

An interview with Brian Orme



Brian (left) in the garden of the family home in Vine Street, and the house as it is today.



Staff of R.J. Collins Ltd (Northwick Avenue) prepare for the carnival in 1935. Brian's mother is the lady on the left in the front row.



A family photo at 29 Northwick Avenue in 1936.



Family gatherings including Jack Orme's wedding in 1937.



Jack home on leave in 1943



Brian's brother Derek as a scout
c.1950



St Stephen's Infants, 1950



Brian today

An Oral History for Northwick Manor Community Project – NM01

Name: Brian Orme
Date of Birth:
Place of Birth: Saunders Street, Northwick
Date of Interview: 22th April 2008
Interviewed by: Julia Letts

CD 1 : Track 2 : 16:27:13

Brian, can I just start by getting you to give me your name and your address, so I can check your recording level?

My name's Brian John Orme and I live at Northwick, Worcester.

Can you give me your date of birth?

1938.

Can we start right back in 1938 or soon after, what's your earliest memories of where you grew up?

My earliest memories, which are backed up by a photograph, I must have only been about 3 or 4, and being taken on Gheluvelt Park, with a little truck and I've also got a photograph which I remember being taken, at the north end of Pitchcroft, with the same little truck. So I would say, somewhere between 3 and 4.

And whose truck was it?

It was one that my mother and father had purchased for me.

So they were pulling you along in the truck?

It was to help me to walk, and they did pull me along in it, yes.

So where did you, where was your home at this stage?

We lived at Vine Street, no. 15. But mother and father, when they got married and for the first six months of my life, which clearly I wouldn't remember, lived in a rented house in Saunders Street, which has since been demolished.

What was their background, did they come from this area?

My father and mother both came from Worcester. My grandfather and his ancestors were all Derbyshire people. But father had no connection there, and apart from a cousin, who had come down to Worcester following grandfather. My mother's family lived on the top of Tunnel Hill and grandfather was a Great Western Railway employee.

OK, but so, first Northwick memories for you were in Vine Street?

Definitely.

Can you describe that house to me?

Yes, it was a terrace house, no bathroom, which was quite common. Outside toilet, which, again, was quite common. Three bedrooms, which I enjoyed the use of the second one. Mom and dad were in the front bedroom, which is quite traditional and when my brother was born, then he took over the third bedroom.

What about downstairs?

Downstairs, again, fairly traditional. Small kitchen, dining room and the front room, which housed mother's piano because she was a music teacher. We only tended to go into that room on holidays and Christmas and when we had relatives visiting.

And, roughly, how old was the house?

The house was built, I've established since, in 1895.

So, it had been there quite a while?

It had, yes.

And tell me about the rest of Vine Street, what it looked like?

Vine Street was a very similar mix of houses to the ones that are there now. Some of the houses were slightly older than the house we lived in. Some of the cottages still had a well and they have been since demolished and replaced by the Garden of the Northwick Public House. And I often wonder if the wells were properly filled in. At the bottom of the gardens of the old cottages, there used to be a coach house. So, presumably there was either a carter or a coachman living

in one of the houses at some stage. The other houses were quite a mix of 1890's up until, the last houses were built just prior to War World II, and that was three pairs of semi-detached.

So, you would have been around when those were built?

No, they were built just before I was born. And at the end of Vine Street, as part of the Post Office, there was a bakery and the bakery buildings are now converted into a self-contained apartment. But we used to be able to get freshly cooked bread.

Was that a job for you, to go down to the bakery and get bread?

Yes, it definitely was.

Whilst we're talking about the facilities and the shops, what were the other places that you would have frequented, that sold things?

Track 3 : 16:28:40

There was a row of shops, as there is now, but a different mix of occupants, at the bottom of Vine Street on the Ombersley Road. The only one that has kept to it's roots is the place that sells flowers, albeit in my day, it sold fruit and vegetables as well, and slightly later it sold fresh fish. That's where I got my first part-time job to earn pocket money.

We'll come on to that in a minute. What about the other shops, what do you remember of them?

There was a sweet shop. Working from the Northwick Cinema towards Coombs Road, there was a sweet shop. There was the fruit and vegetable shop, there was a hair dressers, which there still is, a ladies hair dressers. And then a multi-purpose store on the corner of Coombs Road and Ombersley Road. Very much the mix that there is now, but no fish and chip shop or Chinese take-away.

Were there any characters that really stood out in the community, or that ran the shops or that you came upon in other walks of life?

There was Mr Maddock, who owned and ran the multi-store. A very, very Christian gentleman, always cheerful and we never, ever saw him with anything other than a welcoming grin on his face. We don't know how he kept it up. And Mr Smith from the fruit and vegetable shop, which was always known by the number of the shop in Ombersley Road. It was always 134, I remember that clearly, being sent down there. Mr Smith was always rather sober and sombre I would say, rather than sober. And Mrs Smith was the one that did tend to give you the extra tomato or an additional apple. Mr Smith never.

And, in the street, did you play in the street, did you have friends and you would meet up and play in the street, or did you tend to play elsewhere?

We tended to play in the gardens, because the gardens in Vine Street, on the south side where we lived, were quite long. We tended to play in the gardens, not because there was a risk from traffic, because there just wasn't any in World War II. That's where we could communicate across garden fences with our friends.

We tended to play more in Union Place, which was a cul-de-sac running along the back of all the gardens and that's where some very famous cricket matches took place, and footballs had to be retrieved from other people's gardens, but people didn't seem to object.

Did you also wander far and wide in the surrounding countryside?

Particularly into the Lodge playing field, or Northwick playing field as some people refer to it. We always knew it as The Lodge. And then when we became a little more trustworthy, we were allowed to play at Northwick Slip, which, in its day, was quite a focal point for, not only people from Northwick, but from all over Worcester, especially at weekends with ice cream vans there. It was a very, very busy place. It was a little holiday resort.

Can you describe it to me?

Yes, the river had encroached into the fields, in my living memory, leaving two or three small beaches and they were used just as beaches are down at the sea. Most people could not afford to get as far as the sea, and this was very accessible, so people turned up there, or families turned up there with picnics at the weekend, barbeques hadn't arrived by that stage, so it was always picnics. There was an awful lot of people learned to swim there. I never did, couldn't stand the cold water.

And the highlight of the picnics used to be seeing the oil tankers come up the river. Oil used to be brought in to Bristol in large tankers, brought up to Worcester in smaller tankers and then taken on up to Stourport, and when they came up the river they were so big, they used to, occasionally, drag on the bottom of the river.

Track 4 : 16:29:00

But the big benefit was they used to produce waves, so we could really pretend we were at the seaside, then.

What an amazing memory. Do you remember any other interesting craft coming up the river?

Yes, there were two old Edwardian wooden steamers, as they were referred to, but they had been, they were converted in a later life, to diesel engines. There was the Sunberry Bell and the Duchess Doreen, and they were built in Edwardian times. One of them has since been scrapped and the other one, apparently, is still in use on the south coast, somewhere.

And where they just pleasure craft, cruising the Severn?

They were pleasure craft, yes. But you had to be a little wealthier to go on those, so it was a treat for high days and holidays.

Were the people in small boats, and canoes and other craft on the river?

