

An interview with Bessie Brewer



Bessie Brewer outside her home
in Northwick Road



Bessie's husband, son and brother in the
garden at Northwick Road.

NORTHWICK MANOR COMMUNITY PROJECT

Name: Bessie Brewer
Number: NM07
Date of Birth: 1924
Place of Birth: Mayfield Road, Worcester
Date of Interview: 05.07.2010
Interviewed by: Julia Letts

Track 2 : 10:12:08

Bessie, can I start by getting you to give me your date of birth and where you were born?

I was born in Mayfield Road, Worcester and my name is Bessie May Brewer.

What was your maiden name?

Whittle.

And when where you born?

1924

(I'm just hearing a squeaking noise, I'm just going to go and shut that door and we'll set off again.)

Track 3 : 10:12:11

OK, we've shut out the roadworks now. So, you were born in Mayfield Road.

Mayfield Road, that's up Rainbow Hill.

That's up by the cemetery, isn't it?

Yes, somewhere up that area.

Can you tell me a little bit about your home there, your earliest memories from that home?

I can't, there's nothing I can remember about Mayfield Road at all. 'Cause when I was 4, my father was transferred to Cardiff and we went down to live down there and I came back 3 months after my 14th birthday.

So your early years that you can remember were in Cardiff?

Early years, were in Cardiff.

So, tell me about your father, why was he transferred to Cardiff?

Well, he was in the sheet sheds. You know, the sheets they put over these big wagons, well, he used to sew them, used to sit and sew.

How fascinating, so was that a family thing, had your grandfather done that?

No, no, dad had done it for years, yeah.

And so when he was in Worcester, where did he work?

Up at Shrub Hill Station, in the goods yard.

Sewing the sheets for the train wagons?

Yeah, yeah. And then after he retired, he done little odd jobs gardening, mainly, for different people.

OK, so you grew up in Cardiff and then age 14 you moved back to Worcester ...

I moved back to Worcester, was 3 months in Stanley Road School, before I left school. And I had a job straight away because mother had got me one, to start me off straight away. I was at the Vicarage in St Martins, Lord and Lady Barty Roberts.

Goodness, that's sounds ... why did ...

You know where ...

Why did you come back, why did the family come back to Worcester?

Well, we had to come back because it was killing mother. Her health had deteriorated over the years. She used to suffer very bad with peptic ulcers in her mouth, she'd have as many as 6 and 7 at a time.

And what, and that was exacerbated in Cardiff?

Yeah, yeah, she was perfectly alright when she was in Worcester and she got alright when she got back to Worcester. She used to have occasional ulcer, because it was actually in her system, you see, but she did manage to have a happy life afterwards.

So, you came back to Worcester because of her health?

Yes.

And did your father immediately find work again ...

Well, I ...

... doing the same thing?

I presume, I presume he must have done. I can't remember, really, it's going back so many years.

And, so when you came back to Worcester, this would have been late thirties?

It was, now then, what was it. The war started in 1939, I think we came back between 1935 and '36 and we moved into a house in Wyld's Lane, which belonged to an aunty of my mothers. And we stayed there for, oh, 12 months, nearly 12 ½ months, and after that we went into Vincent Road, off Wyld's Lane. And I stayed there then, 'til I got married when I was 20.

And tell me about this job that you started off at the vicarage?

I was a maid, you know doing the, doing all the waiting on the table and doing the housework and they had a cook and a nanny, which the cook was the nanny to the family, and I kept to it for 12 months, but they wanted me to move in, so as I could be at her beck and call, and his mother said no, no way.

And they offered to give me a shilling extra ...

But still you didn't want to move in?

.. because I was only getting 8s 6p anyway.

And you would have been what, 14?

I was 14 when I started that job, yeah.

What was that like? I mean it must have been ...?

Well, it was horrendous, really, because it was a four storey building and it's right opposite the, what's it called, St Mary's School ...

That's St Mary's School.

Up Battenhall.

Yes, OK.

That one, on the other side of the road.

So, great big grand house ...

Oh, yeah.

... 4 storeys high and you were up and down like a yo-yo?

Up and down, yeah.

Can you remember what your sort of typical working day was like?

Well, I suppose it was the same as what you normally do at home, really, Hoovering, doing that. It used to take me nearly a day to do the brass and the silver and I used to help a little bit in the garden. I liked it in a way, 'cause the girls, they had 2 boys and 2 girls. But they did like to drink. I don't know whether any of them are still alive, but I know that Lord and Lady, they're finished, they're gone.

What were they, Lord and Lady ...?

Bar ... what the hell was their name now, I just had it on the tip of me tongue.

Track 4 : 12:12:33

I'm sure you'll come back to it, come back to it.

Oh, heck.

Now, presumably because you'd left all your friends that you'd grown up with in Cardiff, you didn't know many people in Worcester?

Oh, I didn't know very many in Worcester, no, definitely not.

Was it quite a difficult time?

Um, no, not really, no, well I wasn't a one for going out a lot, I was a home bird. I know it used to worry me mother because she said, you're not going to land up like your father's sister. 'Cause she lost her parents, dad's parents, and of course she lived with them, she'd never married. And, of course, she landed up in the River Severn, she walked in and drowned herself. And mother thought that I'd go the same way, you see, being, I'd never go out and mix with anybody, 'til I met me husband, of course.

