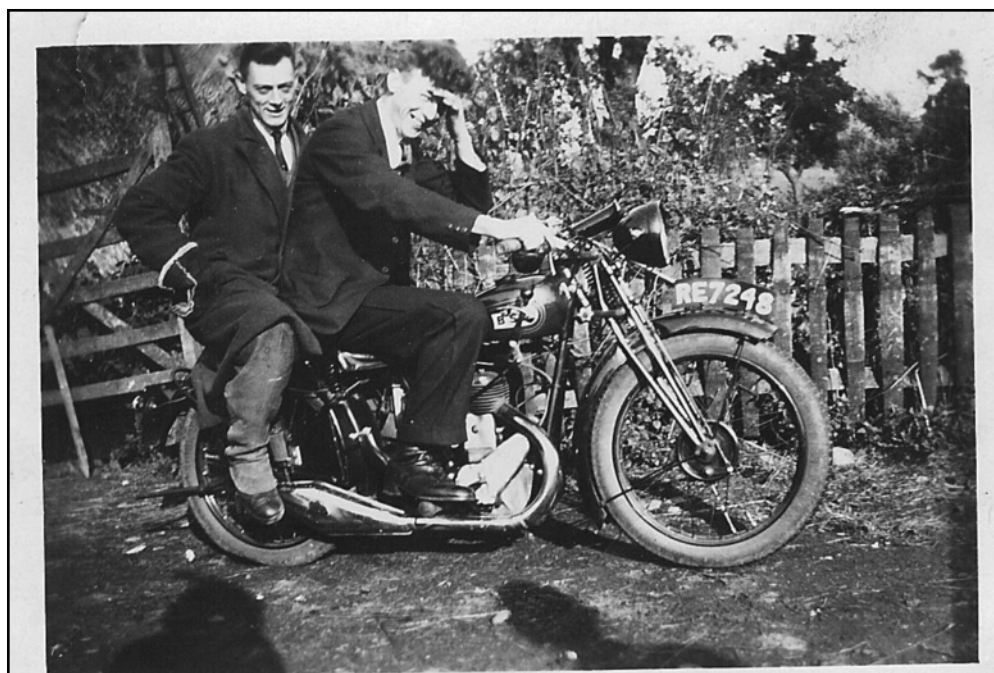
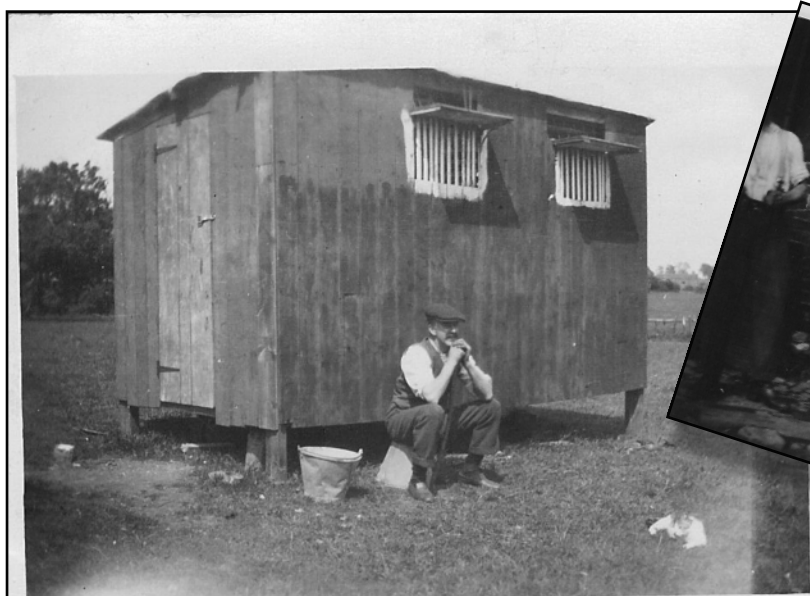
S2: Yes.

S1: Right, Jack. I'm going to say thank you so much. It's been really, really fascinating listening to all your memories and thank you.

[END OF TAPE]

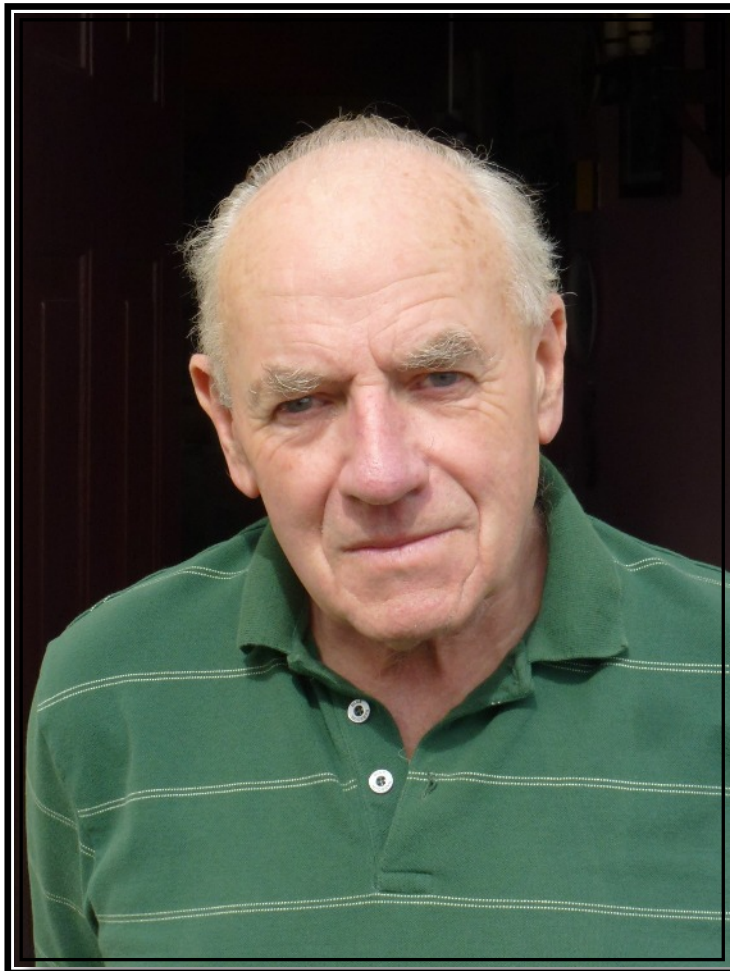


Village life in the 1930's



Colton History Society

All Our Stories



David Bradbury's story

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 myself 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 ... What band was it love?

- S4: Stafford.
- S2: Stafford ...
- S4: Euphonium.
- S2: You tell me. It's there.
- S4: It's on the sheet.
- S2: It's the Stafford ...
- S4: Country Dance band.
- S2: Stafford Country dance Band. Sorry about this So the Stafford 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: Oh right. Yeah.

S2: But the best one was ...

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.



A long history of
social activity in the
village



Colton History Society

All Our Stories



Hilda & Keith Williscroft's Story

Hilda Williscroft & Keith Williscroft:

S1: Hilda Williscroft

S2: Marion Vernon

S3: George Vernon

S4: Keith Williscroft

S1: Ask me some questions and I'll answer you then.

S2: This recording is being made for Colton History Society. George and Marion Vernon are interviewing Hilda Williscroft and her son Keith at Forge House, Colton on Friday 15th February 2013.

Well Hilda, would you like to tell us a little bit about where you grew up and when you were born? When were you born?

S1: I was born in 1919.

S2: 1919!

S1: Yeah. And I went to ... We lived down in ... on the Armitage Road and we went to Brereton church.

S2: Right.

S1: And when just, well, until I was married and came to Colton.

S2: So did you go to school in Brereton as well?

S1: Oh yes I went to school in Brereton and in them days there was an old railway came down from Brereton to Rugeley from the colliery. And it came down the side of the ... opposite side of the road to the church. Where the Alms Houses—I don't whether they're there now.

S2: They are still there, yes.

S1: Well, if I came down there and we used to go to school that way.

S2: How far would that be to walk?

S1: Oh, we used to walk ... The school was up Red Brook Lane, at the top of Red Brook lane. We used to have to walk from there.

S2: Would that be about a mile would that be?

S1: Oh, a couple of mile I bet. And we walked up there to school.

S2: Who would you walk with? Did you have brothers and sisters?

S1: I'd got a sister and we used to walk. She's two years younger than I am. And she, unfortunately she's poorly at the moment. But she's ... we both used to go to school to Brereton and we went to Brereton church in those days.

S2: How long did you go to school for in those days?

S1: Till I was 14.

S2: Right till you were 14.

S1: I didn't go to school ... I did at Brereton but we had to change schools when we were 11 and then move to what used to be the chapel, what was at one time the chapel school but it wasn't then, they changed it, and it was for both church and, well, anyone. You know. When they were 11 we moved up there and went there and I was there till I was 14.

S2: What do you remember learning at school? What lessons would you have had?

S1: English and arithmetic and that sort of thing.

S2: Did you learn any cooking or ...?