Not so much canoes, but definitely rowing boats, coming up from Mr Morrissey's boat hire establishment, which is still running, in a much depleted way, at the north end of Pitchcroft. But, rowing boats used to go up as far as Beverley, and then back again.

So, just going back on the beach side, and you had the ice cream vans there, was there anything else there or up the road from The Slip that you can recall that's different from today?

There was the area which is now a site of special scientific interest where, rather naughtily, the lads used to go and collect bulrushes and take to school. They were welcome in those days, I don't think they will be very welcome nowadays. They're best viewed where they grow, is the modern outlook. But we used to go in there, also as an adventure exercise, to see who could get from one side of the marsh to the other.

I bet a few fell in along the way?

You got an ear-bending when you got home, for turning up plastered with mud. But apart from that, it was all put down as boyish activity. Some of the more adventurous lads, in the summer, especially in the school holidays, use to take tents up to The Slip, and camp there for a week.

It just wouldn't happen today. Presumably there was parental concern that children might fall in the river and drown, and things like that, or, do you not remember?

Children did used to drown, and adults. It was not a place, really, that was safe for swimming, but there was little opportunity to learn anywhere else. We had one character, who used to keep an eye on us, and he was a gentleman who lived in Union Place and through World War II he was a sub-mariner. He was an expert swimming and he used to keep an eye on us and he used to demonstrate that he could swim from one side of the river to the other, underwater, which we

thought was very impressive. On one occasion, he frightened us, because he did not appear on the other side and then someone pointed about 200 yards down the river, he'd swum at an angle, and had in fact, gone virtually twice the distance. And that was just done as a joke and to show how far he could swim.

But he was sort of an improvised lifeguard for you lads?

He was, yes.

OK, moving on from the river side, take me back up into Vine Street and starting your school days, which were at ... ?

St Stephens School, where most of the teachers were ladies. Ladies who, I was only to learn much later in my life, who'd had fiance's and lost them in the First World War and had never been, either inclined or able to marry again. I went into the class of Miss Hill, and from there to Miss Walsh and there to Miss Percival and then went to the Junior School.

I do remember on the first day I went to school, which would have been in 1943, feeling very, very proud because my father was on leave from the Royal Air Force and took me to school wearing his uniform.

A big day!

A very big day.

And, did you have a uniform?

Track 5 : 16:29:27

No, it was war time and school uniforms were not a thing that could be insisted on, because there was no place to purchase them from. Children in those days used to go to school looking tidy, with great emphasis placed, I remember, on shoes being polished. But, no, there was no formal uniform, there couldn't be, there were limitations on what clothing one could buy, anyway.

St Stephens was the only school for the Northwick children, is that right?

For the Northwick children, yes. When one started to get further north in what is now Grange Avenue, and until, probably only 20 years ago, all those children had to go to Claines. So there was a demarcation line somewhere running between Grange Avenue and Corn Meadow.

OK, so, but you would have obviously walked to school?

Yes.

How long did it take you?

Oh, 7 or 8 minutes, really. And from an early age, not primary school, but from, probably about, 7, one would walk unattended. Again, there was very little traffic.

Can you talk me through that walk and anything interesting that you passed, on a daily basis between home and school?

Well, the walk was a fairly common one, meeting up with friends and we'd go as a group and generally used to walk down Union Lane into Northwick Road, down Northwick Road, cross the road near the place, the shop which is now Turbo Motors, which then used to be, yet another, green grocer shop run by Mr Harper, and look left and right and left again, and cross over to St Stephens School. And be there before the bell started ringing, otherwise you were in trouble.

And that was infants, and then you moved into Juniors, on the same site?

It was on the same site, on the same site. The Junior school was adjoining St Stephens Street. It had a headmaster, Mr Westwood, who lived in Northwick Close and that's the first time we ever came across male teachers, which was Mr Rayers, who eventually became head teacher of Northwick Manor School in later life.

Well, I was going to just jump forward, and we'll come back to the 1940's. But just jump forward, because your own children went to Northwick Manor, which by that point had been built. Is that right?

My oldest son was just old enough to catch the last 6 months of St Stephens and then both the lads went to Northwick Manor School.

Which was an absolutely brand new school?

Oh, yes.

Do you recall it being built?

Oh, definitely, I remember what was there before it was built. It was a huge market garden belonging to the Brewer family, who were pre-eminent and are still very prevalent in Northwick. The large house by the side of Northwick Manor School was the family house, called The Acers, which you can still see. And where Northwick Manor School building is now, was a very, very large black barn, where the horse and the cart were kept and where produce was stored. And that market garden extended right the way down to the footpath that runs from Chasewater to the end of Northwick Close. That was all their land, plus other land further up Northwick Road.

So, was there any hoo-hah when it was decided that this would be replaced by a school?

There was a limited amount, but most people were rather pleased, because the facilities at Northwick, at Northwick Manor School were clearly going to be modern whereas facilities at St Stephens, were definitely not. All the toilets were outdoor, so to use them on a wet day, was something that made you hurry and the only form of heating in St Stephens School, was large open coal fires, which if the caretaker had not got up early enough in the morning, had not really warmed the building up, or the classrooms up by the time the pupils arrived. There was a lot of competition to be at school early to sit as close as possible to the fire, otherwise it was difficult to write, because your fingers were so cold.

So, you were quite happy for your son to have the new modern version. What date was that, that the new school opened?

That would have been in early 1966, no, no, I correct myself. That would have been about 1970.

Track 6 : 16:30:04

OK, let's go back to the 1940's then and you obviously started school mid-way through the war. Tell me your memories that relate to that period, both at home and at school?

My memories are of my brother being born in 1943 and father coming home on leave from north Yorkshire, where he was based in an RAF bomber station, I remember that. My other memories are that my grandmother, who lived in Northwick, bottom of Northwick Road, used to come up to our house most evenings, because my mother was on her own for most of the working day. But, although father was away, very quickly changes took place and I remember the very early stages when my uncle and aunty from Coventry, on the night that Coventry was severely damaged, arrived at our house in the early hours of the morning.

Uncle had been fortunate enough to own a car, which he'd not been able to use for 2 years. It was propped up on bricks at the back of the house and he'd saved about 2 gallons of petrol. He put the wheels on, the house was damaged, the roof was badly damaged, and they arrived at our house at half past three in the morning and stayed with us for about 3 months until the roof was sealed. In subsequent years I always used to use the bathroom and look up and see where the hole had been and debris had come through.

What a terrifying night for them to literally fly for your lives.

Mother said that, although Coventry was over 40 miles away, people were coming into the streets and looking because they could see the glow in the sky of the whole city burning, of the whole of the centre of the city burning.

We then didn't have the house to ourselves for the rest of World War II, because, as with many other people, we had 2 spare bedrooms and so workers who had been sent to this area to work, were billeted on us. No choice. This was quite common. They were introduced, they were basically handed over and we had Mrs Booth from Doncaster and then Theresa from Birmingham. Theresa worked on the Midland Red, Mrs Booth, in the daytime, worked on making ammunition at, what is now the Blackpole Trading Estate, but used to be a Cadbury's factory where they made chocolate and parts for shipping up to Birmingham for incorporation in various other products. But it was an ammunition factory.

So, during the war it was just turned over to an ammunition factory for that period?