Well, tell me about that, when did you meet your husband?

19.., well the war, I think the war had started, it hadn't started long, 193..

It was '39 when it started.

So I reckon it was round about '39, getting on to the forties and yes, we went together for 4 years and I got, I got married and had a son.

Between doing the job at the vicarage and meeting your husband, those years between about 15 and 18, did you change jobs?

Yes, I did, I went to the tin factory up by Shrub Hill Station, Thomasons, it was called.

And what did you do there?

Make tin cans and packing.

In a production line?

Yeah.

What was that like?

Oh, I tell a lie, before that I got a job at Russell & Dorrell. Now they used to, they started in Sidbury, Russells did. You had to go through a big yard, up a flight of steps to a big warehouse at the back. And I stayed there for so long and then they decided to build this down here and, of course, I was transferred up here. So it's a good job I got a bike.

And when you say, up here, you mean ...

The one that's just been knocked down with all the boards round it.

And that was the site ...

It was the site where there was a big factory there.

And so that was your first taste of coming to Northwick, really?

Yeah, yeah, that was it.

So you, can you tell me about that moment that you told you'd been transferred to Northwick and having to get here on your bike?

Well, I just didn't take any notice, really. I thought, well it's a job, I gotta keep doing a job, so I just went automatically.

And what did you do up here in the factory?

I didn't work on the machines, I worked in the packing department.

So, what did that entail?

Well, it was getting all the stuff from the different machines and sorting it out and putting it in packages, you know, ready to be delivered to wherever it was going.

What sort of packaging would you have used in those days, would it have been cardboard?

Well, there was some cardboard to it, and also a lot of paper, yeah.

So, you're mainly wrapping things and packing in cases?

That's right, yeah.

And then you moved on from that job?

I went from that one to Thomasons and I was there for about 3 years, 4 years and then I started with, with me son and I decided to pack it in. That's when I retired, 1943.

You can't say that, because it's a full time job bringing up a family.

Yeah, it is, really, yes.

But, how did you meet your husband?

I was walking with a cousin of mine up by the Tything, one Sunday night. We decided to go for a walk and we see these two fellows on the other side of the road. And my cousin said to me, she said, oh, she said, they're looking across the road at us. And I said, oh, well, let them look, there's plenty of places they can look at besides us.

Anyhow we walked, we came, we started back towards the Hawford [Foregate?] then, and we stood talking under Hawford Street bridge for quite a while, my cousin and I. And these two fellows came across. Of course, we got chatting and chatting. I said to her afterwards, I said, it's a wonder to me the weeds didn't grow round our feet the time we were stood there.

No, we decided to go for a walk the next night and we went up what they call, something Lane, up St Johns, and it was pitch black. You couldn't see a hand in front of you and there was me talking to my husband, boyfriend.

Track 5 : 10:12:53

And she hadn't had a word out of the one that was with him, because they just walked and never talked.

That was your cousin with the other chap?

Yeah.

So, that one never went anywhere, did it?

No, no, that didn't go anywhere. And any case I knew over the years that she fancied Jack more than she fancied him.

But you got in there first.

I got in there first. Yes, we got married in 1940, Johnnie was born in 1944.

So you had a war time wedding?

So, it's '40 ... yeah, yeah, we had a white wedding at St Martin's Church. I had to go and sleep, you're supposed to sleep in the area where the church is, 3 nights running. Well, I only slept the one. Mom, says I can't see how that can make any difference, anyway.

And it obviously didn't?

It didn't.

And can you tell me a bit about Jack's family, because he was a Brewer?

Yes. His parents, his grandparents came from, original market gardeners from Evesham. I didn't know his dad, because he died before I met Jack, but I lived with his mother and his, we got on, we got on alright. We got on famously, really. We had, I had Johnnie and we got on alright. And I was lucky, I had a young girl from across the road, she came and looked after him if I wanted to go anywhere and play with him. And so, I was really lucky.

And where were the Brewer family living at this point?

When the grandparents, the Brewer parents, they lived in one of the, what they class as police houses at the top of Grange Avenue, where the bus turns, Green Lane, Green Lane, that's it.

Well, they started off there with a field just opposite and then they decided to move from there to Ombersley Road. Then they decided to move from there to the shop at the bottom of Northwick Road on the right hand side, they sell spares for cars and different things. And that's where granddad Brewer died there.

So, were they running the shop?

Oh, yeah, yes, they ran the shop. 'Cause you see, they got all the stuff that they were accumulating on the ground, you see. And, of course, they hadn't only got that up at the top ground, they'd also got the big one that's got all houses on that's by that, that bit motor place, 'cause that used to be part of it.

So, they had various plots of land around?

Yes, and then they got this one down here by the school, that was theirs as well. There was also a big field down by the river where they used to have the cattle. And we also rented some ground off the back of Mrs Durrell. You know Mrs Durrell? And we used to keep chickens and ducks and other things down there.

So, it was quite an enterprise, by the time you came on the scene?

Oh, it was quite a big, it was quite a big area.

When you say they had all these bits of land, did they own them or did they rent them?

Oh, they owned them, because it was left to them from their father, you see.

So, Mr Brewer, the grandfather who came from Evesham, he had built up ...

Yes, he built up the firm, yeah.

What was the firm called?

Just Brewers.