S1: Oh no. No cooking. But you could go to cookery classes if you wanted to but you had to go in Rugeley. They weren't ... it was like evening cooking, you know?

S2: Yes.

S1: In them days.

S2: Did you ever go to that?

S1: No I didn't. No. Because I used to do cooking ... My mum was a quite a good cook. And me cousin, they lived next door but one to us in the houses at the old brewery there and we went to Brereton school but she passed her scholarship and went to Lichfield and then she became a teacher. Well, I wasn't clever enough for that sort of thing but I used to like knitting and sewing and that sort of thing. You know?

S2: Yes. And who taught you that?

S1: Well, me mother I suppose.

S2: So did your father work?

S1: Yes. He was a blacksmith at Brereton Colliery.

S2: Was he?

S1: Yes. And he, they, used to work ... He used to go down the pit and he was there down the pit and he was a quite happy man, you know?

S2: Yes.

S1: He was a blacksmith.

S2: And so was that the pit ponies?

S1: Yes.

S2: Fit the pit ponies.

S1: Yes. The ponies, yes. They used to go down by the side of the ... from the Armitage Road to the Brereton Colliery down ... we used to call it the Ginnies. There was an old engine and train went down there and that was useful for anybody really, you know?

S2: Yes.

S1: And the miners particularly.

S2: Did you have to pay to get on that?

S1: No. It was for the miners really but if they saw you coming they'd give you a lift, you know?

S2: Yes.

S1: That sort of thing, you know.

S2: Was it very friendly? A friendly community?

S1: Oh very! Yes. Oh yes.

S2: And so did your mum stay at home and do the housework or did she have a job as well?

S1: No she stayed at home and did the housework and the cooking and cleaning and that. Yes. And ...

S2: What do you remember ... sorry.

S1: ... Rose's—me cousin, Rose. She, they, lived next door but one to us and she passed a scholarship and went to Lichfield.

S2: How would you get to Lichfield?

S1: By the bus I think. Yes.

S2: What was the school they went to in Lichfield? Was it a grammar school?

S1: I can't remember. No. I can't remember that.

S2: What did your mum like to cook? Did she ...?

S1: Oh she was a proper cook, housemaid cook, you know?

S2: Yeah.

S1: Yes. Everything. Cake and that sort of thing; we was always got plenty of that, you know?

S2: Yes. And what about your ...?

S1: She came from Ireland; me mother was Irish. And she and her sister came and she went, her sister, my aunty like, she went to live at Burton and they went in service in them days, you know?

S2: Yes.

S1: Looking after children and that sort of thing. And she used to ... I used to go quite often to Burton, you know, because ...

S2: Did you? How would you get there?

S1: On the bus; the Midlands red bus used to run on a Thursday and Saturday.

S2: Just twice a week.

S1: Twice a week, yes. And it was just convenient because we lived down the Armitage Road and we could stop the bus and get on it right out side the door, in them days, you know.

S3: What did it cost you to go to Burton in those days?

S1: I can't remember. No, I can't remember. Not very much.

S4: Not very much.

S1: Oh, only pennies.

S2: Would you go on your own as a child or would you go with your mum?

S1: No, I could go on me own, yes. Because they got used to you going, you know, the conductors and that on the bus. There was always a conductor on; they were friendly, you know.

S2: Yes.

S1: But they were happy days. I was always happy, you know.

S2: Did you have running water in the house?

S1: No, a tap out on the yard. Tap on the yard.

S2: And who fetched the water in?

S1: In a bucket; me dad used to do that sort of thing, you know. Yeah.

S2: And toilet then? No flush toilets?

S1: Oh no. Outside on a bucket and a wooden seat over it, sort of thing, in an old shed sort of thing. You know.

S2: And was that emptied for you or did your dad ...?

S1: Oh no. Me dad had to do it. You know.

S2: So did ...?

S1: Put it in ... made a hole in the garden and used to put it in the garden.

S2: And did he grow his vegetables there?

S1: Not just there, no.

S2: But he did grow vegetables for you?

S1: Oh yes, he loved his garden. Yeah, he did.

S2: Yes. What did he grow?

S1: We always had good cabbage and good dinners. You know, potatoes and things like that. Oh yes. Me mother was a good cook as well really. Yeah. She'd always been in service and her and her sister came to this country from Ireland.

S2: Yes.

S3: Whereabouts in Ireland did she grow up?

S1: Northern Ireland.

S3: Northern Ireland, right.

S4: Donegal wasn't it?

S1: Donegal, yes.

S4: Southern Ireland but the northern part.

S2: Northern part of southern Ireland. Yes. How did she manage with the washing and things then?

S1: She had a dolly tub and a, wotsit, you know, that she used to go like this.

S4: Budger.

S1: Hmm?

S4: Budger?

S2: Yes.

S1: Well, it was like a—what would you call it? It was on a stand and legs on it, you know?

S2: Yes.

S1: And you used to go like ...

S2: Twirl it round and round.

S1: Yes. That's it.

S2: Did you help do the washing?

S1: Oh yes. We used to do things, you know. Well, I had to do it meself when I got married, you know.

S2: Of course. So she taught you. You had a good learning.

S2: Yes. Oh yes.

S3: Which was bath night then?

S1: Friday night was bath night.

S3: Was it?

S1: Yes. And we ...

S2: Where was the water heated for your bath then?

S1: Well, on a stove; we used to have paraffin stoves in them days you know.

S2: And you had no electricity at all?

S1: Not then, no. It came later.

S2: So paraffin stove.

S1: It was paraffin lamps. I've still got the lamp up at home. One of them anyway, yes. I never use it of course but I keep it. Memories, you see.

S2: Absolutely. And the paraffin stove. So how was the house heated?

S1: Coal fire.

S2: Coal fire.

S1: Yes.

S2: From the ... of course. Because ...

S1: well, he worked at the colliery.

S2: Exactly.

S1: And that were, the coal was part of his wages you see. But he never ... he worked down the pit but he was on repair work. He wasn't a miner.

S2: No.

S1: He used to repair things, you know?

S2: Yes.

S1: He was in the workshops at the top but he had to go down repairing anything that broke down.

S2: Yes. Very important. Yes.

S1: Oh yes.

S2: So when did you come to Colton and how?

S1: When I was 21 we got married.

S2: So how did you meet your future husband then? Let's go back a stage.

S1: Well, yes. Well, I used to go, when I working ...

S2: So you left school when you were 14. Did you go straight to work then?

S1: Oh yes. I went working and I used to do sewing. There was a factory, a factory down at the bottom there by the railway in Rugeley, you know, round there.

S2: Like Trent Valley or the ...

S4: Keystone Lane, wasn't it?

S1: Keystone Lane, yes. And I went down, I used to go there. Because I rode a bike in them days, you know, and we used to ... I used to go on me bike to work and when I was ... we'd only been married a year and me husband was called up. It was army; the war was started you see.

S2: So from the age of 14 till 21 you worked at this factory. What was it called?

S1: Keystone.

S2: Keystone. Yes. And what did you sew?

S1: Men's jackets. It was a tailoring place.

S2: Tailoring, yes.

S1: And I had to do all the hand sewing. I was a bit important as far as that was concerned.

S2: You were weren't you? Yes. Do you remember what you earned, as a wage in those days?

S1: Oh, about, what would it be? About, oh, a few shilling actually. It would be about a pound a week I suppose, something like that.

S2: And what did you have ... did you pay some board for that?

S1: Oh yes. Well, I used to give me mother the money and she'd give me a bit of pocket money, you know, in them days.

S2: Yes.

S3: How many hours did you have to work in a week?

S1: Well, we used to go for eight o'clock in a morning till five o'clock at night, you see. An hour in between for dinner, yes.

S2: What did you do then at lunchtime?

S1: I used to, very often, I'd got a cousin that lived in Market Street and I used to take me sandwiches and have me dinner with her, you see.

S2: Yes.

S1: And so it was a break to get out of the factory, you know.

S2: Did you pack your own sandwiches or ...?

S1: Oh yes, what I wanted, yeah I did that.

S3: Did you have to work on Saturday?

S1: No. Monday to Friday.

S3: Monday to Friday.

S1: Yes.

S2: Did you enjoy it?

S1: And when it was, they were busy, we worked till we had a break at five o'clock till six and then we went back again till half past seven at night, but I was never on the machines. There was machinists and they made donkey jackets, the machinists did, but I was on the more particular work, if you understand.

S2: Yes, with the finer materials.

S1: Yes. Well, it was men's suits, you see, and I was doing the jackets. And I did all the hand sewing on the jackets that they did.

S2: Was that hemming? What sort of stitching would you be using?

S1: Well, just an ordinary needle and thread but we used to do sort of ... it depended what sort of a suit they had. If they paid more they used to have ... it was hand stitched all round the edge, here. And I used to do that. Yeah. I was the only one that did actually do that, but I used to sort of, with the ... they did donkey jackets but that was all machine work. And there was two rows of machines in the factory and some of them did trousers as well, you know. So we worked hard really.