Yes, making ammunition, yes. And then Mrs Booth became engaged, so occasionally her husband, who was being trained as a paratrooper, used to come and stay for two or three days. My grandmother took great exception to him bringing his rifle, but, as all soldiers were on call, and if they were needed urgently then the police used to come, they being the only people that had telephone communication with the military, to say you've got to get back, there's an emergency. Grandma always insisted that he put his rifle in the cellar, which he said was the wrong place to put it because it was damp down there. She didn't care, she was terrified of the rifle.

So Bernard came, he then took part in the invasion of the continent, but he survived the war. We saw them both afterwards, but Mrs Booth then left and we had another young lady come, Lucy, Lucy Everson from St Martins, near Oswestry. After the war I went up and stayed with Lucy and her family, who were farmers.

So, it had a profound effect ...

They became part of the family.

... the people who lived in your house became family friends.

They did, and I was in part brought up by them and taken out for days by them. It was a bit of a squeeze when dad came home on leave and Bernard arrived at the same time.

Track 7 : 16:30:41

But, that's when we used to put mattresses down in the front room and make do. It was very much ...

Make do. Was it the same as every other house in the street, did your friends have people lodging with them?

Not everyone, no. The cottages were only 2 bedroom, and they were aged relatives living with most people in the cottages. But other people, it was not uncommon. Well, in fact, it was fairly common that people were billeted on you. Government officials turned up and told you, you were having so many people. They'd assessed your house and said you can manage, and you had to manage.

What about evacuees. Were there any evacuees in Northwick?

No, because it wasn't far enough away from the danger area. Birmingham was a bombing target, Coventry, as I've mentioned already was severely damaged and there was industry in Worcester, for instance, what is now Faithful Overalls, was converted from a clothing company, manufactory, to the manufacture of aircraft cockpits, aircraft gun turrets. And what the little building at the top of Northwick Road, that until recently was a plastics factory, and is now a dental surgery, that was also a small factory making components for military aircraft that were made in Wolverhampton, the Bolton Paul Aircraft Company. So the area had got military targets. Worcester was bombed several times. The mining engineering company or MECCO as it's usually referred to, was bombed.

One of my later friends at Christopher Whitehead School had been with other children, walking home from school the afternoon that was bombed. And the children were machine-gunned.

Unbelievable.

Fortunately, all the bullets missed. The aircraft, another German aircraft attempted to bomb the tunnel at Tunnel Hill, to block railway traffic between the north and the south of the county, and then overflew the munitions factory, that used to be Cadburys, and according to a neighbour that I've heard in recent years, the factory, in common with all factories, used to have people on the roof as lookouts. And indeed there was one on top of the Northwick Cinema, to look out for enemy aircraft and for fire. But the aircraft that bombed the tunnel, then flew north at very low altitude and the look out at the Cadbury factory saw it coming and with horror saw the white crosses on the black background and, although he was 30' up in the air, in a tower, he just vaulted over the side and ended up with 2 broken legs. So, he was one of Worcester's casualties.

Do you actually, personally, remember any of the planes going over and any of the bombs dropping on Worcester?

I don't remember the bombs dropping because that was quite minimal. But I definitely remember being taken into our back bedroom, which was the south facing bedroom, by mother. We were not allowed to put lights on, to hear the drone of the German bombers, which used to come from near Cherbourg, and I've been to the airfield since when we go caravanning in France. They used to come from Cherbourg, they used to cross the south coast, south of Bristol, fly up the Bristol channel and follow the River Severn because it took them straight to the Black country. And I remember, clearly, being taken up there one night with my mother, and listening to the distinctive noise of the German bombers, which used synchronised engines, in other words all the propellers went round in synchronism and the noise that they made was, whom, whom, which was quite different to ours.

Then we heard a rattling sound, and my mother scurried and took me straight back to the cellar, because that was one of our night fighters attacking them.

Right, and she took you down to the cellar because that's where your air raid shelter was, presumably?

Track 8 : 16:31:17

Yes, there were air raid shelters, which I'll mention in a moment. But before dad went to war he reinforced with strong railway sleeper type props, the ceiling of the cellar and put cross bearers in. He was in the building industry. And whenever the siren went, that is where we went, down the cellar. The theory being, that if the house collapsed, then the debris would be kept off us and we were lucky to have a cellar. Because I remember, we were generally down there for about an hour, no more. And then the siren would go, the all clear siren. The siren to warn to take cover was a pulsed signal, a rising and falling note. The all clear was a solid drone and our siren was located on top of the former Kays building at the bottom of Sebrina Avenue. So we heard it very quickly.

When the all clear went, we had, in Vine Street, as in every other street, a person appointed as an air raid warden. He wore army steel helmet painted white and he had two duties. He used to come round every night and, if there was even a chink of light showing through the curtains, that could attract a banging on the door, with an instruction to douse that light.

But he also had the ability to impose a £5 fine, which in today's terms would be about £120. But Mr Howell, also, had to carry a white football rattle, and if there was an emergency and he thought you hadn't heard it, he operated that.

Well, that's quite ingenious. I quite like that idea. A nice rattling noise down the street.

We never did use the local air raid shelter, which was built on the road immediately in front of, what is now, Faithful Overalls. They were very austere places with a little bricked off enclosure at the end with an open bucket toilet, if you had the need. The next nearest air raid shelter was in Pinkett Street, and at the end of World War II, seeing these being demolished by a crane with a long chain and a big steel weight, I got too near to the one being demolished in Pinkett Street and got struck on the shoulder by a flying brick. If that had been 6" higher, I wouldn't be talking to you now.

Doesn't sound like Health and Safety was operating that day.

Everyone wanted to see the end of things to do with World War II, so we were all glad to see them go.

So, when were they built, those air raid shelters?

They were built very, very quickly when it was realised that things were going to get serious after 1940. The last remaining one in Northwick, Claines, is in the garden of Claines village hall in Corn Meadow, it's still there.

So, obviously the air raid shelters were something new that came into the community and the businesses that you've mentioned that went over to war work, can you recall any other changes specific to the war period in Northwick?

There wasn't a lot of evidence of military traffic in the city, but there was an awful lot of aerial activity because Perdiswell playing field, as it is now, was a private air field from before War World II, and was taken over by the Royal Air Force and was used for training beginners in bright yellow Tiger Moth twin-winged aircraft and they buzzed over the locality at varying heights and staggering all over the place, all the way from about 1940 to, up to about 1946.

Track 9 : 16:31:53

They were quite noisy and just used to keep going round and round in circles and pilots would come there at the age of, usually 18 or 19, and within six weeks were flying Spitfires and bombers.

There were two notable occasions I do remember. My grandfather was a painter and decorator, as indeed my father was, and he was working on the airfield when father came home wearing his uniform. We were allowed past the guard to go and see grandfather. It was a very busy airfield and on another occasion a bomber, a light bomber, twin-engine bomber, had crash landed. It had had a mechanical failure and had landed at Perdiswell, which was not entirely suitable for it. It came in from the Fernhill Heath end, touched ground and skidded right the way across Perdiswell and was poised on the bank with the nose stuck out over Bilford Road.