Brewers.

Brewers, that's all, yeah.

So, was Jack involved in the family business when you first met him?

Oh, yes, he was one of the workers on the ground, but, of course, I think the one, the one brother, George, he was the one who died just before Jack died, just after Jack died, that was it. He was to have a share of the profits at the end of the year, but Jack didn't, you see, 'cause he wasn't only class as a worker on the grounds. So I presume George must have had some money invested in the firm, anyway, in the first place. I don't know, I don't know the ins and outs of it.

But, he did have this big field of houses, it's built now. He was left that by his father in his will and then, of course, in latter years we sold it and he got £75000 for it. That was a lot of money in them days.

I bet it was, but we'll come on to that in a minute. But, can you just clear up for me, we were in the war time. Were the family in reserved occupations, because they were working the land?

Yes, they couldn't go, they couldn't go to war, which they wanted to do, but they couldn't. Jack was in the Home Guard. They got on very well, really, 'cause they used to provide everything that was needed for people to have. And, of course, they weren't the only two in the family, there was quite a few others, as well.

Track 6 : 10:13:11

The one son was killed at Dunkirk, the one son he never done anything, we used to class him as the tramp of the family. Then there was another brother and another one, there was three sisters, there was a fourth sister but she died when she was 12 months old and I believe she's buried at St Stephens.

So, a very big family?

Very big family. And she, I think she had, I think she had the 2 or the 3 eldest children in the police house, up the top of Ombersley Road, and the rest of them was born down at the shop. And Jack was the baby one.

He was the youngest?

(inaudible)

Now, you've moved here in 19 ...

Well, I moved, we moved straight away into his mother's house, down here.

After you got married?

After we got married. I, we stuck it for ever so long, and then it started to get a bit funny. The sisters started to interfere and Jack says, I ain't having any more of this, he said, I'm going to get out. I said, well, where are we gonna go, I said, we've got a child. And he said, it don't matter where it is, so long as it's out of this house. So, of course, the sisters got together, well, the youngest sister, she owned this house.

You're talking about the house you're in now?

Yes.

Which is 135 Northwick.

Yes, she owned this house with her husband, but she kicked him out because he knocked her about, that one. Well, they decided, they persuaded her to sell this house to us and that's what she did. She didn't like doing it, mind you, because she could, she didn't get on with her brother. Well, she was put in that house to look after him, see that he done what he was told.

There was nothing wrong with him, but he got a palate, you know, no palate at the top of his mouth, at all. But, no, they never got on at all those two didn't. And, of course, eventually he got married to a, a girl 20 years younger and she gave my sister-in-law hell as well.

So, you moved ...

So, it wasn't a very happy family.

... no, but you moved out of the difficult circumstances?

I moved out of that yes, '95 I moved out and that was it.

And that was ...

And we've been here ever since, that was in ...

'44?

... no, the war was finished, no, the war hadn't finished, no, it hadn't. Because 1945 it finished, that was it and we moved up here on a Thursday, I think we was here for about 6 or 7 months, I should think, when the war started ...

When the war ended.

When it ended.

Yeah, ok, so mid forties?

Yeah, so we ...

Can, was this house, what was this house like at that point, was it a fairly new house?

1936, they were built.

So, it was fairly, fairly recently built?

Fairly new, yeah. Yeah, everything was made on site, all doors, all windows, everything. It was made in them days.

So, I can imagine that having shared the busy shop with your family-in-law, it must have been a wonderful moment for you to move into your own front door?

That's right, yeah, it was, yes it was.

Can you talk me round what the house was like, 63 years ago?

Well, it's a, I suppose, I can't actually remember what she got in this house, to tell you the truth. But, no, I can't. That's funny, that is, because I never really looked, I don't actually look at people's houses when I go in to 'em. You know, I just, sort of glance, and that's a bit, I couldn't tell you what was in a room.

You had lots of space.

Definitely, I did. And, of course, we didn't have that, we didn't have that for quite a few years, but that's the second one I've had anyway.

We're talking about a little sunroom. But you had the garden?

Oh, I had the garden, yeah, yeah.

And was it as built up around...?

No, that was allotments down there where Mr Orme is.

So, below you which is now Geneva Close, was allotments?

That was allotments, yes.

And orchards beyond?

I got an idea that it's, I think there was some orchards down there, I dunno, I. And then there was like a dingle affair that went right down and that's near the big house that's on the left hand side at the bottom of Slip Lane.

I know where you mean.

Yeah.

Now this house is on the site that was originally part of Northwick Manor.

Manor, that's it, yeah, yeah. Cause I think, I think Jack said that this part of the place, here, was the drive, the drive.

Right, where we're sitting, where your house is built, was the drive to Northwick Manor.

And when you go up the road here and you come to the bend, the wall, well, that was the stables inside there.

Track 7 : 10:13:33

Have you ever found when digging in the garden, or anything else, that, has it reminded you that you're on the site of a former old building?

No, never. The only thing my husband did find once, was a clay pipe. Dunno why, where that come from, I don't know.

Probably discarded.

That's more than likely ...

Way back when.

... the workers, yeah, more than likely.

And, somewhere I read that, when the hall itself, sorry, the manor itself, was demolished, some of the stone and wood was used in the building or the finishing off of the houses that were being built at the time.

More than likely, yes, more than likely.