S2: Did you enjoy it though? Was there a good camaraderie?

S1: Oh yes. I enjoyed me work, yeah. And we made friends and we were all friends. I've still got ...

S2: Did you go out together?

S1: Yes. I've still got a friend and she comes and does me hair sometimes.

S2: Right.

S1: When I want a perm. She comes and she lives—where does she live now? Up Sandy Lane way, doesn't she?

S4: Yes.

S2: Yes.

S1: And she comes. Of course, she drives a car now. But at the moment her husbands got her car so Keith has to fetch her.

S4: Brian fetches.

S1: Brian fetches her and she does my hair and Pam's, once a fortnight, you know.

S2: Yes.

S1: But we've done that all those years, you know.

S2: So would you go out with your friends at the weekend?

S1: Yes. Well, I was a home bird really because when we'd only been married a year—I got married when I was 21—and ...

S2: How did you meet Morris?

S1: Well, I used to go ... there used to be a blacksmith's shop and that in Market Street and it was ... Morris used to go and me cousin that lived in the house but if ... there was a library there and she used to keep the library, you know. And ...

S2: That's a strange mix: a library and a blacksmith's.

S1: Yeah

S2: Yes.

S1: And she, he, used to come with a jug from where he worked at the back, you see, and she'd make him a jug o' tea for a smith.

S2: So was he a blacksmith when you met him?

S1: No, he worked in wood all his life, but his brother did a blacksmith's job but they used to do it ... work together you see. And he, I, used to go on a Thursday and have me dinner. That's how I met him. It was me cousin's you see.

S2: Oh yes.

S1: And so I used to go for me dinner on a Thursday and that how I met him.

S3: Was it love at first sight?

S1: Oh yeah, I think it was you know.

S2: How lovely! Isn't that lovely? Yes.

S1: And I got married when I was 21.

S2: In Brereton?

S1: In Brereton, yes. And we'd been married a year and he was called up to the army.

S2: Yes. So what year was that?

S1: Well, I was 21 when I got married and I was there for a year so I'd be about 22 then. And so I was only young really.

S2: And where were you living then?

S1: We was, I was living down the Armitage Road.

S2: Still, did Morris move into your house with you? When you got married where did you get ... where did you get married?

S1: Oh no. I came to Colton when I got married.

S2: Came straight the way to Colton.

S1: Yeah.

S2: Yes. And you were only here for one year and then he was called up?

S1: Yes he was. And we let, well, some friends used to live here, you know, because I was in this house then.

S2: Yes.

S1: And it was ... this was workshops, you see.

S2: Right.

S1: All this was workshops. And that was ...

S2: So this is where Morris lived when you met him?

S1: Yes.

S2: And that was the cottage was it next door then?

S1: Well, it all joined on together, you see.

S4: You bought the house didn't you? Together.

S1: We bought the house together.

S4: To move here when you were married.

S1: Yes, when we were married.

S4: 1941.

S1: We bought the house. Yes.

S2: Who did it belong to before then?

S1: I don't really know. I can't remember.

S4: It was Mr Preston, I think, owned it didn't he?

S1: Oh, Tom Preston.

S4: Or his parents.

S1: Yes, they were farmers and they lived on one of the ...

S2: Small Tom and Ivy?

S1: Yes. That's right.

S4: It was their parents lived here.

S1: Yes, they did yes.

S2: And so you bought it to move in. Newly married and then suddenly your husband ...

S1: And we'd been married a year and he was called up for the army.

S2: Army, yes.

S1: His brother was older than him so he didn't have to go, you see. Morris was the second in the family and he had to go.

S2: Was that George? Is George the oldest?

S1: George, yeah.

S2: Yes.

S1: And so we'd been married a year and he sailed abroad on our first wedding anniversary.

S2: How did you feel?

S1: Awful, because I didn't see him again for four years.

S2: Really?

S1: He was abroad for four years.

S2: Did you stay living here?

S1: Yeah. And he was ... but we had ... always let some lodgers have it, you know, for that time. I used to sleep at me mother's you see.

S2: Oh, you let it out.

S1: Out, yes. I couldn't ... Well, the army were in Colton House in them days, of course.

S2: Yes.

S1: And I didn't like that, you know, I couldn't ...

S2: It wasn't requisitioned for anyone though; you actually decided to stay with your mum and let it.

S1: To do it. Yes. That's right, yeah.

S3: Where did Morris's mum and dad live then?

S4: Originally in Williscroft Place, didn't they? Next to The Greyhound. But then moved to Rose Villa later

S1: That's right.

S4: In Colton.

S1: Where Gwen lives now.

S2: Yes. And George lived next door later did he?

S4: Yes.

S1: That's right.

S4: So it was me granddad's business, wasn't it, in Market Street that they all worked at.

S2: Oh was it? Yeah, right.

S4: And when granddad retired George and me dad moved here to work and carry on here.

S1: Yeah. That's right.

S2: I suppose Morris was particularly keen to buy this property because it had got the workshop next to it.

S4: That's right.

S1: That's right.

S2: So he could do his carpentry work.

S4: Yes.

S1: That's right.

S4: And they continued when dad came out of the army.

S1: Yes, that's right.

S2: Where did he go in the army then if he was away for four years?

S1: Oh, he was in Iraq and all round there. That part. Yeah.

S4: North Africa, wasn't he, to start off with?

S1: Yes.

S4: And then Italy.

S1: Yeah. And he was in Italy quite a long time

S2: Did he write to you? Did he write to you?

S1: Oh yeah, when he could. But you didn't get many letters you know.

S2: No. Have you still got them?

S1: Oh I have, yes.

S2: I thought you would.

S1: I've still got them. Yes.

S2: Yes.

S1: Still got them. Yes.

S2: Yes. They're special aren't they?

S1: Very. Yes.

S2: Yes. So you were living back in Brereton again?

S1: Yes.

S4: Dad was in Italy during the war and he took part in the Sicily landings didn't he?

S1: Uh hm.

S4: And the ship that he was on was mined.

S1: Yes.

S4: And there were a lot of injuries there weren't there? And I think you were notified that he was missing.

S1: Missing. I think I was, yes.

S2: Oh, how shocking!

S4: And I think your mother kept it from you didn't she? Over Christmas until ...

S1: She didn't tell me, no.

S4: Until after Christmas.

S2: Yes.

S4: But actually he was rescued by the Americans and separated from his unit, and the Americans actually looked after him in hospital for a while.

S2: Did he have serious injuries?

S4: He had leg injuries and ...

S1: I can't remember that.

S4: It was an American doctor who he was very grateful to who actually treated him.

S2: Saved him.

S4: Yes. And he got separated from his unit and as a result of that they thought he was missing ...

S1: He was missing.

S4: But actually he'd been sort of taken care of by the American army temporarily.

S2: I expect that was a black time for your mum then wasn't it?

S4: Yes.

S2: Yes.

S4: And then he eventually caught up with his unit and just in time to be involved in the Monte Casino battles there.

S1: I never saw him for four years.

S4: And he finished in Venice and had to stay in the army for a year after the end of the war and they were looking after German POWs in Venice. He had to take a party of prisoners over to the shipyards on one of the Venetian islands and care for them during the day.

S2: What sort of care? Was that just guarding or was he actually ...?

S4: Just guarding.

S2: Not food and things like that.

S4: No.

S2: No

S4: Just guarding them.

S2: Yes.

S4: Basically.

S2: How did he ... when he came back how did he feel about what had been going on?

S1: He didn't talk a lot about it.

S2: No.

S4: Didn't you used to send shoes?

S1: I did, yes.

S4: You did. Yes. Dad got friendly with some Italian families didn't he? At the end of the war and ...

S1: Children's shoes.

S4: That's right. He used to send money home and the children in Italy hadn't got any shoes.

S1: Anything on their feet and that, no. And I used to buy shoes and post them, send them to 'em, you know.

S2: Yes. Where did you buy them from? In Rugeley?

S1: In Rugeley yes.

S2: Yes. Oh I bet they were so glad to have shoes.

S1: Oh they were yes. You can't believe all these things happened, you know, now.

S2: No. It's a long time ago now.

S1: Now, when I think about it.

S2: They were hard times weren't they?

S1: Oh awful.

S2: Yes.

S1: Very hard times, yeah.

S2: So the fact that he was away, what were the main differences for you? You know, you were living back home, fine, I understand that.

S1: Yeah.

S2: But was there a shortage of food and clothes? How did it affect you? Do you remember?

S1: I can't remember. No.

S2: Everything went on to rationing didn't it?

S1: Oh it did, yes. I can't ... we ... wealth ... clothes were rationed. You had points, you know?

S2: Yes.

S1: Sort of thing. And you had to sort of remember to, if you bought anything, you'd got to give coupons for it and that sort of thing.

S2: It was make do. You were a good seamstress so did you make your own clothes as well?

S1: Oh used to, yes. I did. Because we always did in them days. Me cousin's mam, me aunty, had a sewing machine and she used to machine and I'd tack them all up for her.