Because father took me up to see it, he was home for 3 days, the RAF men guarding it, with rifles, allowed him to come through the guard fence with me, and they lifted me up into the aircraft. And I can remember, very, very clearly, the smell of the aircraft with, it was covered with fabric, dope and cellulose. I remember the cellulose smell and the smell of oil. No-one had fortunately been hurt and where the refuse tip is now, was always a depot for storing sand and gravel, it belonged to the city, and the RAF men had established a little camp in there and they kept a brazier going and tea brewing all the time. So we went over and joined them for a while.

Quite an adventure for a little boy!

Oh, absolutely, I had a lot to talk about at school.

So, that was the air, what about the river? Was the river in any greater use during the war?

Yes, with the oil tankers that I've mentioned earlier. They were used to bring oil petroleum up into the Midlands as far as Stourport. That, again, made Worcester a target because there was a huge oil store at Diglis. Some of the tanks are still standing, but Diglis was a target.

What about the land, did you see much change in land being turned over to grow stuff, allotments springing up, any of that?

Oh, absolutely. The large playing field was ploughed up at a very early stage. It was only from the late '40's, early '50's that I can remember it being allowed to go back, or go to grass. I'd never seen it as grass before. It was alternated between growing wheat, some years, barley in other years and potatoes. We only played on it in the years when the wheat and the barley had been harvested. When the potatoes were growing, clearly we couldn't go on there. Although there was always the footpath across the middle. That always remained in use.

We used to love when the wheat and the barley had been harvested, and all the chaff had been left there, because we used to go and build dens out of it.

And this is the field that you called the Lodge?

Yes.

I meant to ask you earlier, do you know why it kept that name? Was it to do with the Lodge of the Manor house?

It was always said, but I don't know the truth of it, that the large house that is in Northwick, old Northwick Lane, was not the Manor house. Northwick Manor was

located at the end of where Geneva Close is located now, off old Northwick Lane and there is a small part of the old Northwick Manor, standing. That used to be the stables. It was said that the white bungalow near the gated entrance to the playing field near Northwick Close, was originally intended to be where a large house would be located. Then there would have been a double row of trees to Northwick Manor.

So that's why it was the Lodge?

Apparently, so. But I, personally, would like to know more about that.

Track 10 : 16:22:42

And on the playing field ploughed up. Who worked the land? Was it land girls, did you often see people working there, in the field?

Generally, prisoners of war.

Was it?

Yes. The Perdiswell, within my memory, the Perdiswell Air Force camp, towards the end of World War II, was run down and the building of Perdiswell Hall, itself, and where the old motor, where the present Worcester Auto Club building is located, that's one of the last World War II buildings. The site was turned into a prisoner of war camp and fenced off. Which was a bit ironic because the prisoners were all allowed to come out and about in the community and became quite a common sight throughout Northwick.

They were a mixture of German and Italian prisoners of war. They all wore green suits, a green jacket, green trousers. And the dominant feature was in the centre of the back, almost ½ metre in diameter, was a yellow circle, solid yellow disc to make them very noticeable and visible. They were allowed to come out and about. They'd clearly proven themselves to be trustworthy for that. And, indeed, a number stayed on in Worcester after the war.

They used to, the Catholics used to march down on a Sunday morning, to the Catholic church in Worcester. The Protestants, generally, used to be taken, strangely enough, under guard, to Claines church. But the Catholics went without a guard. I didn't know the significance of that.

Did you ever speak to them or make friends with them?

Personally, not, but my father, for the last year of World War II, was transferred down to Royal Air Force, Pershore, and in 19.., Christmas 1942 or 1944, I went to a Christmas party on RAF Pershore, and all the children were given presents that had been made out of old packing cases and kipper boxes, by the prisoners.

My father had a detachment of prisoners under his control and about 18 months after he'd been discharged from the RAF, I remember going up with him to the allotments, which had been created for war time production, in the grounds of Perdiswell Hall, and to hear, my father was a Corporal in the RAF, to hear a call coming from behind, Corporal, Corporal. And it was one of the former prisoners who had been under his care. He decided it did not want to go back to Germany. Walter.

As you were saying, there were quite a few who did stay.

Quite a lot, yes.

Do you know if any actually stayed in Northwick? Did a community of people settle here?

No, for some strange reason they seemed to home in on, well, I say strange reason, I may know the answer. The Rainbow Hill area. And I only learnt this when I became an engineer at MEB, that the site that we took over at MEB, was where the people who did not wish to be returned to their countries of origin, or could not go back, were then termed to be displaced persons and they were moved into premises that had housed many of the ammunition workers that had not been billeted. The initial buildings we had at MEB in the late '50's, early '60's had been built as accommodation. So the displaced persons came there. So, maybe there was an affinity as they were based in Brickfields and Rainbow Hill. They tended to meet up with local partners and stayed local.

Track 11 : 16:23:27

Let's go back to your memories of, towards the end of the war, 1944 and the build up to D-Day, cause that's a strong memory for you. Tell me about it?

Father didn't come home so often, although by, around that time, and I haven't got the exact date, he was then transferred down for health reasons, he'd had to spend a spell in hospital up in Yorkshire. My uncle, Arthur, who'd been in the navy all the war, stopped coming because he, again, could not come home. The few that had fathers that were based in the UK, virtually all leave was stopped. People, generally realise why it was.

Another memory I have is of a lot of aerial activity and seeing planes towing gliders. Large bombers each towing about 2 gliders, so you'd have maybe 6 or more bombers coming over, each towing 2, so it was a very impressive sight. They were clearly practising. That memory stays in my mind. The noise of all the engines and they would be up, probably, probably about 4000 or 5000 feet, but the noise swamped the area when they came over.

And that would have been in the early months of 1944?

Late 1943, early '44. Things started to change a lot and started to see then, other preparations which were used quite extensively after D-Day. From D-Day onwards, we started to see lots and lots of wounded soldiers. The Americans had funded and had built, three hospitals along the Malvern Hills. Brick Barns was one of them. I can't remember the names of the other two. They also had, what we know, or knew as Ronkswood Hospital built. Trainloads of injured and mutilated soldiers used to arrive from the coast and the men were attended to at these hospitals and we started to see, in the city, when they were well enough to be brought out of hospital beds, they all wore bright blue suits with brilliant red ties. Most of them were either on crutches or sticks, but they, to give some light relief, were brought into the city, bussed in and bussed back to give them some break from ...

Light relief. Before D-Day, was your first sight of black Americans, you were saying. Tell me about that memory?

We used to see them on the open trucks, because nearly all the trucks, it being late spring, early summer, didn't have the canvas covers over and we children had only ever seen black people in books, before. And it was quite a talking point for the first few weeks, anyway.

So, they were coming down ... explain where they were coming from and the convoys that you remember?

They were coming from Chester and Shropshire, in the main. Although I've learnt since, from other activities, that they were based down as far as Cleobury Mortimer. Many of them were brought down as far as Bridgenorth, the men were brought down as far as Bridgenorth in trains from the continuation of the Severn Valley Railway, which used to run from Kidderminster all the way up to Shrewsbury. Severn Valley is just the little bit that's left.

The Americans had huge arms depots in and around Chester because the arms used to be brought in across sea to Liverpool. So, the men and the materials were joined together and used to travel down in these very, very long convoys, nose to tail, for 2 or 3 hours to pass through the city at very slow speed with many, many traffic jams.