Not something that you can recall though?

No, no.

Another thing I read was that these houses were nearly finished before the war ...?

That's right. These two, me and that one next door, were the last two to be built, definitely.

But were they finished before the war, or were, building works stopped and ...

They were finished, they were finished before the war finished, yeah.

Can I take you to back to when you first came to Northwick and were living in the shop. What was Northwick like? What sort of facilities were there, such as the pub and other shops?

Well, there was the Northwick Pub, there was a vine on the other end of Vine Street. Now I can't remember whether, I don't know what that place was where the Post Office is. That, I can't remember that. Cause the Post Office I used to go to, you know Johnsons, well that, his mother had the Post Office in her shop.

Right.

Cause as you walk through the door, the counter was like that way and there was a glass window there, and she used to sit behind there and take the post.

So, that was where you went to the Post Office?

That's where I went to the Post Office. But I can't remember what was there at the Post Office that there's now the big one.

Was there a bakery?

Um, there was a delicatessen down the corner of Coombs Road, there was a fish shop next door, there was a hairdresser, which is still there, and also there was a green grocer shop, Smiths family. Next door again was a sweet shop, then I don't, I can't remember what was next door to that. Then, of course, there was the Northwick Cinema and then there's Worthingtons, the hardware store, and that's been there for donkey's years.

So, tell me about the cinema? When you first moved to this area, it was presumably quite new?

Oh, yeah, yes, it was 'Gone with the Wind', we went to see, that was the night we got engaged, on the Saturday night.

Was that when it was opened?

Yeah.

That was the opening of it?

Yeah, yeah.

So, you got engaged on the night that the cinema opened?

Yeah.

Oh, you must tell me that story.

There's not much to tell.

Well, you, had you watched the cinema being built, and was there some anticipation in the community?

Well, of course, the thing is, you see, when I was, when I was living in Worcester I didn't know this area existed because I never came up this area. Even when we came to Worcester for holidays with mum and dad, I never went up to town, never. So, I couldn't tell you, I know, I know from the once that I did come up to see, I can remember there was a heck of a lot of shops in our high street, a heck of a lot. But, I couldn't tell you exactly which ones they are.

Cause my husband went to work, when he first started working, there used to be David Greggs in the high street, and he went to work there for I don't know what, 12 months or 18 month. And he got fed up with it and he packed it in and went on the ground.

Right, ok. Going back to the cinema, there, you've got to tell me about this opening night? How did you get tickets, did, were there tickets for everybody?

Oh, you just went in and asked for a ticket and then went in and saw the cinema.

Was there a big opening?

Um, not that I can remember, no. No, I can't remember that.

But you can remember going to see 'Gone with the Wind'?

Yeah.

And did you get engaged before, during or after 'Gone with the Wind'?

I think it was, I think it was during, I think it was during the picture. I'm sure it was. I can't remember us doing it outside or even inside at the end. So it must have been during the picture. That's going back a few years of my life.

Track 8 : 10:13:59

And then something that I've not been able to fully establish was, was the Northwick closed during the war years, or did it remain open?

Oh, I don't think so, it remained open, yeah.

And did you go there regularly?

Yes, after I had Johnny, I used to go every Monday afternoon and he used to fall asleep because it used, it used to make the ushers laugh. They said, oh, he certainly comes in for a rest.

And one of the, one of the sons, I think it was the one that was killed at Dunkirk, his wife died in the Northwick. She was on a machine and she just had a heart attack and fell on the floor and died.

What sort of machine was she on?

One of these, you know, slot machines.

Oh, goodness, ok.

Like you have at a seaside, you pull a handle down.

And she had a heart attack in the Northwick, goodness me.

Yes, it was a big shock, that was.

Was it quite a central part of the community, was it where you all met and ...?

Yes, I used to meet quite a few people there, you know, I used to, sometimes I used to go at night but it was mainly in the day time, I went.

Is that because it was cheaper, or ...?

Well, it was cheaper in them days, gosh, you don't get much change, really, out of £5, £7, £8 now, do you, when you go to the cinema.

No, you're right. Can you remember how much you paid?

No, I can't. I know it wasn't a lot, because we didn't have a lot of money in them days. Market gardening wages was very, very poor. Very poor.

You mentioned the pubs, did ladies go to the pubs in those days?

Oh, I did, I used to go (inaudible), cause I lived down the road then and the day, the day the war finished, I was down at me mothers and I'd left me son down there, John, and I said I'd pick him up at 5 o'clock. So, I came back home and, of course, they wanted me to go to the pub with them, the fellows off the ground.

So, I went and of course, you know what it was like, you just sit there and drink and that was it. By the time I got home I was nearly legless. And of course I went to bed and I fell asleep. I told me mother I'd be done at half past two, I arrived then at half past five.

I expect she understood. It was a pretty special day.

Well it was, really, yes, yes it was. It certainly was.

Do you remember any street parties or any community celebrations at the end of the war?

They did have them at Pinkett Street, they always do, they have them every now and again at Pinkett Street. And, of course, you see a lot of it, you see, you heard a lot of it on the wireless and that and, of course, we had our first television, and of course you see a lot of it on there.

When did you have a television, then, very early?

When they first come out we had one.

Most people remember seeing a television for the first time, round about the time of the Coronation, the Queen's Coronation.