S2: A Singer was that?

S1: A Singer sewing machine, yeah.

S2: A treadle one?

S1: Pardon.

S2: Was it a treadle?

S1: Yes. When people remind me I can remember but ... what affected us, you know.

S2: Yes.

S1: But I sit and think sometimes and I can't remember anything really.

S2: What about any bombs? Did anything drop near you in Brereton?

S1: Oh yes, there was. There was some bombs dropped down the field here.

S2: Up here in Colton yes.

S1: Yes there was.

S2: Yes.

S2: But you didn't have any near misses over in Brereton when you ...?

S1: Oh no no.

S2: Were there any soldiers over there?

S1: No. I can't remember any.

S2: And did your mum have any evacuees or anything was she involved?

S1: Oh yes we had an evacuee.

S3: Did you yes?

S1: From ... where did she come from?

S4: Think it was Ramsgate wasn't it?

S1: Ramsgate. Margate.

S4: Margate.

S1: That's right. Margate. And oh yes. Well, me mother looked after her you know.

S2: Yes.

S1: And she was quite happy with us. In fact for years we kept in touch after the war you know.

S2: Yes.

S1: I don't know now what's happened to her of course.

S2: Was she a young girl who came?

S1: Oh yes. She was only a well more or less a growing child you know.

S2: Yes.

S1: But oh yes we had evacuees. It all comes back to me but I can't ...

S2: No that's fine. What would you have had for a Christmas meal during the war? What would you have eaten before the war for Christmas? Did it change?

S1: Change? Well, I can't remember before the war much.

S2: No.

S1: But we always, me mother always kept ducks, you see, because being on the Armitage Road me dad used to make a path so they could go swimming on the canal you see, because the canal was by.

S2: And they came back to you?

S1: Me dad had got a garden so of course he made a path on the garden for them to be able to go on to the canal and they used to be fed in a morning with corn, Indian corn, and then they'd go and be away all day and come back for the supper at night you know and go into the shed on the garden.

S2: Yes.

S1: Yes. Oh I can remember all that.

S2: So did you eat one for Christmas dinner?

S1: Oh yes we had it for our dinner. Not the ... I think me dad bought one though. He didn't give us what he'd grown, what he'd looked after. Oh no, he wouldn't, he'd buy it you know, off somebody else.

S2: Oh right.

S1: Or tell us that.

[Laughter]

I'm not sure. But he wouldn't tell. He wouldn't do anything to upset us.

S2: Do you remember pudding, Christmas pudding or?

S1: Yeah we had Christmas pudding yeah. I can remember that.

S2: Did you have anything, and coins or anything in it?

S1: No.

S2: No.

S1: Custard. Was always custard on it yes. No cream much we didn't have.

S2: No.

S1: Too expensive.

S2: Did you have toys at Christmas when you were little? When you were growing up?

S1: Not much no. More books and things like that than toys. I can't remember having many toys. A Doll.

S2: Did you have a doll?

S1: I remember a doll, yes.

S2: Yes.

S3: Did you get a pram to put her in?

S1: I've still got some dolls up at home.

S2: That you had when you were a child?

S1: Yeah.

S2: I must come round and take a photograph of them.

S1: They're on the spare bed aren't they?

S2: Ah! That would be lovely yes. Alright, let's move back on then to him coming back to Morris coming back now from the war.

S1: Yes.

S2: And you getting back together. Did you come back then to live in Colton?

S1: Oh yes we came back to live in Colton.

S2: Yes.

S1: And he started work here again you see.

S2: Yes. And what did he do mainly? What sort of things did ...?

S1: Well, he used to do chicken pens. Woodwork, you see.

+

S2: Yes.

S1: He's always done woodwork. And he use to ... Of course the smallholdings then had got ... they were farms of course. Tom Preston and Ivy and people like that and they used to come for ... and he'd make hen houses and that sort of thing you know.

S2: Yes.

S1: Yes.

S2: Was he a wheelwright as well?

S1: Yes.

S2: Yes.

S1: Yeah. And the blacksmiths; they had a blacksmith's shop here you see. Yeah. The house that was only as far as this wall; we had that as a sitting room but all this was workshops you see.

S2: Yes.

S1: Yeah.

S4: He was the undertaker as well.

S1: Hm?

S4: Was the undertaker as well

S1: Oh he did undertaking me dad did.

S2: Did he yes?

S1: And all the ... lots of people that were buried in ... Well, mostly people that were buried in Colton.

S2: So your dad used to come over here to work as an undertaker? Did you say it was your dad? Or was it Morris who was ...?

S4: Morris.

S1: Morris, me husband.

S2: Morris was the undertaker. Your husband yes.

S1: Yeah, he did ...

S2: Yes, I thought it.

S1: He did undertaking and ...

S2: Yes.

S3: What do you mean? He'd make the coffins?

S1: Oh yes he made the coffins and he dressed like an undertaker, you know.

S2: Yes.

S1: With the top hat. And they used to walk down the village in precession you know. Yeah. We were well liked actually, you know, in Colton.

S2: Yes. A very important part of the village life.

S1: I'm sure ... yes. You know, and everybody was so kind and that to you, you know, but we were the same with other people I suppose.

S2: Was it a nice village to come into?

S1: Oh yes. Yes it was.

S2: You didn't find it difficult leaving where you were and coming into the village?

S1: Well I did at first for a bit but then you got used to it, you know.

S2: Yes.

S1: Yeah.

S3: Were there any shops when you came?

S1: Yeah, Mrs Upton's was a shop and Miss Williscroft. She was the newspaper person, delivered the morning paper, you know.

S2: Miss Williscroft did?

S1: Yes.

S2: Did she yes?

S1: And ...

S2: Which paper did you used to take? Did you remember?

S1: I can't remember.

S2: So she'd come out in all weathers would she?

S1: Oh every morning yes.

S2: was there a post office here as well?

S1: Oh yes. There used to be a post office up, you know ...

S2: Martlin Lane

S?: Yes.

S1: There was a row of the houses at the back there. At the top.

S2: Martlin Lane?

S1: That's right, yes.

S2: Who used to run that?

S4: Mrs Deakin

S2: Yes.

S1: Yeah, that's right.

S2: And who delivered the post then?

S1: Oh, Nelly Rotchel for years and years and years.

S2: She lived next to your ... Morris's mum and dad?

S4: That's right.

S1: Yes she did.

S2: Yes.

S1: Yes. Oh yes she was the post woman for years. Used to ride a bike, you know.

S2: Yes.

S1: Yes.

S3: Did you still ride your bike when you lived here?

S1: Oh yes. I did.

S2: Did you still go to work at first when you were married?

S1: Yes. I used to go every day to Keys you see.

S2: On your bike?

S1: Yes, on me bike. Till I learnt to drive and then I had a little car you know.

S3: What sort was it?

S1: Morris Minor, I think, or something like that. yeah.

S2: And then, I'm looking at this young man next to you so at some point along the road you had a baby.

S1: Oh yes we did. Yes, that's right. Yeah, he was born in the house here.

S2: Right.

S1: Yes, and he ... I had the nurse and the doctor came.

S2: Which doctor would that be?

S1: From Rugeley and he came and they looked after me here and I never had to go away or anything and they were so kind you know.

S2: Were you thrilled it was a baby boy.

A1: Oh yes. Thrilled to bits you know. Yeah.

S2: And Morris was I bet wasn't he?

S1: Oh he was yeah.

S2: Yes.

S1: Thrilled he'd got a son.

S2: Yes. So you come in on the story now then. What are your earliest memories Keith?

S4: Well, I remember all of the garden was actually over to vegetables then.

S1: Oh yeah.

S4: And there was very little area of lawn but all of the rest of the garden was completely vegetables.

S1: Vegetables, yeah.

S2: Who did the vegetable growing?

S4: Well, Dad had one section and me two granddads had the other two sections.

S1: Me dad used to ride his bike from Rugeley. They lived in Church Street you know.

S2: They'd moved in to Church Street by then?

S1: Yes.

S2: Yes.

S1: And he used to ride, come up on his bike and do it and I used to get me potatoes and everything for nothing. Freebies, you know.

S2: Yes. So you stopped work when you had Keith did you? Or did you keep on.

S1: No I ... Well, I did yes. I stopped work for a while but then they used to bring work out to me.

S2: Right.

S1: Yeah, when he was small.

S2: You were very important weren't you?

S1: Oh I did. Well I was for single suits you know.

S2: Yes. And I suppose being someone who did hand sewing you could still do that hand stitching without a machine.

S1: Yeah. They did that. yeah. And they used to come from Keys and bring me a bag of sewing to do and then they'd come and collect it when I'd ring up and tell them I'd finished it, you know.

S2: Yes.

S1: But I was the one. Well, I was the important one really, although I say it meself, I shouldn't.

S2: Yes. For doing the finishing.

S1: But I was doing ... I did the finishing yes. And I taught others how to do it eventually.

S2: And you Keith? You were taught about woodwork from a very young age were you?