Track 12 : 16:24:01

Traffic In the city being virtually told just to clear the way.

And you remember these passing through Northwick?

Down the Ombersley Road, yes, oh, yes.

And you would have been at school, or were you allowed to watch them pass?

For the first few times and then it became so common that the teachers only allowed us to watch if they happened to come down when it was play time. But, the soldiers used to throw tins of army issue biscuits, survival biscuits. Small tins, about as big as a Strepsil tin, khaki with green tape around the outside. And some of them used to have tins filled with boiled sweets and as we really hadn't seen sweets for most of our school lives, at that time both were novelties and a lot of competition went on to grab the tins and a lot of competition went on for swapping.

The troops seemed to be overjoyed to have a rapport. I mean, they knew where they were going.

You didn't know where they were going?

No. Nobody knew what was happening. No-one knew.

One thing that we haven't really mentioned so far, apart from the night watch on the top of it, is the Northwick Cinema. Presumably that was quite a popular place during the war years with the soldiers when they had time out?

On the contrary, it was closed.

Was it?

Yes. It, the building of it was completed about 2 months before the start of World War II. It was then requisitioned, as indeed the Odeon Cinema was in the centre of Worcester. That was, building of that was only completed in the months before, and both of them were used to store military material. No, the Northwick Cinema didn't reopen until late 1945, where I was taken, by my father, who'd just came out of the RAF, and saw the first film, ever, in a cinema, which I didn't understand because it was *The Third Man*. It was a very gloomy film and in the interval, we didn't have TV's so we didn't see any graphic images, my father wished he hadn't taken me because the graphic images were all of the liberation of concentration camps in Belson, which I found very sickening.

And that was the first time, can you describe to me what the cinema was like? If it had been requisitioned during the war years, it wouldn't have been pristine new, but the first time it would have been opened as a cinema, it would have been in its first youth.

The art deco work in there had been maintained, bearing in mind it was brand new in 1939. A general clean up had taken place. I would imagine all the seats had been taken out. They'd been put back in again. It was an experience to get

in to the cinema because people were so hungry to see news, rather than pictures in newspapers and to see films, that the queues for the Northwick Cinema, generally started halfway up Coombes Road, unless you got there very, very early. People were being turned away when all the seats were full. Health and Safety laws in those days would only permit people to stand at the back. So when the cinema seats were full and the standing room was occupied, you were turned away. There were generally two performances a day, so you either had to chance coming back, or stand there until the clock came up to the start time of the second performance.

So, once it had opened, was it a regular haunt of yours?

Yes, it was a treat. It was a treat. The next thing I can remember seeing there, I must have seen other things, were the performances on Saturday mornings, purely for youngsters. I tended not to go the Northwick for that. Didn't do that for very long, Saturday morning cinema for children, but the Gomonth? did in Worcester, and they used to have all the best cowboy films. So, we all used to gravitate down to the Gomonth?.

So, whilst we're on the subject of entertainment, where were the other places in Northwick where people tended to congregate and hang out?

Track 13 : 16:24:35

In front of the fire place, at home. There weren't any else. Occasionally, whist drives, in the village hall. That tended to come along after World War II. No, there was very little.

What about the pubs?

If they had beer to sell. My grandmother used to come up on, every night, and the weekend. And another memory, everyone had open coal fires. My grandmother used to go down to The Vine and buy a jug full of beer and bring it back for mom, the lodgers and herself and I always remember, she used to insist in putting a poker in the fire, taking it out when it was red hot and plunging it into this jug of beer. I think it's called, mulling the beer, m u l l i n g, and it softens the harshness of the beer. It was a common thing to do.

Grandma used to go to the out sales counter to get the beer because in most pubs, unattached ladies were not allowed in on their own, very discriminatory.

When the end of the war came, did you, within the community, have a celebration party?

We did, yes. The couple that had occupied the Northwick Arms pub, were Mr and Mrs Dredge. Mr Dredge was a former police officer, retired from Birmingham.

They didn't have youngsters and they did what they could in arranging birthday parties in the garden. The gardens used to extend, roughly the area that's covered now, not quite as big, because some cottages were knocked down. But they organised a small VE – Victory in Europe, party, at the end of the European war.

I do remember that we lads had found that the Faithful Overall factory used to have a skip filled with strips of aluminium that would be probably about 15mm wide and 3" thick, and we went and pillaged that. Aluminium being soft, we were able to cut it up into shapes and put nuts and bolts through and made swords, and then promptly had to file the points off the end. But that's another matter.

The biggest street party was held in Pinckett Street. That tradition seems to have carried on. They still hold very big street parties in Pinckett Street. I think the reason in Vine Street was that a lot of the occupants were quite elderly and there were a lot more children in Pinckett Street.

Very shortly after the party, a very sobering experience, when our next door neighbour's nephew came and stayed with them for a while having just been released from a Japanese prisoner of war camp. Freddie, who eventually went on to become a policeman, was a full blown man who weighed just over 7 ½ stone and he literally was a walking skeleton. But he stayed with his aunt and uncle for a while, before going back to stay with his family, because he was closer to hospitals here, I suspect, and he still needed medical attention. But inside 6 months he came back. In common with a number of people that came back from experiencing that, he never talked about it.

At St Stephens school we had, Pat Neal who's father returned home from fighting the Japanese and presented a Samurai sword to St Stephens school. I do know that when the school was knocked down, it was still in the caretaker's store. So whatever happened to that, I do not know.

Track 14 : 16:25:10

But Pat Neal brought it to school and it was shown to all the children. Well, clearly then put in the caretaker's store under the stairs.

So when was the school knocked down?

About 1970. It was still there, then.

Gosh. Before we have a break, just to finish any memories you have on the war time period, anything else that comes to mind? I mean the one thing we haven't touched on is the nuclear bunkers.

The other thing that comes to mind, is very topical, really, from today's date, in the new century. Recycling was carried out as a matter of course. Most people kept animals, or many people kept animals, we kept chickens. Our next door but one neighbours, kept pigs in the garden. A lot of people kept chickens and pigs on their allotments. Many of the allotments had been created. The neighbours that hadn't got animals, saved all their food waste and took it round in buckets for the chickens and the pigs. And if you were lucky, you were rewarded either with some eggs, or some bacon when the pig was killed. It was quite horrific when the pig was killed and very, very noise. Someone used to come to the house and kill the pig.

Do you recall pig killing days and neighbours?

Oh, yes. It was only two gardens away, tremendous squealing, but not for long. And then the family were told how much they could have of the meat and the rest had to go in to government intervention store.

Oh, so somebody would come along and take half your pig?

Oh, yes. You were told how much you could keep and you would be told how many you could kill. It was all very tightly managed.

And would you be invited round a few months later to see the new piglet?

Yes, but I can't remember ever seeing any at our neighbours, only at ones on the allotments. The allotments on the opposite side of the road to Northwick Manor school, the allotments used to come right up to Northwick Road, proper. The number of pig sties on there were quite prolific.

Food waste was recycled, very little food was wasted, anyway, because one was reprimanded if you didn't eat everything that was put in front of you. That was a way of life and as food was rationed, no-one starved. There was plenty of food but the diet mix was quite different. It was predominantly vegetables and eggs, rather than meat. There was very little meat. I think it was 2 ounces of meat a week and 2 ounces of cheese. So people were, frankly, a lot healthier.