Yeah, well I, we'd already got those, then.

Had you, gosh?

Because we had a neighbour, one of the policeman and his wife came across, from across the road, to come and have a look.

Going back to the war time, what do you remember of war time in Northwick? Do you remember air raid shelters?

Yeah, I think we did, I think we did, not that I ever used it. I think we did have an air raid shelter somewhere and Jack used to go off doing night duty. Said the only thing that used to make him annoyed was when the fellows started snoring. He said you couldn't hear a damn thing.

Where did he do his duty, was he stationed somewhere?

He was down Slip Lane, down there. And, of course, they had brooms, you see, for guns.

Broomsticks?

Broomsticks.

Oh, dear.

Honestly, I don't know.

Can you remember hearing the planes coming up the Severn?

Oh, yeah. I can remember a plane coming across, cause I was living at home then. When a plane, a German plane came across the top of our garden in Vincent Road and it hit the (inaudible) of St Johns. Then another one, it came

down in the, what they called 'the grubber' at the top of Tallow Hill, the big hospital that was there. And that landed in the garden. Well, that was not long, not far away from where we lived in Vincent Road. I can remember that.

I'm told there was quite a lot of aerial activity because of the base at Perdiswell.

Oh, yeah, yeah.

You often spotted planes in the sky?

Track 9 : 10:14:16

Oh, yes, you could often see 'em, but what I can't understand is, I, I always thought Perdiswell was an air place, and yet I never saw no planes come down there.

It was a base.

Yeah.

And I've certainly heard of planes coming down ...

Yeah.

... but, perhaps they didn't come this way, land from this direction.

No, no. In any case I didn't see much anyway because I was living at home, then. I didn't see many other planes when I first come up here.

Can you remember seeing any convoys or military vehicles on the road?

Oh, yes, you often saw them on the Ombersley Road, really, yeah.

Can you describe that to me?

Well, it was a, it was just a convoy going through and you always wave to them in any case, don't matter who they were. And I know my sister-in-law, Lauren and I went to Ronkswood and took cigarettes for the wounded soldiers.

Did you do any other special duties or, during the war time?

No, no, no. I just stayed at home and looked after my son, yeah. I done a lot of work afterwards, mind you, over the years.

One thing we haven't mentioned, which I'm sure as a mum with a young child you frequented, was the Slip.

Not very often, I didn't go down.

No?

Not very often, no, until later years, later years.

I've got the impression that it was a place where the community would go to on a hot sunny day ...

Well, of course it was ...

... picnic on the beach.

... because you used to have a lot of Birmingham visitors and of course they used to like to do the fishing. But I don't think for a minute that we have them now like we used to.

But you didn't go down there particularly?

No. The boys used to go down there. But I always told them they gotta tell me where they were and also to be back at home for meals.

Did you worry about the river?

Well, I suppose I never took that much notice of it, really. It's only the latter years that we've heard so much about the river and, of course, the trouble is, it's not dredged, which it should be. Cause, the thing is, it would be a deeper place for the water to go into when the floodings on, and they just don't take no notice of what people says.

When you had your children, did the children swim in the river?

I don't know what they did. Once they were out of sight, I don't know what they did.

Cause a lot of children did. Do you remember any tragedies in the community when ...?

No, I don't think so, no I don't think so. I can't remember anyway. But I know there was somebody died down there, but that's in later years.

Right.

But, no, I don't, I don't remember any fatalities down there.

So, if you wanted to get some fresh air, go for a walk, take your youngster out, where would you have gone to?

Well, I used to go twice a week to me mothers down in Vincent Road, so that was quite a trek, that was. And I used to go to different places, walking round.

What were your favourite haunts?

Up round Bevere, back down the Ombersley Road, or down this way, down to the park.

I bet it was a lot quieter in those days?

Oh, very, very quiet. Well, we used to take the cattle down, well they did before I got married, they used to take the cattle down by, on foot, they never took them in carriages.

And where were they taking them to?

Worcester Market, down by the river.

So, where were your cattle?

Down in the meadow, by, where the Slip is.

And they would bring the cattle up ...

Yeah.

... up the, what's it called ...

Slip Lane.

... Slip Lane and then down the Northwick Road all the way to the Cattle Market?

Yeah, yeah.

And you can remember that?

Well, I can't because I wasn't married to me husband then, but, yes, we had horses, we had pigs.

And where did you keep those?

The pigs was kept down here where the school is, because there was a big black shed there. The cattle was down in Slip, in the Slip. We also had some pigs at the top ground, because there was some big sheds up there and we also had a man die up there in later years.

What happened there?

I presume he'd been on either Meths or drink and he just covered himself over with a tarpaulin and he was dead when me husband went up the next day.

And you say the top ground. Can you just tell me again where that was?

That's at the end of Green Lane, because Gwillams have got the field that belonged to Brewers and he rents it off my sis ..., what, how can I class her as, me sister-in-laws' daughter, her oldest lad.

So, it's still in the family?

It's still in the family.

Track 10 : 10:10:33

So, you mentioned this land where this school, where Northwick, the current Northwick Manor School is, can you describe that land to me and the black barn you mentioned?

Yeah, well, the school itself is the, where the building was, the black building. Then the ground started from there to Northwick Close, went all the way down, so far with houses on the left hand side, then after that it was open ground so the ground what was looked after. And that went right down to the hedge that's there now along the bottom that you can walk through an alleyway to bottom.