S4: Yes. I was always playing about in the workshops as a child and it just seemed natural to take it up really and I worked with dad when I left school and I was his apprentice.

S2: Where did you go to school?

S4: Colton school to start off with.

S2: What was that like for you?

S4: It was still very Victorian in those days really.

S1: Mr Broughton.

S4: Mt Broughton was the headmaster.

S3: Was he strict?

S4: Very strict. Very strict.

S1: Oh he was. Used to use the cane a lot hadn't he?

S4: Oh yes.

S2: Did you have the cane?

S4: No. No I didn't!

S2: Managed to avoid that.

S4: Truthful answer, isn't it.

S2: Not just because your mum's sitting there?

S4: I remember when we started in the infants' class we started with slates and chalks. You know, it was that sort of style at that time, and still the old desks and the old classrooms.

S2: All in rows?

S4: Absolutely. There were three or four years in each classroom, particularly in the older years and we were taught separate lessons within the same classroom.

S2: How many classrooms were there?

S4: There were three classrooms: the infants, a middle classroom, and then the headmaster had the more senior ones up until the age of 11 and the 11 plus.

S2: Yes. Did you take the 11 plus?

S4: I did yes. I didn't pass the 11 plus. We went to Broadacres at Hixon then.

S2: Hixon yes.

S4: Yeah.

S2: Was that a good school?

S4: It was.

S1: Used to go on the bus hadn't you?

S4: Yes. I much preferred the secondary school to the junior school to be honest.

S2: Yes.

S4: I suppose being, perhaps, more practical ...

S2: Yes.

S4: ... it suited my sort of learning more at the secondary school and I enjoyed it that much more for that.

S2: And did you play lots of different games when you were at school either of you? Do you remember? What do you remember doing Hilda when you were at school? Games with your friends. Do you remember any games?

S1: I can't remember.

S2: Did you do any skipping?

S1: Oh skipping yes. And we used to have a long rope and a person in each hand and turn it and they'd run in and skip and skip and skip.

S2: Can you remember any of the songs you used to sing when you did it?

S1: No I can't. no.

S2: 'All in together girls' we used to ...

S1: Oh yes. Oh yes. That yes.

S2: Yes.

S3: The same one?

S2: Yes. Everybody used to sing that.

S1: They did yes. That's right.

S3: Did you play snobs?

S1: Hm?

S3: Play snobs?

S2: Of ... Five stones?

S3: Five stones.

S2: Some people call it.

S1: Oh no I can't remember that.

S2: Hopscotch?

S1: Hopscotch oh yes. We did yeah.

S2: What about you Keith? Do you remember games?

S4: Not at Colton school really. I don't remember too much in the way of games there. Used to play the normal games at secondary school: football and so on, and cricket.

S2: Did you stay at school for your lunch when you were in Colton or did you pop home?

S4: I think I came home to start off with. But you were dinner lady.

S1: Yes, I was a dinner lady at one time.

S2: Oh were you yes?

S4: At Colton school and ...

S1: Yeah, I was.

S4: ... then I stayed ...

S1: School.

S4: At school for lunchtime.

S2: Were there school dinners, meals, provided? Did they cook there?

S1: Oh yeah they did them at school you see yeah. And I was ...

S3: It would be good dinners it me nan had done it!

S2: Did you cook or were you just supervising?

S1: Well, I was just laying tables and things like that but I did cook as well.

S2: You could have done couldn't you yes?

S1: You helped each other in them days didn't you?

S2: Yes.

S2: So how long did you stay at the school at Hixon?

S4: Until I was 16.

S2: 16.

S4: 16.

S2: And then where did you go from there then?

S4: Well, I worked with dad but I went to Stafford College and learnt the trade, joinery, at Stafford College as well.

S2: And how did that work with you? Were you coming back with new ideas and things or were they things that your dad used already?

S4: I think, I think he appreciated what I learned. I think I probably learnt more from me dad than I did probably at college at that time.

S2: Yes.

S4: Yes.

S2: There's nothing like practically doing it is there?

S4: Yes, that's right.

S1: He was determined you were going to get certificates.

S4: That's right.

S1: And do the job right.

S2: He encouraged you to get the qualifications.

S1: Although he was working at home. I mean that didn't mean anything; he'd got to do ... go right through it hadn't you?

S4: That's right. He was very happy and encouraged me to go to college and follow a proper apprenticeship and so on.

S1: Yes. Oh yeah, you did.

S4: Which enabled me to follow on further later on.

S2: When you left, yeah.

S2: Is there anything your dad made that you look back and think that was absolutely wonderful. That's so much my dad' or anything?

S4: Well, it was always a pleasure working with him. It was a special experience and I picked a lot up from him just observing really. You know, he didn't always have to instruct me and tell me what to do.

S2: Was he a quite man?

S4: But he was. He was a very quite man. But by working with him and following his example you developed a sort of sixth sense really as to what he was going to do next and you could sort of foresee what he was going to do and we worked so closely together.

S2: You didn't argue over things then?

S4: No. No. I don't remember ever arguing. No. that's right.

S2: Wonderful.

S4: No, it was a nice experience working with him.

S3: Did he teach you how to make wheels?

S4: He did, yes. I built up some wheels and we used to do the hooping of the tyres in the yard here, and that was a nice experience, sort of ...

S2: You did once do that for a Colton festival?

S4: Yes we did.

S1: Showed what they could do yes.

S4: That's right. So we did a very wide range of work really. We made some furniture didn't we?

S1: Yes.

S4: From time to time, and ...

S2: Was that what people ordered or did you just ...?

S4: Yes.

S2: Yes.

S4: Yes. I remember dad making the altar for Bishton Hall School, for the chapel there. Things like that. We used to do a lot of ...

S2: Very specialised work.

S4: Used to do a lot of work at Bishton Hall School.

S1: Yeah, in them days.

S4: And people used to come here and I remember the, when he was an undertaker, everyone used to meet here at the house and the cars were lined up outside, and as a child that was quite impressive that one moment you knew what was happening as a child because someone used to come to the house and I had to go and make myself scarce in the garden or something like that when the visitors were here. And then the following day, Dad started making the coffin.

S2: Yes. Did you help?

S4: And worked all the way through. I helped him with that. And he used to change then from his overalls to his top hat and tail coat.

S1: I've still got the top hat up there.

S3: Really!

S1: Yeah.

S4: For the funeral.

S2: Yes. In those days did people stay at ... did they keep the person who died at home?

S1: Yeah.

S4: Generally speaking I think.

S1: About four or five days, but if they died in hospital they'd stay there and the undertaker used to pick them up, bring them back home to keep at home for perhaps a night and then go from their own home. You know.

S2: Yes. And they had, I suppose, local people would be around to lay out.

S1: Oh yeah.

S2: And he didn't have to organise that.

S1: I didn't do anything like that I didn't. No.

S2: No. And he didn't have to organise that. That was separate altogether in those days.

S4: He organised it but ...

S2: Oh did he?

S4: Yes.

S1: Yes. But I didn't do it but he organised it all. Yes.

S2: So looking back to the village life as such as ... Have you ever been members of anything? Have you been a member of something Hilda? You know, the WI or The Produce Guild or ...?

S1: Oh, WI, I've been in that a good many years you know. Yes.

S2: Yes.

S1: But I've never been in The Produce Guild.

S2: No? Nor any of the organisations?

S1: No, not really. I can't think why.

S2: Have there been any social events that you've gone to in the Reading Room? You're very near to the Reading Room. Did you?

S1: Oh yes. I used to go and help at things, you know, when there was something on. Specially for the church or anything like that.

S2: Yes. Like fetes and that ...?

S1: Because me dad was, he was a wotsit, a ...

S2: Church warden?

S1: Church warden at Colton school.

S2: Was he?

S1: Yeah.

S2: At the church?

S1: Church down here.

S2: Your Morris was?

S1: Yes, me husband was. Yes. He worked hard really. Yeah.

S3: Did you used to go to church every week Keith?

S4: Yes.

S1: Oh yes.

S4: I was encouraged to go to ...

S2: Go to the Sunday school.

S4: ... Colton school and, uh, to the church and ...

S2: Was there a Sunday school?

S4: Sunday school, yes.

S1: Oh yeah.

S3: Did they go as well?

S4: Well, we used to go ... We had confirmation classes and they were Sunday afternoons, I remember. But ...

S2: Was that with the vicar?

S4: Yes.

S2: Who was it then? Do you remember?

S4: Reverend Tolsen at that time.

S2: Tolsen.

S4: And we had choir practise as well on Friday evenings, so ...

S2: Right. Who was the organist?

S4: I don't think there was an organist.

S2: It wasn't Cecil

S4: I don't remember the organist at that time.

S2: No.

S4: But it was ... That was quite enjoyable: the choir practises on Friday evenings, because Mrs Tolsen used to be involved. And in the summer we used to play rounders first of all.

S2: How nice!

S4: On the church lawn. And she used to provide refreshments and then we used to go and do the choir practise afterwards. So it was quite a social event really.