You mentioned livestock in terms of the hens and the pigs. Was there other livestock around in the fields? Were there cows and sheep around?

Only under the care of farmers, predominantly beef cattle.

In the fields around Northwick? And horses, stables, and still used, or not?

There were no horses provided for leisure purposes, they were working horses. There was not the feed to indulge on feeding horses for pleasure. Indeed, at Hanbury Hall, the flock, the herd of deer were deemed to be more valuable as

meat because the feed that they consumed could be used more profitably for beef cattle, so they had to go.

Were there still people who used horse and cart when you were growing up?

It was the common way of transport for goods. Our milk was delivered by horse and cart. No milk was fetched from shops in those days. Milk was bottled and Bennett's had a small distribution depot in what is now, Worthington's ironmongers, that was Bennett's Dairies. Bob Caldicott, the milkman, brought the milk around on horse and cart. Coal was always brought round by horse and cart.

Track 15 : 16:25:45

Another bit of recycling that was almost an indulgence, we, I was always allowed to keep some crusts. I was always reprimanded for not eating the crusts on my bread, I was allowed to keep them and give them to the Colman's horse. Birds didn't do anywhere near so well in World War II. No-one fed the birds.

Nothing left for them.

But carts were used quite generally.

Where did the coal come from, 'cause I've hear mention that there was coal brought up the river at times and that there was a warehouse down by The Slip, or somewhere?

No

No, not in your memory?

No, our coal came from Mr Naydin's coal yard by the side of the level crossing at Henwick, because there's a direct rail link between south Wales and the Midlands and I think you'll find that most coal came into dumps by the side of railway goods yards and Henwick had a small goods array of yards. So did Shrub Hill, so did Droitwich station, so did Pershore.

So, no coal coming up the river, that you can recall?

I don't think that happened. There would be nowhere to unload it apart from right next to the petrol and oil depot and they'd taken all the space needed. The only additional space down there was for the importation of timber and there was not a lot of that coming in because most of it used to come from the Baltic States and, of course, they were under enemy occupation. The main import of fuel to Worcester, other than oil, was by rail.

We will have a break in a minute. Will you tell me your knowledge of the nuclear bunkers built round the Northwick area?

There were no nuclear bunkers built until the late '50's. Nuclear bombs had been used against the Japanese and it was envisaged that they'd been created for a purpose and that would be the end of it. In the event, it seems that other people learned how to make them and then we had the start of what would be then known as The Cold War.

Other bunkers were built in World War II for more conventional purposes, which we were not to learn about until 1975 when the 30 year embargo that had been imposed on people that either built those bunkers, or had been, had them created for their use, were allowed, by law, to talk about it. The degree of secrecy that they held for 30 years was incredibly tight.

I worked with a colleague, who, on the day he received a letter from the Ministry of War, which it was still called in 1975, now the Ministry of Defence, told him that he was then absolved from what he'd signed in World War II. He then divulged that he'd been part of the Bletchley Park and Enigma programme.

In this locality, we then learned, and I only learnt of it from another work colleague, that in 1940, '41, he, as an apprentice, working for the builders, Joseph Wood and Company, who used to be based in Gregory's Mill, had helped build an underground room, 8 foot cube, in the yard, the farmyard of the farm in old Northwick Lane. The only entrance to it was through a manhole cover with James Wood Builders and then there was a steel ladder going into the bunker which had been racked out with timber shelves and the purpose of that was to store small arms, sub-machine guns and hand grenades and pistols for the use of the people which were known as the stay-behind, stay-behind troops. They were not members of the regular army but were people recruited from within each community.

Track 16 : 16:26:31

They were trained in the early stages of World War II, so we now know, to carry out specific functions if the country had been overrun by the enemy. What they were trained to do, was to create as much havoc as possible by sabotaging, by seeking information and passing it on to a command chain that had been created, a very secret one. They would have sabotaged railway lines, telephone lines, power lines and then drawn their materials from these bunkers, but in the day time carried on their normal occupations.

They also had one other important function. They were all trained in a secret establishment down in Wiltshire and they were trained in assassination techniques. One of their duties were to assassinate public employees that cooperated with the enemy. That would be council officials, police, because the

government had been mortified to see the extent that the police and the civil authorities had cooperated with the Germans when the Channel Islands were overrun. They were determined that a very strong message would be sent to anyone who collaborated in this country.

That bunker was eventually filled in. The farmer Mr Hunt, at the time, was sworn to secrecy. The builders were only allowed, all the builders that worked on the project, were sworn to secrecy, including the apprentices. And no builder was allowed to build more than two, so that under duress or torture, they didn't know of the existence of more than two.

The military, in the early stages, did build some themselves. One was built up near Porters Mill, hidden in the canal bank by the side of the canal of the River Salwarpe and, we later learned that the team leader for that, was Dick Phillips, the farmer who passed way about 10 years ago, and lived at Church Farm, right opposite the Mug House, and his family still do.

Dick Phillips was the team leader and he had a team of six. Most teams only comprised four. But, Dick, exercised even greater prudence than the others. Whether he didn't trust some of the members of his troupe, but he hid part of the munitions under one of his pig sty's, which he didn't tell them about. Presumably, dug all this up and handed it over. All these bunkers were evacuated and either destroyed, after the end of War World II, or filled in.

Many of them have never been talked about, so were just destroyed, presumably. Over in Alfrick, the local doctor was the team leader, and the bunker was under a grassed area and the cover, indeed was covered with turf, raised and lowered.

It's an amazing thought, isn't it, you know, all the time that you were playing in and around the Northwick area, there was an 8' room, filled with weapons, very close at hand.

Yes, I can't go any further than to say that on one occasion, there was an incursion into the store by youngsters who did take some items from there. But as one of the people who divulged it to me is still alive and did pay a penalty for doing it, I can't break confidence on that.

That's fine.

But, it happened. There was also, at the top end of the Lodge playing field, a base built that demolished only when the new modern bungalow was created in 2004, which we now know was a gun emplacement to put a 4 1/2 " navel gun directed at the river crossing at The Slip, because the river used to be a ford there, before weirs were put on the river for navigational purposes, but it was still capable of being crossed.

Track 17 : 16:26:59

So there were contingency plans put for, we didn't know what the base was ever for. Why should people turn up out of the blue, build this concrete base with bricks around it and then just go off and leave it.

So, you remember that being built?

No, I remember it being there, don't remember it being built, but it was never used. But the bolt holes were there just to put the gun. There was another one erected where Worcester Technical College is now, pointing at Worcester Bridge, for the same reason.

Any more World War II paraphernalia in and around the area, that you can recall?

Well, staying strictly with Northwick, no, not really. Except that on Sunday mornings, as the wind is predominantly from the south or the south west in Worcester, one could hear the rifle training, firing taking place at Norton Barracks. That's got to be 4 miles away. You could hear it very, very clearly.

Carry up the river!

Yes, probably did, yes. All the crackling, that was generally on a Sunday. That's when the territorial army used to go and practice there. But the only other reminiscences of World War II really are very local, because we didn't used to go anywhere. Public transport was at a premium. After World War II, fairly soon after, from the age of 8 onwards, I used to make my way, unaccompanied, to stay with aunt and uncle, for most of the school holidays, in Coventry.