And, of course, the only thing is I can't, I could never understand what my husband was on about. Cause he came home the one day, and he said, you know, I could never believe it, he said, I know we've always classed Northwick Close as a posh street. He said, but you'll never believe what I found this morning. He said, one of them was cutting one of the cauliflowers. And he said, he said, what're you doing. He said, he said cutting a cauliflower. He said, well, he said, you haven't asked for it, you haven't paid for it. He said, well you've got a great big patch of them, he says, you aren't going to miss one. Now, that's, that's beyond the pale, that is, really, it is.

Well, it's stealing.

I expect they've passed away now, that family have.

So, that the houses down Northwick Close were considered a bit up-market, were they?

Yes, they were, yes they were, in them days.

So, on this patch of land, did you have the full, it's a big patch of land ...

It is a big patch of land to keep. Because I've heard people say that lives in the houses on the other side of the road, and they says, oh, they wish Mr Brewer was back again with either tractor or the horses, but he always liked the horses best. He said, cause you can talk to a horse, but you can't talk to a tractor. He said, and the horses know that you're talking about 'em, cause their ears twitches.

And this is your husband, Jack?

Yes.

So, he worked with horses ...

Yeah.

... for a long time?

Yeah, ploughing.

Where did you keep the horses?

Down Slip Lane with the cattle.

How many did you have?

Only two, we only had two horses and I know that one day, well, he did bring it in any amount of times, one of two of them. He used to bring them in the drive at dinner time.

What were they called?

With a dray.

What were they called?

The one was Mary, and I can't remember the other one, I can't remember the other's name. But I know the one day he put me eldest son on it, on his back, and I thought, well, honestly I don't know what he'll do next.

So, he worked with the horses until, roughly what year, what, did he move over to tractors at some point?

Oh, yes, they always had a tractor, Ferguson tractor, cause, well, there was lots of jobs you couldn't do with a horse, anyway. But, yes, he quite enjoyed his work. And then, of course, when they decided to sell up, cause me brother-in-law was a poorly man anyway, me husband got a job over at Stokes Bomford at Martley, a freezer place.

Right, that presumably is ...

So, that was the end of the grounds, he sold it all up.

And was that in about the sixties?

I think it was round about that time. Yes, cause, oh yes, because it's, what is it, me husbands been gone now, 15, 14 years and he was at Stokes' for quite a while.

When you had the land, I'm still going back to the big black building where the school is now, was that like a storage place?

It was a storage for the dray, that had the horses in front of, and also to put some of the stuff that they'd already picked into crates, ready for the lorry to take it the next day.

Where did the lorries take your produce?

To the Worcester Market in Hylton Road.

All of it went there?

Yeah, that's been knocked down now, that's been finished.

It wasn't taken by train elsewhere in the country?

Well, he used to take stuff to all the shops in the town, me husband did. He used to take stuff on the, he had, he had like a pick-up, no back to it, and then the engine, the front part was alright, it was all covered in. But he used to take that, and we grew everything, everything you can imagine.

What, talk me ...

Flowers, everything.

... talk me through what you grew and where?

Track 11 : 10:10:53

Well, there was potatoes, broad beans, kidney beans, tomatoes, cabbages, sprouts, onions, flowers. Everything you can imagine, we grew.

Did you get involved in the land, did you have to go out ...?

Well, if you, if he want, sometimes I used to ask him, is there anything I could do, and I used to go and take some weeds out, like spring onions or lettuce or anything like that. And, of course, when me son got married, his wife used to come and help, as well.

Cause I remember we done some hay making once, and we went down this particular Sunday to get it all in, and we was absolutely black when we come up here. You've never seen such a mess in your life. But we enjoyed ourselves. We had some cider.

Did you have least favourite jobs on the land? Were there some that you really hated, or your husband really hated?

Oh, he enjoyed doing everything he did on the land, yes, he really enjoyed it.

And did you have lots of itinerant workers, travellers or gypsy's or people who came for the picking season?

No, we never had any of those. We only had the immediate neighbourhood people that wanted, you know, a little bit extra money, that, husband didn't have anyway. And there was quite a lot of people worked for us. But there was two, there was two that worked for us permanent and the second one, he's died recently, and the other fellow, he's not very well.

And they worked with you for a lot of years?

They worked right to the end, yeah.

Did you do fruit as well?

Oh, yes, there was fruit. There was apples, pears, plums, all sorts.

So, you had orchards and ...

Oh, yeah.

... fruit bushes. Where were they, which part of the grounds were they?

Um, we did have some down there. We had some, some in, oh, we had quite a lot in Greenfields, as I call it. That's the ground that my husband was left. We had a lot of fruit in that, those places. And also there was quite a big area in the top ground.

OK. So, it sounds like he had his work cut out for him, he was not only managing the grounds ...

Oh, yeah.

...but he was also doing the deliveries in town ...

Oh yeah, yeah, he was quite a busy man.

Sounds like it. But it was a family enterprise ...

Oh, yeah, yeah.

... you had other family members?

But the daughters didn't have anything to do with it, there was three. Then there was, there was Reg, Alan, George, Nancy who died, I said, and they never had nothing to do with the grounds whatsoever. But, George, George and Jack was the only two members of the family that actually worked all the grounds.