S2: Yes. Did you sing on Sundays?

S4: Yes.

S2: Morning and evening?

S4: Morning and evening when there were morning and evening services, and for weddings and things like that.

S3: How long did you go on to the choir, Keith?

S4: Well, until I was a late teenager really, I suppose.

S3: Even when your voice had broken?

S4: Yes. And that was quite a strong part of the church at that time really, the choir.

S2: And Sunday school on a morning would that have been, when you were younger, or in the afternoon?

S4: I don't remember exactly when it was, but Miss Rotchell used to do the Sunday school I remember, when I was very small. Yes. I remember, I don't know whether you remember, but I think you'd ... there was a collection at the Sunday school and I think you'd told me that I had to save my money for my holidays, and on one occasion I wouldn't let her have the money because you'd told me to save my money.

[Laughter]

That caused a bit of a problem.

S1: I can't remember that mother!

S3: I seem to remember that.

S1: We always used to have a holiday every year.

S2: I was just going to come on to holidays so you brought us around it nice. Did you have holidays as a child?

S1: No. I can't remember that.

S2: No.

S1: I probably did but I can't remember.

S2: Or day trips out or ...?

S1: Oh we, yes, once a year we used to ...Me dad used to work, belong to the working men's club in Rugeley, and they used to have a seaside trip once a year. And he always used to pay for us to go on that, you know. Me and me sister.

S3: Where would you go?

S1: Oh, all over. I remember going to Scarborough and ...

S2: That's a long way for a day.

S1: ... Blackpool and—oh where else did we go? Lots of places. Always at the seaside.

S2: Would you have gone on the bus or the train?

S1: Bus.

S2: Bus.

S1: But I used to have to take tablets because I was always sick when I travelled on the bus. So I always had to have me tablets or else I couldn't go. But we had happy days as well as work days.

S2: Yes.

S1: Didn't we?

S2: But you did go on holiday as a family, from Colton?

S1: Oh yeah.

S2: With Morris and Keith.

S1: Oh yes.

S2: Where did you go to then?

S4: It was Wales generally wasn't it?

S1: Wales mostly.

S2: Yes.

S1: Rhyl and Llandudno and round there we used to go.

S2: And would you stay ...?

S1: We'd got some friends that me husband did work with. He was a bricklayer, you see. He'd do bricklaying. Mr Toy down Wolesley Road. He lived in one of them houses. And we'd go ... They had a caravan and holiday time they never wanted to go themselves but every holiday we could go and have the caravan you see. Because they trusted us.

S2: Yes.

S1: And we used to go and you always used to take somebody with you hadn't you? Stephen Hibbs and one or two more, you know.

S2: How many of you would go the?

S1: The four of us.

S2: The four of you would go. Yes.

S3: Did you go by car?

S1: Yes, must have done. Yes, we did.

S3: How long would stay for when you went?

S1: Oh, a week. We would stay for a week and come home again. And each time they went away we could go couldn't we? Yeah.

S4: And that was at Criccieth wasn't it?

S1: At Criccieth. We went to a lot.

S4: Yes. We always enjoyed it there didn't we?

S1: We did, yes.

S2: What do you remember doing there Keith?

S4: Well, swimming in the sea. The beach every day wasn't it? Weather always seemed to be good in those days.

S1: Steve Upton used to go hadn't he?

S4: Yes.

S1: And Steve Hibbs. Take it in turn to go, you know.

S2: Yes.

S1: With us. So you'd got company.

S4: Somebody to ... Good friends from school.

S2: Would they manage to get away themselves if you didn't invite them?

S1: Oh no.

S2: Did everybody have holidays?

S1: I don't think ...

S4: I don't think. A lot of people didn't in those days in the 1950s and '60s. No, it wasn't always, you know, the usual thing.

S2: No.

S1: No.

S4: No. We were lucky really, being able to go away, weren't we? Each year?

S1: We were lucky really. They used to like us to go because they knew we'd look after the caravan and nothing would happen to it, you know?

S2: Yes.

S1: We didn't pay them much for it but we give them something, you know. We didn't hire it as we should have done but they were glad that we used to go, you see.

S2: Did you have to take your own sheets down with you?

S1: Oh yes we did. We took our own bed clothes and that.

S2: In those days I don't suppose it had electricity on did it?

S1: Oh no.

S2: Did you ... How did you ...?

S4: It was a gas lamp wasn't it?

S1: Gas lamp.

S4: In the caravan.

S1: Yes.

S2: Calor gas?

S1: Yes.

S4: Yes.

S2: And the cooking. I bet you had black on those pans. Do you remember? Well I've cooked with Calor gas in a caravan I always find that the saucepans have a lot of black all underneath. And washing, we had to keep a separate thing for the pans.

S1: Oh I know.

S2: Do you remember? Yes.

S1: Yes.

S2: Yes. How far from the sea were you where you stayed?

S4: It was about half a mile wasn't it?

S1: Half a mile. That's all. Yeah.

S2: Lovely.

S1: And they had that for years didn't they? Yeah. We were upset when, well, we felt it a lot when they packed up didn't we?

S4: Yeah.

S2: You didn't think of getting one of your own then?

S1: No. We didn't have our own did we?

S4: No.

S2: Just going back a bit to, you were talking about when you had Keith, you had wonderful care from the doctor and everything.

S1: Oh yes, I did.

S2: Yes. And when you were at school Keith, did they have any health care provided? You know, nurse coming round or dentist or anything like that when you were at school?

S4: I think we had the dentist come to do inspections.

S2: Yes.

S4: I don't remember ever any treatment at school. But they used to come and do inspections and they used to come and do all the injections at school, I remember.

S2: Yes.

S4: I remember that quite clearly. We were injected for all sorts of things in those days. I remember that happening at school.

S2: Did you have any childhood illnesses?

S4: I think I had just about everything ...

S1: Everything I think.

S4: ... that was going at the time.

S2: Yeah.

S1: Yeah.

S4: Measles and German measles and mumps and ...

S1: All sorts.

S4: All sorts of things.

S2: Because they didn't used to have injections for that did they?

S4: No.

S1: No.

S2: No, I think not when you were little. Whereas they don't get them today. They don't get those illnesses.

S4: So yeah. I seem to remember having all those ailments.

S1: Oh yeah.

S4: When I was young.

S3: Did you have to stay in bed all the time when you'd got them?

S4: Oh yes. Well, me dad was school manager wasn't he? He was a ... And the headmaster lived next door.

S1: I know.

S4: So I couldn't get away with anything in those days.

S2: So your dad was a school governor?

S4: School governor.

S2: Was he!

S4: Yes. They called them managers in those days but ...

S2: How long for?

S4: Ooh.

S1: Years.

S4: For years and years and years wasn't he?

S1: He was.

S4: Yeah, I think he was school governor for, what, 30-odd years.

S1: I bet he would be, yes.

S2: So, governor of the school, church warden.

S4: Church warden.

S1: Yeah.

S2: And undertaker and ...

S1: Everything. Yeah.

S2: Very respected.

S1: He was very popular actually.

S2: Yes.

S1: And everybody, well they loved him didn't they? Your dad. Yeah. Everybody seemed to be happy with him, you know. That meant a lot in them days.

S2: Yes. I'm coming back to illness again, not to dwell on it, but I just wondered, when you were young and if you had something wrong did you just call a doctor or did you try and manage the ... Did you have to pay to see a doctor?

S1: Oh I think so. Yes.

S2: Yes.

S1: But me mother was quite good actually, and she looked after ... I had the measles once and I had the chicken pox, but I never had anything really serious when I was young at all.

S2: No. Did she have any like ... If you had a cold or a sore throat did she have anything she made for you?

S1: Oh she'd buy stuff at the chemist's for me. Yeah.

S2: Yes.

S1: She did.

S2: Yes.

S1: She knew about most things like medical, you know.

S2: Yes.

S1: She did.

S2: Yeah.

S1: And we had every care when we were children, you know.

S2: Yes.

S1: Yeah, we did.

S2: Were you warm?

S1: Oh warm, yeah. Because me dad worked at the pit he got coal.

S2: I understand you were inside but you know when you went outside?

S1: Oh yes.

S2: Because you didn't wear trousers in those days ...

S1: Oh no we did ... oh, no way.

S2: What were your clothes that you would wear in those days?

S1: Just a skirt and blouse and that. And knitting. Me mother used to knit and that, you know.

S2: Yes.

S1: Yeah.

S2: And did you have a liberty bodice or ...?

S1: Oh yes, a liberty bodice, yes.

S2: Yes.

S1: Oh yes. Always. I can fasten it up with buttons you know.

S2: Yes.

S1: Oh yes.

S2: So were you cold, did you think, when you went outside?

S1: No I can't remember being cold. No. Scarf always and that sort of thing. We were well looked after when we were children. We were lucky.

S2: Did you have many clothes?

S1: Not a lot no. But me mother was always washing and that you know.

S2: Would you wear the same clothes several days?

S1: Two or three I think and then change and she'd wash them and wash about you know sort of thing.