That generally wouldn't happen with an 8 year old, nowadays. I used to have a label tied on my lapel of where I was heading for and where I'd come from, and used to know full well I'd go on a 144 bus until I was disgorged in Birmingham, walk through the fish market and get on a 159 bus and get off in Camden, Coventry. Walk up Camden Avenue to number 37, have a slice of cake or a biscuit and a cup of tea and walk up with my aunt to the Post Office and send a telegram, no telephones, to mom and dad, which they would receive within an hour of me arriving in Coventry, to say that I'd got there.

Well, the system worked.

And I was taken by aunt, my aunt, my uncle still worked, and the day after King George VI laid the foundation stone for the rebuilding of Coventry. On occasions, I've been back since and it's right in the middle of a huge complex now which, even the 1960' and '50's, complexes being demolished and rebuilt again, but

they're going to keep that datum. The whole of the centre of Coventry was rubble as far as you could see, it was rubble. Timber, rubble. And the only shops were prefabricated, tin huts and prefab buildings that had been put on what used to be roads.

So, shopping was still going on. Furniture shops, food shops, in tin huts.

People making do.

Yes, people were used to making do, you didn't throw anything away, it's a habit that's stuck, I'm told.

CD 2 : Track 18 : 15:26:54

Brian, we've had a short break, and we're going to move on past the war years to the '50's, '60's, '70's. You stayed in Vine Street until early '60's, is that right?

1962, when I married.

Where did you move to after you're married?

Our first house was in Shrubbery Avenue. It was a very roomy, end terrace house. For the first time enjoyed an indoor toilet and a bathroom. The house was large, empty and cold and the first the winter was the winter of '62, '63, when we had temperatures of -20°. But I acquired a second-hand solid fuel heater and installed it in the living room and that was a absolute lifesaver. I remember waking up in the mornings and seeing a glass of water on the dressing table with ice on the top. But we'd been used to that, anyway.

But, we stayed there for three years and the house was so commodious, it was far too big for two. It took 17 rolls of wallpaper just to cover the staircase. My father was a painter and decorator, and I do remember that we were putting the last couple of rolls on, and the portable radio announced that John F Kennedy had been assassinated. We both came to the conclusion, it was pointless putting the last two rolls on, because the press seemed to think that the Russians were the cause and this was the start of a nuclear fighting war, so we pushed off round to the pub for the rest of the evening.

That's quite a memory of where you were when JFK was shot!

Yes. Wall papering.

In that period, did much change in Northwick, to somebody who'd live here all his life?

Not an awful lot of change, no. There's quite a bit more new development, mostly of an infill nature. The Northwick Road itself, I will comment, between Sabrina Avenue and Vine Street, was actually made wider. There were, there was a row of terraced houses right opposite Union Place, that projected out into what is now Northwick Road. That bottleneck was removed, I would imagine, about the late '50's. The origins of it, I've no idea.

And was that achieved by removing the terraced houses?

Demolished them completely and then set back a new building line and built the new, well there were new in those days, built new houses there.

Other changes that have taken place, have sort of been incremental, really. I'll mention one in particular. In Vine Street, we lived, almost opposite, probably the first coloured doctor in Worcester, Dr Dey, D E Y and his wife. And so from an early age that was quite normal, we had coloured neighbours. Very polite gentleman and we found out afterwards, he wasn't a GP, he was a Neuro Surgeon from Powick Hospital and was one of the early, very early users of LSD in the treatment of psychiatric disorders. We didn't impinge on each others jobs very much, we learnt that in later years, but Doctor Dey and his wife were very, very good neighbours.

Were there any other infamous or famous residents of Northwick that you particularly recall?

No, there were one or two characters, but there seemed to be more characters about in those days. They weren't exclusively from Northwick or operated in Northwick. The city had more characters, predominantly the city centre.

Did you get a sense that the city was expanding out this way?

Yes, it was starting to lose the feel that we had in the '40's, '50's and '60's of being a market town. The cattle market held every week had been quite a big event, and that diminished.

Track 19 : 15:27:27

Then we started to get building land at the top end of Northwick, being built on. The development of Grange Avenue southwards, where we eventually moved to in 1966, '67, from Shrubbery Avenue. That had always been agricultural land. It was, to us, very pleasant to move into a brand new house with everything new and shiny and guaranteed for 5 years. It was the start of a lot of upper Northwick gradually slipping away.

Worcester Rugby Club were always, their football ground was accessed from Beverley Drive and that all became a brand new housing estate. Then other infill

developments by the side of the Northwick Cinema and developing, eventually, to some properties being demolished, that probably wouldn't be allowed today.

Where the Co-Op store is at the moment, was a very, very nice Victorian or Georgian house, where the local vet, Mr Fleck, and his family lived. Approached up a long drive with lawns either side and some lovely tall fir trees that had been there for years. And that, all in two weeks, was demolished by bulldozer and the Co-Op store appeared, which I don't think that would have been allowed. That would have been a Grade II building, but that system of listing didn't come in until the '70's.

Did, was there any community uproar at any point that too much development was going on, too quickly, or did people welcome the fact that there were new homes available?

People generally welcomed it. There'd been so little development in the early '60's, and none at all since about 1938. In recent years I have learnt that the houses along the top of Northwick Road, the ones immediately behind us, indeed in Geneva Close, that the builder, by the name of Mr Harper, starting building them on the west side of Northwick Road in about 1936. '37. He started building from where the end of Geneva Close meets old Northwick Lane, now, and started building them in a clockwise rotation. By the time World War II started, he had got probably as far as, opposite Beckett Road. Those houses were built to completion and occupied.

The other houses on the land he'd bought, down as far as, almost to The Lodge, had been constructed either in, to the point of half construction or down purely and simply to the drains and footings. I only learnt that the ones at the southern end, which I'd always believed had been there since the late '30's, weren't in fact finished until 1947, when a member of the Brewer family, who lives at the end of our garden, Mrs Brewer, said they had to wait for the house to be finished, for them to move in after their marriage in 1947, and it's because there'd been no building materials. And since found that the builder finished the last few houses, using timber that he'd obtained from the, or many of the houses, from the demolition of the old Northwick Manor house. So the roofs of many of those houses have got timbers of old Northwick hall in.

How fascinating. So when was the Northwick Hall demolished?

Partly demolished, because there's still part of it existing now. The Old Coach House is still existing. It was demolished in, I believe, in the late, finally demolished in the late '40's or '50's. The cellars were filled in, in the 1940's.

Do you remember it at all, being there when you were a child?

No, not at all. There is a little bit of it left at the end of Geneva Close. There's a wall with a ring bolt in it where the cart horses used to be tied to, that was part of the farming complex.

Track 20 : 15:27:50

Do you ever remember seeing a horse tied to it, or would that have been way before your time?

No, I only remember it when Mr Smith, the proprietor of 134, the vegetable shop, lived in one of the first houses to have been completed by Mr Harper and he bought the site and operated it as a small market garden and kept the wall in because it was a retaining wall, holding back earth from a higher level. So, it was always, within my memory, a working area and it's since being built on.

But it's still there?