And did the shop keep going at the same time?

No, the shop was finished. When the father died, I think he died in 1936, 1935, '36 that was it, and these houses down the road, they weren't built then.

But, George decided to buy No. 95. So, he bought that for his mother, so she moved out of the shop and into a house and that's where she died.

And that was in one of the houses that had just been built?

Right opposite Pinkett Street, those houses there.

And those were new houses?

They were new houses.

You must have seen a tremendous amount of building and infilling in this area over the years?

Yeah, because the eldest son, you see, he lived in a big house, as they call The Acers, that's next to the school, it's a big double fronted house. That's where the eldest son lived.

And he owned that house?

He owned that house, yeah.

OK. So, can you talk me through what must have been a momentous family decision to give up the ground, to sell it to the developer who put that school up?

Well, I suppose they were getting on in years, anyway, so I don't think it was that much of a, you know, it didn't upset them that much. But, no, I think when me husband moved to Stokes', he had quite a, quite a good job, and he enjoyed it. I never knew when he was coming home now, that was the trouble.

Was there any disquiet in the community that land which had been agricultural land ...?

No, I don't, no, I don't think so. Cause I think, I think it was just automatically. I suppose they thinks, well, if they're getting on in years and they don't want to keep on doing it, you might as well get out of it.

The only thing that annoys me, and it does my eldest son, as well, he's got a book about the area and it's about the shop down at the bottom of Northwick Road. Now, Jack's father and mother was there and had family.

Track 12 : 10:11:09

His name is never mentioned in that book, but the people that have taken it since, two or three of them, they are mentioned in it, but it's not mentioned in that book, now why?

Perhaps they didn't know about him, perhaps they didn't know about their time there, I don't know.

That's what, that's what annoyed us, cause we thought, well, why did they put the other names in and not the Brewers.

Cause the Brewers were a pretty well known family in this community.

They were a well known family, they were, yeah.

Did anybody in the Brewer family have any particular roles in the community?

No, no. No, they didn't, no. Very quiet family, actually.

Quiet and hard working.

Yeah.

I have just mentioned about how you must have noticed changes in this area in Northwick Road, all the building.

Yes, well, of course, these were built when we moved up here, those, the police houses was built. Those houses down there, was built.

That's Geneva Close you're looking at now.

Yes, and where Johnny lives, that used to be part of the allotments, anyway, that run up the side of his house. Well, when we bought it and gave it to him for a wedding present, we said, why don't you incorporate that into your garden, which he did. And then in latter, later years, a lot later years, he sold it to a friend of his and they had a house built on it which is still there. It's up for sale at the moment.

Do you think that the building and the changes have been a good thing for Northwick?

Well, I suppose it has in a way, but I know, I know, I can't remember what her name is, the name of the firm is now that built the houses on the piece of ground, that me husband has left him. They said they were going to put a 100 houses on it, cause it was a big place. But I spoke to somebody not so long ago that worked for him and he said, Mrs Brewer, I can tell you there's more than 100 houses on that place.

And what's that site called now?

Hill, it's Hillcrest Rise off Northwick Road and there used to be a factory down at the bottom end. I don't know what it is now, I think it's a dentist. And, of course, the houses opposite, that's the start of the grounds and it goes right out to Ombersley Road, a big patch, that was.

It must have been lovely out there, 40, 50 years ago?

Oh, yeah.

When you talked about walking up to Bevere. Were there any particular landmarks that you can remember that you, that really spring to mind?

Well, it, it was nice to be able to walk through the Bevere Green, cause, you know with the trees sort of arching up and over and I know we used to walk along the river to Bevere and then through the walls, where the place is now, what is it, the flower place, garden, no it ain't gardening place.

The Gallery?

There is a gallery there. That's in another part of Bevere, that is. But this is, this is off, this is off the green itself, it's, oh, what the heck's it called where you go for the plants and that.

Like a nursery.

Nursery, used to be a nursery there. Well it, I think it still is, actually.

That was a favourite place to walk, was it, the green?

Oh, it was a lovely place to walk, that was. I used to love that, every Sunday afternoon.

What other changes have you seen in the area?

Well, I suppose there's not a lot of change, really, when you think about it. I suppose there has been houses put up. Those three on the corner of Beckett Road, because Mrs Durrell lives in one of them. They've been done recently. Now you see if that piece of ground, now that isn't very big, now he wanted £200 000 for that.

Who wanted £200 000?

The builder, and he charged, they charged £300 000 for the houses, each.

So, you think the developers have done quite, well, the builders, have done quite well in this area?

Oh, they have done well, they certainly have done well.

But from what you've been telling me, back when you were first married and living here, this area was dotted with small grounds and allotments and green spaces, all gone now?

Yeah, yeah.

Does that make you sad?

Well, I suppose it's like everything else, it, you have to go more modern. But I don't, I don't think that we need a lot of houses. I don't think we do. I think we got quite adequate houses in Worcester, I really do.

Track 13 : 10:11:40

What about the community, do you see any changes there, I mean, was there a time when you knew everybody?

Oh, yes, I knew everybody in this area and down the road and they still speaks to me now. And they can't get over losing Jack.

Do you still think its good community spirit?

Yes, yeah.

Cause there would have been a time when people would have worked not very far away from where they lived ...