S2: Have your best clothes for Sunday.

S1: Oh yes, on a Sunday!

S2: They never got worn out did they?

S1: To go to church. No. With me dad being ... With me husband being church warden for a good while wasn't he? And so we had to be dressed properly you know.

S2: So you had to be dressed properly then.

S4: Yes.

S1: I think we've still got his top hat.

S4: I think so yes.

S1: I think I've still got that up there.

S2: What did you wear for school Keith, when you were here?

S4: We had a blazer didn't we?

S2: Oh did you!

S4: In those days.

S2: A uniform?

S4: Yes.

S3: Colton school?

S4: Yes. In the later years when Mr Waters became headmaster we had a school uniform then.

S2: He introduced that, yes.

S4: And we had a blue blazer.

S3: Short trousers or.

S4: Yes, it'd be short trousers in those days. All the way through the winter as well. You weren't allowed long trousers until you went to senior school in those days.

S2: And did you have a badge on your blazer.

S4: Yes, there was a badge.

S2: Similar.

S4: A sort of fleur-de-lis type badge.

S2: Oh I see yes.

S4: And the school cap.

S2: Oh did you have to wear your cap.

S4: Yes. So there was a uniform at that age.

S2: What colour shirt would you have worn?

S4: It would be white wouldn't it? White shirt.

S2: And a pullover?

S1: Yeah.

S4: Yes. Blue.

S1: Blue pullover.

S4: Pullover I think, yes.

S2: Was that navy blue or brighter.

S1: Yeah. Navy, I think, wasn't it?

S4: Think so.

S1: I think I can remember it was navy.

S2: And what colour socks?

S4: Probably grey socks I would have thought.

S1: Grey. Oh that's right.

S2: Knee length.

S4: Yes. They'd be long socks with short trousers wouldn't they?

S2: Yes.

S4: In those days.

S2: And what did you carry your books and things? Did you have anything to take to school?

S1: Satchel.

S4: Satchel I think. Yes.

S2: Yes. A leather satchel.

S4: Yes.

S2: Do you look back to Colton school and think you didn't enjoy it at all or do you ...?

S4: I didn't enjoy junior, Colton school, as much as the secondary school to be truthful.

S2: Yes. What do you look back at and think 'Oh I wouldn't like to do that again.'

Colton History Society – All Our Stories. *Kethe & Hilda Williscroft*

S4: Well, there wasn't a wide range of activities in those days. It was very much a three Rs I think.

S2: Just boredom really.

S4: Yes.

S1: Was with Broughton wasn't it.

S4: Well it was yes.

S1: Oh he was a ...

S3: Was he still living next door to you then?

S1: Yes.

S4: Well, he moved when he retired.

S1: Yeah.

S4: Because Mr Walters moved here and they moved in next door and things improve then.

S3: So was that his house then?

S4: Yes at the time.

S1: Yes.

S2: It did improve. Was there a garden there at Colton school?

S4: There was originally.

S2: Right.

S4: because when dad went to school he went to the same school until he was 14.

S2: Right.

S4: So at that time they used to do gardening and some woodwork I think as part of the school activities.

S1: With Mr Broughton, yes.

S4: Yes but that had finished by the time it was just the junior school. So there wasn't a garden there then.

S2: Was there a field behind the school to play on and things?

S4: Yes there was, yes.

S2: You didn't have any sports at all?

S4: Not really. I don't remember any field sports. Just sort of playground activities really.

S2: Did you do PT? Yes.

S4: Yes we did but it was, I seem to remember it was all outdoor sort of activities in those days.

S2: Yes. Did you have an assembly in those days?

S4: I don't remember assemblies.

S2: No. That's when ...

S4: Not at junior school.

S2: Who taught the RE? was it ... did the vicar come in?

S4: I think it, yes, the vicar did come in.

S2: It often was like ...

S4: Yes that's right.

S2: Yes.

S4: Yes, that's just brought it back to mind. The vicar did come in quite regularly and talk to us at that time. Yeah.

S2: And did you go to the school as children? Did you go to the church as a school?

S4: Yes. There were church services and so on. There was a very close link with the school.

S2: Did you go with the school sometimes to over there as a dinner lady and as a mum?

S1: Well, we did, yes. When you were at school we used to go hadn't we?

S2: Yes.

S4: Yeah, the festivals were quite important then: harvest festivals and Christmas plays.

S1: Yes.

S2: What would you do at harvest festival?

S4: We always used to make a basket up didn't we? Of fruit and produce and each one of us used to take that to the church didn't we? That was a ...

S1: Because we'd got apple trees you see.

S2: And was that distributed?

S4: That was distributed, yes, after the service. I always remember that.

S2: So that was harvest. And then Christmas did you go?

S4: Christmas. There was always a play in, you know, the nativity, in church.

S2: Did you ever get a part in that?

S4: A minor part I think.

[Laughter]

Yes. Don't remember a major part in that. But yeah, there was always activities at Christmas time and the carol services and that sort of thing.

S2: Christmas party at school or anything like that?

S4: I think there was. I think there was. I don't remember that really.

S4: Couldn't have made much of an impression.

S2: No.

S4: Used to have broadcasts, you know, the radio broadcasts, and nature programs, music and movement and singing, and that sort of thing.

S2: Oh you did music and movement.

S4: ...broadcast from the BBC.

S2: In the hall?

S4: In the hall, yes.

S2: Yes.

S4: So that was a bit of relief from the normal classroom activities.

S2: What would you wear to do music and movement?

S4: I think we had ...

S2: Vest and ...

S4: Yeah, we had shorts I think, and pumps and things like that for PE. But it was very basic education really in those days.

S2: Learn your tables.

S4: Yes. Yes. It was quite regimented.

S1: Mr Broughton had, they had six girls.

S2: Did he? Yes.

S1: He was a father of six and they were all girls.

S2: Did they all go to Colton school?

S1: Oh yes. Till they were older and then they passed on to ...

S2: Yes.

S1: They were all teachers or something. You know. They were all ... I still have a card sometimes from one of them.

S2: Do you? Yes. You're good at keeping in touch aren't you.

S1: Oh yes. They ... She was always ... I don't know whether I had one this time. Hilda's her name. No, my name's Hilda. What was her name? [Laughs] Helen!

S4: Helen.

S2: Helen.

S1: Yeah, Helen, yeah, Helen Broughton. That's right.

S2: I mean I look at both of you and I know that you're both speaking as though you love the village and you've enjoyed living here.

S1: Oh yes.

S2: Are there any characters that stick out in your mind as being eccentric or somebody you could never forget or ...?

S1: No.

S2: Village characters. Any at all?

S1: Can't think of anything.

S4: No, not really

S4: Mr Ravenscroft was always a very distinctive man.

S2: Yes.

S1: Oh yes.

S4: And he ...

S1: Used to walk.

S4: ... was obviously very educated and very well respected within the village. And he probably stood out as a village character. Well, not a character but someone who was, you know, an important part of the village.

S2: Right. Yes. Everyone knew him didn't they?

S4: Yes. That's right.

S3: Used to play the organ didn't he?

S1: Yes he did.

S4: Yes.

S3: Did you used to pump it for him?

S4: I do remember pumping it on occasions but I think it had been converted to electric power then, but occasionally it had to be pumped I remember. Yes.

S2: When did the electricity come the Colton?

S4: Well, it was always here in my childhood.

S2: Yeah, what about ...

S1: I can't remember.

S2: ... when you first got married? Did you have electricity straight the way when you first moved in here?

S1: Paraffin lamps in then.

S2: Paraffin. Yes. At first yes.

S1: I can't remember really.

S2: And did you have running water when you moved in here?

S1: Oh yes.

S2: Yes.

S1: I think we had running water.

S2: So that was a bonus.

S1: Oh yes.

S2: Yes.

S1: Yeah I think we did, yes.

S2: So by the time you came you'd got electricity and hot and cold water?

S1: Yes.

S2: All mod cons.

S4: That's right. In the bathroom. Bathroom.

S2: Inside toilet. Yes.

S2: When we listen to your mum things were very different.

S4: That's right yes.

S2: Changed an awful lot.

S1: Oh yes they have.

S2: You've see many changes over your life Hilda, haven't you?

S1: Oh I have you've such ... yes a lot of changes

S2: And what do you think looking at the changes do you think we've improved things?

S1: I think so yes. Oh I'm sure so. It's a good many things you know yeah. Oh yes.

S2: Any regrets about what's changed or?

S1: No.

S2: No.

S1: Not really. No. I think you get used to them and you learn from them don't you?

S2: Yes.

S1: From the old days. You don't forget everything you've learnt. You'd never forget it.

S2: I just thought you might mention the traffic because ...

S1: Oh the traffic yes.

S2: Because you were here when it was just ...

S1: Bicycles.

S2: And safe to bike along to Rugeley.

S1: Anywhere. Yes.

S2: Anywhere you wanted to go.

S1: There was no cars much was there? No there wasn't.

S2: And yet now? Would you feel safe biking along the road to Colton?