It's still there. The allotments, incidentally, in Geneva Close, were all part of an orchard that stretched, pretty well from the west end, the river end of The Lodge, right the way up to the back of the houses in the Northwick Road and that was an orchard that was used for keeping, people keeping ponies in. The Dauncey family used to keep ponies in there.

And then the builder who created Geneva Close purchased a portion of the land, the City Council used the other portion, but I understand they don't own it. They are the landlords.

OK. So, this, these houses were all built in that period before '48ish. Do you remember it being pretty much a building site, further that we go out in Northwick during the '70's, 60's, 70's?

From about the early '60's onwards there was continuous building, yes. Geneva Close, itself, the house that we're sitting in now, was built in 1960, '61, but that's only a row of about 12 houses. Other infilling took place when the market garden was sold. Other areas in Northwick tended to be infill.

There used to be a market garden, again, in Northwick, that is about 50m further up from Pinckett Street and it's got a solitary bungalow in at the moment and behind it is Marion Close, that was created. But all that area, again, used to be a small market garden.

So, it's the green spaces that have gone?

Yes, inevitably. Northwick Close, the south side of that, has got houses that have only, in the main, been built since the 1960's. And the field on which Northwick Manor School is built, used to come right up to Northwick Close, itself, apart

from some pre-war houses. And Northwick Close was only tarmacked in the late '60's. It was just a rough track, a very dusty and bumpy, rough track.

What about any factories or business that were, can you recall any of those disappearing and becoming developments, housing developments?

No, there was a shortage of labour in the '50's, the country had lost an awful lot of production workers in World War II, and the factories that had stayed were hard put to obtain their full complement of trained workers, hence the start of emigration, but that's another subject. The lifesaver in Northwick really, for the female workers in particular, was the Kays Warehouse, which was originally built as a quilt manufactory, and that's where my mother worked as a young woman and maintained her skills in quilt manufacture and made all the ones in our house. But Kays took that over in the '50's, and as a young apprentice, I spent about 3 months in 1954, working there, and that was a god-send to the, particular the women, and a few men, from Northwick. That provided employment for several hundred people.

Goodness, where was that warehouse?

Track 21 : 15:28:12

Well, it's been converted to apartments in recent years, it's still standing. It's at the junction of Sabrina Avenue and Northwick Avenue, on the crossroads.

What were the other big employers in Northwick in that period?

Well, Faithful Overalls used to belong to the Dorrell family, who also had a big store in town, with the name of Russell and Dorrell. They owned that factory, they created the factory and again, that was a big employer in the area, but predominantly for female workers. Again, making clothing and in the main, industrial clothing, overalls and protective clothing. They also owned a shirt making company in Belfast, but they've sold out to another conglomerate in recent years, who are now threatening to move production to Portugal. That site is now earmarked for the building of 43 houses.

So the development continues.

Yes, people in Northwick, in the main, were able to work without commuting more than, probably 3 miles at the extreme and some of them no more than two.

I bet that's changed. That's changed hugely, I would imagine.

Yes. It was reckoned that people, the men who had to commute out to the engineering factories of Archdales and Wards at Blackpole, had a long way to go to work, and that's 2 miles, just under 2 miles.

That's amazing. So where would the men, predominantly, have worked?

In Worcester, the majority of people in engineering were fortunate that they had Archdale and Wards at Blackpole, they had the Cadbury cake factory at Blackpole, when Cadbury's brought it back from, or inherited it from being a munitions factory. In St Johns there was a company called Alley and McClellan, that made steam engines. That factory was bought and levelled and turned, the site turned into a huge warehouse for Kays Mail Order.

The Mining Engineering Company, or MECCO, as they're generally known, were a large producer of pit props, hydraulic pit props for the mining industry, and still carry on that activity in a much smaller manner. In the south of Worcester, the Metal Box Company and the Williamsons Tin Plate Company, both made tin cans in prodigious quantities. And all this provided work in engineering.

The city had a profusion of builders and decorators, more than there are now, most of them being family businesses. The other main areas of employment were in local authority work and then warehousing started to come to Worcester but the warehousing only started to appear after the motorway was created and tended to be to the motorway side of the area.

I've missed out one important area that's on the fringes of Northwick. And that's the Metal Castings Company. They inherited the site from a company called, Climax, Thomas and Company, Climax Works, and one can travel all over the world and see their products still working, because they made wind driven water pumps and sold hundreds, thousands of them through Africa, Australia, India and many of them are still working. And the design is still used, but they're made elsewhere.

Made by people from Northwick, originally!

They generally made in those countries, now.

How amazing. So, going back to your homes. First marriage you moved to ...

Shruberry Avenue ...

... and then to ...

Grange Avenue

... and then to here?

To here, yes.

In Geneva Close. So, you've had 4 homes in the area. What main changes have you seen in the communities around your homes?

Five homes, actually. Saunders Street for 6 months.

Have you seen any changes in the community?

Track 22 : 15:28:33

Yes, it's grown much more diverse. A lot of people moving into the region. The majority of them, in the main, coming from two locations, we find from people we know. Birmingham/Black Country and Scotland. There's quite a lot of Scots who've seemed to home in on Worcester and enjoy the locality. There's less of a community spirit than there used to be, but probably the majority of that was due to the pressures of World War II and having to know who had got surplus this and surplus that and who you could do a deal with.

Lots of services left the area in the '60's, but are now coming back in. We only had a solitary dentist. We have lost a couple of doctor's surgeries, but they're starting to come back, so services are coming back in as the population is growing. So it's a bit of a balloon, really, it goes up and down.

Are there any changes which you would say, have been changes for the worse, over the years?

Yes, the environment hasn't had the attention that it needs and at times the park and river bank have looked very, very sad and were nowhere near as well maintained as they used to be since labour devices came in and personal attention was taken away from those areas. We were always used, on the park, to having a resident park keeper and a deputy living on the park, who would stop bad behaviour, regulate anti-social action, such as dropping litter. Those have been quite noticeable.

The policing of the area has never been very strong. Probably, in the early days, because it didn't need to be, and for different reasons now, because they seem to have sorted out different priorities for themselves.

Did you use to have a local bobby that you knew?

No, no, we had two or three policemen living in the patch, but they never policed the area. No, we never had a local bobby. We used to know the postman by name, we used to know the milkman by name. I used to know the shop keepers by name, but no, we had a resident police station, which you may not have heard of, in Coombes Road. But even that was closed through lack of use.

So, conversely to my question about what's changed to the worse, what would you say has changed for the better in the area?

More shopping facilities, more in diverse shopping facilities and the take away facilities. We're very well blessed for an excellent Chinese restaurant and two excellent fish and chip shops, and a multi store, albeit it a small one, whereas previously we used to have to rely on corner shops, who were quite discriminatory. If you weren't a regular shopper there, then invariably if you asked for something that was in short supply, they automatically hadn't got it.

Brand, or shop loyalty, was emphasised quite strongly and some were worse at it than others. They, I'm sorry to say, but many of the small shop keepers were not best loved in World War II and were remembered afterwards.

Brian, thanks very much for your memories. They've been absolutely fascinating, and I'm sure there's many more to come, but we'll stop for the moment.

OK.

Thank you

Transcribed by : Sharon Kettleby – December 2009