That's right.

... whereas these days people commute a lot further.

Oh, yes, they do, yes, they do.

So, did a lot of people, who lived locally, either work on the ground or work within the community?

Well, I dunno, I dunno what their husbands did, but I know the women used to come and work on the grounds and they always got on very well. They never, they never moaned or anything. They always got on well with the, with the firm.

Where did your sons go to school?

Me eldest son went to a private school for 12 months, but they never done much for him, so he was taken out of it. And he went to St Stephens. Then he went from there to Bishop Perowne, and then, 13 years later I had me second son, and he went to St Stephens and then he went to Bishop Perowne and finished there.

And tell me about St Stephens as a school?

It was very good actually because all the Brewers family went to it, bar one and that was the one that owned this house and she went private. It was called, a Miss Falls School, and that is in Barbourne, the beginning of The Tything, up that, you know the high step, the high path with them old, big old windows. Well, that was a school.

Right.

Well, that was a school, Miss Falls private school.

But the rest of them went to ...?

The rest of the went to ..

St Stephens.

... St Stephens and they finished at St Stephens.

And St Stephens closed and became Northwick Manor, is that right?

Yes, yes.

But your sons had gone ...

Well, they'd finished school then, when that was done.

Did you use to do the school run, or would they walk themselves to school?

I used to take, I used to take Johnny and then I got a bike and I had a seat put on the back so I used to take both of them on the bike.

So, there's a big gap between your two children?

Thirteen years.

So, you spanned almost two generations of moms, there?

Yeah, yeah.

So, you probably, you were the wise experienced one when the younger one came along?

Yes, yes.

She's saying no more.

I'm not saying anymore.

What about other things in the community that you would have used as a young mother, like, was there a doctor's surgery in the community?

No, we used to have to go into town, because I used to go to, I used to go to Dr Mills in the Foregate.

Was there no surgery here in the ...?

No, not up here, no.

What about police, we keep talking about the police houses, were there still police living in the community?

I believe there was a house on the end of Coombs Road on the left hand side that used to be a police, I don't know if it still is. That used to be a police place there.

And did you have a sort of, village bobby as such who you regularly saw and knew the name of?

Well, I suppose we did, really, because I know they used to go down Slip Lane. And I can't remember his name now, but the head one, Jack knew him very well. And of course he knew him when he used to go into town, anyway, so. He said, that's the trouble, he said, you wants the old bobbies back, now, like (inaudible)

What about other people that you would have encountered in daily life, did you have delivery people?

Yes, we had milk delivered, bread delivered. We used to have a lorry come round with all your vegetables on and we also had a fish man.

Can you remember who did those rounds?

No, I can't remember.

What about the milkman?

Well, it was a, it was a woman who came round first, then it was altered then to a man. Well, his family is, used to be in ice cream, they used to have a van down in town. I can't remember his name now, but he's had a stroke, poor fellow.

But you're definitely, there's things you're remembering, I can see, that you haven't thought about for a long time?

Oh, yes, there's lots of things I can't, I can't remember. They're just a memory, really.

But good memories?

Oh, yeah. Oh, I got nothing to say about the area, at all. We all get on very well together and I've always had good neighbours, always.

Track 14 : 10:11:58

Have there been any changes, though, that have been imposed by the Council, or whatever, that the community hasn't liked?

No, I don't, I don't think so, I've never, I've never heard anything, you know, cause we, we always have a good natter about the old days, and what's happened like since, if I've met any of the older ones. But, they do say, give us the old days back again, definitely.

Were you church goers?

Not very often, no, we didn't. I tell you the truth, I do believe in the One above, I do believe in the One above, but I'm not a regular church goer, but I do go to funerals and I always leave money on the plates, whoever it is, no matter who.

When you did go to church, would it have been St Stephens?

No, we used to go to St Martins and then we went to Claines. We used to go to Claines. No, I've, I've been 2 or 3 times to St Stephens, because all the family's buried in Claines.

Are they?

Yeah, and my plot's there as well.

So, is that the Brewer family?

Yeah.

Rather than ...

Yeah, they're all buried up there.

And the Brewer family, no you did tell me they came from Evesham, so the grandfather Brewer was the first Brewer in the Northwick area?

Yeah.

They don't go back before that?

No.

As far as you know?

No, I don't think so, no don't think so, no.

Now, can you think of any happy stories or memories of fun times when you were living here that you'd like to put on record?

I can't think of anything, no, I can't think of anything.

Anything that you got up to.

Anything that I got up to, no, I was a very good girl, actually.

Oh, I didn't mean like that, goodness.

No I, no I can't remember. We all got on so well together in this neighbourhood. You seem to click with some people, don't you, and we all

helped one another. But it has altered over the years, you know, people come and go and you don't like to see 'em go, but that's life, really.

Is there anything else, bearing in mind that this may be listened to by the youngsters of today, that you'd like to tell them about Northwick and how it's changed?

Well, I can honestly say it's changed in some ways for the better, and there's always, there's always some things that you can go and see, especially now they've altered the park down in Barbourne, it's really good. But, its how people, it's the mood of people, you know, the way they live, you just can't alter peoples' ways. But I think I'd sooner go back to the old days.

Bessie, thank you very much indeed for talking to me.

That's quite alright, that's quite alright.