S1: Not really I wouldn't I don't think.

S4: No.

S3: When do you remember having your first television?

S1: I can't remember it really. I can't remember it.

S4: I think you had your first TV for the coronation.

S1: Did we?

S2: Ah yes!

S1: Yes, I think we did now you ...

S3: 1953.

S2: Is that the year you were born?

S4: No, '52 I was born.

S2: 52.

[Laughter]

S4: I don't really remember '53 but ...

S2: Little black and white.

S4: I'm pretty sure ...

S1: Oh yes.

S4: ... you had the TV for then ...

S2: Yes.

S1: Black and white.

S4: ... and I think people came to view it.

S1: View it.

S4: View the coronation at that time.

S2: Yes.

S3: Because most people wouldn't have one would they?

S1: No, that's right.

S3: Was it a big screen?

S1: No. Not a very big one.

S3: Nine inch?

S4: Tiny nine inch I think.

S1: Yeah.

S4: I remember that little television.

S2: Do you remember it? Yes.

S4: Just one channel. Just BBC in those days wasn't it?

S2: With the card on most of the time.

S1: Yes.

S2: Just had certain programmes. It wasn't on all day was it?

S4: No that's right.

S1: Oh no it wasn't.

S2: So, looking back. So we're coming to the end of our interview. Anything else you would like to tell us about that I haven't asked you about? Anything else. Anything you'd like to comment on before we finish?

S1: No I can't think.

S2: Keith? Anything you want to add?

S4: It was just a happy time growing up really in Colton.

S2: Yes.

S4: And just being friends with so many people really.

S2: Yes.

S4: School friends. Many of whom still in contact with and you know still have contacts with the village sometimes.

S2: Yes.

S4: So that's nice.

S1: I liked ... I loved being at Brereton. Going to Brereton church. I thought it was terrible coming to Colton.

S2: Did you?

S1: Yes.

S2: Yes.

S1: Because at Brereton n it was high church, what they called high church, I don't know whether they still do. They still have the same services I think as when I was there but nothing like Colton and I thought Colton was terrible.

S2: Did you?

S1: When I first ...

S2: Because you were used to the high church.

S1: I was used to high church.

S1: Because if there was anything at school, to go to church we always went to Brereton you see.

S2: Yes.

S1: We used to walk up ... As I say, there was a railway through the village. We used to walk from the Armitage Road up through there and get out right by the church you see.

S2: So did the school children used to walk up to the church for a service sometimes from school?

S1: Yes. Oh yes.

S2: Did you go for the harvest when you were young as well like Keith's talking about doing here?

S1: Yes we did yes.

S2: Did you take ...

S1: I can't remember though.

S2: No.

S1: No. I can't remember that.

S4: I think you and Dad used to teach at the Sunday school didn't you? When you were young.

S1: Oh, me and ... yes. And your dad.

S4: In Brereton church.

S1: We used to ...

S2: You and your dad?

S1: Yeah. We used to teach at the school.

[Simultaneously]
S4/S2: At the Sunday school

S1: Yes. Oh yes we always went.

S4: You and Dad.

S1: We always had ... We did teach Sunday school yes.

S2: Did most children go to the Sunday school and the church in those days?

S1: Quite a lot did. Yes.

S2: Yes.

S1: Quite a lot did.

S2: Or to the chapel I suppose you had a chapel there too.

S1: Yes, there was a chapel opposite the church you see. I want to go sometime. Well, you said you'd take me and I'd love to ...

S2: Yes. To a service?

S1: Just go to see what it's like now.

S2: To a service you mean?

S1: Yes. Or even visit the church.

S2: Just visit yes. Good idea.

S1: To see what it's like now you know.

S2: Take you back a trip down Memory Lane.

S1: Lane. That's true yeah.

S2: Yes. That'd be lovely.

S1: But you said you would didn't you.

[Laughter]

S4: It's on record now.

S2: It's on tape now.

S1: I've not just asked you now. I've said it before, you know.

S2: Well, anything else that either of you want to say before I switch the recorders off?

S1: I don't think. I think we've said enough haven't we.

S2: It's been lovely.

S4: I think that's really very nice, yeah.

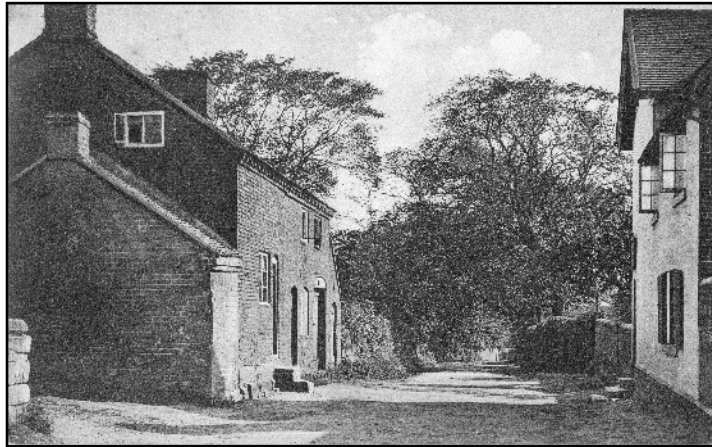
S2: Really so interesting. Absolutely.

S1: Has it been helpful to you?

S2: Wonderful. Yes. Thank you so much.



Fisher's Row High Street
Left & below



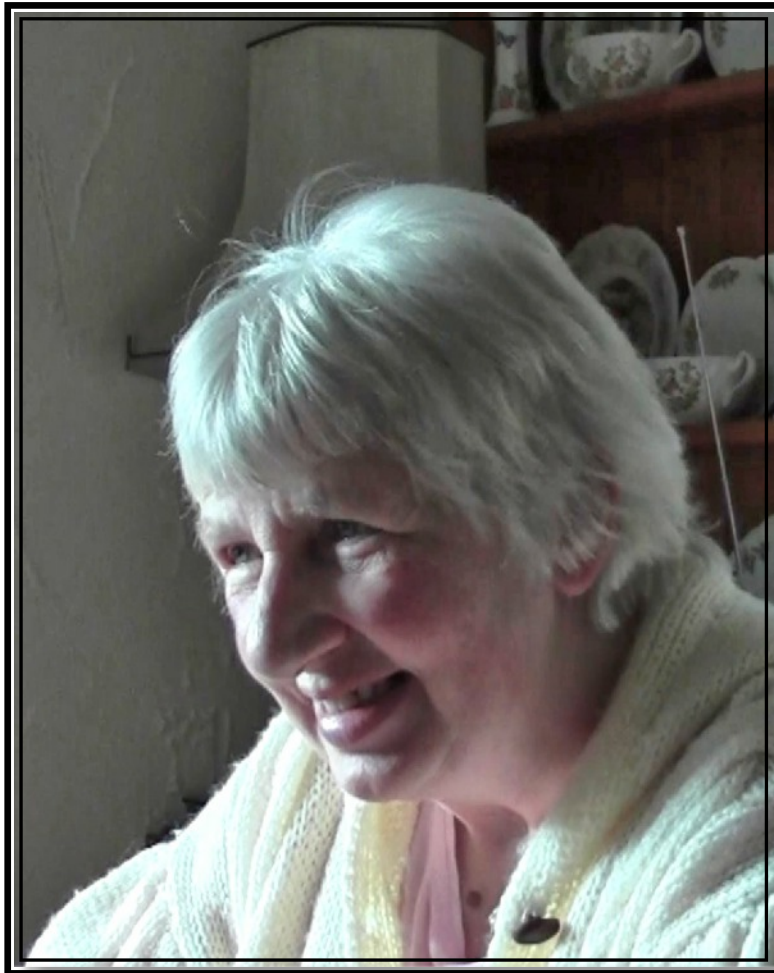
The High Street
With the Dun Cow on the right



Lloyds Cottages
The High Street
(Holly Cottage in
distance)

Colton History Society

All Our Stories



Lyn Collins's story

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 is 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 chaps 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 she 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.

S1: You know, are there ...?

S2: 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.

Colton History Society – All Our Stories.

Lynn Collins

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 dodderly, 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.

All Our Stories

With acknowledgements and thanks to all of those who
shared their memories with us

Barbara Kendrick

Lynn Collins

Colin Norman

Maureen Dix

David Bradbury

Nev & Alma James

Dorothy Bradbury

Nona Goring

Gwen Johnson

Olive & Frank Ballard

Harry Bull

Peggy Banister

Jack & Irene Brown

Peggy Peat

Keith & Hilda Williscroft

Ruth Williams

Laura Hodgkiss

Sam & Pete Jones

Les Kendrick

Sheila Bergin

Lilian Redmond

Stella & Malc Williscroft

Thanks also to the project team
for all of their hard work & efforts in producing

All Our Stories

Bev Croft

Marion Vernon

Bill Brown

Maureen Dix

Gill Sykes

Nona Goring

John Garstone

Philip Charles

Liz Craddock

Shirley Carter





Colton History Society: All Our Stories: April 2014