

An Oral History for Northwick Manor Community Project – NM05

Name: Jim Merrick

Date of Birth:

Place of Birth: Royal Infirmary, Castle Street, Bevere

Date of Interview: 18th September 2008

Interviewed by: Julia Letts

CD 1 : Track 2 : 09:40:11

Jim, can I start by getting you to give me your name and your date of birth and where you were born, just so I can check your recording level?

Jim Merrick, I was born in Castle Street, Royal Infirmary, when it was down there, 1938.

What's your date of birth?

Track 3 : 09:40:14

Let's go right back to the beginning, Jim. Tell me your first memories of the cottage you were born in?

It was Bevere Green, the first cottage as you go down on the green. There were a row of three, tied cottages belonged to one of the farms round there.

What was yours called, did it have a name or number?

No, just used to put No. 1 Bevere Green.

What sort of a building was it, how old?

At least about, 150 years old, I should think. Never did really find out, you just take these things for granted when you're living there. We were, we didn't have any water supply apart from a pump that was at the one end cottage. We had water and electric put in, in about 1948, I think it was. Otherwise we had oil lamps for reading, and that.

So, for the first 10 years of your life, you had to go to the other end of the cottages to get your water from the pump?

Yes.

Was that your job, as a small boy?

Well, if I was there, yes. But, me mother had to fill a copper, we had a copper in the back kitchen. It was a fair size, and that had to be filled so she could do the washing on Monday mornings. So I think I did a bit on that once I was able to carry a bucket.

So, obviously there was no bathroom or anything like that inside. Did you have a ...

We had a zinc bath, about 5' long, which was alright when you were in front of the fire, but with no central heating, or anything like that, it did get a bit cold at times.

And what about a toilet, was that up the garden?

Oh, we had to go up the garden, about 30 yards up there. You had to watch dark nights, because sometimes the cows would come through the hedge at the top and you're liable to fall over them. We had another copper outside where me mother used to cook all the pig's swill and all the dogs in the district knew where the warmest place was. You didn't walk around there, not with slippers on, anyway, because they'd all congregate around the fire, because it stuck warm, pretty well all night when she did some of the pig swill.

So, would she do that once a week, or something, boil up the left-overs?

Yeah.

Did you share the toilet up the garden, or was that just for your house?

No, we didn't share, there was two cubicles and the end cottage had their own on the other end of our toilet. It's still up there now, I think they're using it as a tool shed, I'm not certain. When I went down there I did see it was still there, brick building, it was. Two seat, a plank of wood with two holes cut in it, small one for children, lower down, the bigger one for grown ups. Me father had to empty it every six weeks. He used to dig a hole in the garden, that's where it went to. We had beautiful veg.

Track 4 : 09:40:31

So, we've talked about the outside of the cottage. Can you walk me through the inside, as it was?

When you come up the front path, there's a small porch on the front of the house. You go through the front door, you're into the, well, the main room where mom did all the cooking on a coal fire with an oven. It was about 12' square. We had a dresser in there for plates and things like that, and another cabinet that somebody made dad for, put china in.

And was that the room that you tended to spend the most time in, the family?

Oh, yes, all the time. You had the oil lamp in there. We had a, there was a table in the middle, a settee and these two dressers round the outside. You had just about enough room to get round the table.

If you carried on, you go into the back scullery, which where mom did her washing, there was a copper out there for her to do her washing. It was about 20' long, the sitting, bearing in mind that at the one end was where they used to put the coal. They brought the coal round the back and tipped it at the end. Plus a box, a 3' box, 3' cubed box where we used to keep all of chickenry and stuff like that, the poultry food. We did have a few mice.

I bet you did.

In the main room, round the walls, they had tongue and groove panelling, which was quite nice, a rich brown. The only thing, all the black beetles in, that's where they lived and when you came down in the night, there was crackles as you're walking on them, 'cause you get so many there. There was a powder came out, Keatings, a beetle powder, I think they had picnics on that in the finish. And it wasn't until the more stronger powders came out, that we managed to keep them down a bit.

You were never tempted to take the panelling off?

Well, nobody thought, I was born with that, you just got used to it as you. I don't think anybody down there took their panelling off, it was, bearing in mind it was a tied cottage, they probably wouldn't, they'd frown on it.

We had a radio in there, which, every Saturday, when I went to the Saturday morning pictures, I had to take an accumulator down to County Magneto, I think it was, down in Sidbury, and leave the battery there to be charged up. When I came out the pictures, I had to go there and get the new battery to take home and it just about lasted 5 days. But they're a god-send.

I'll bet.

At least we had the news and things like that. We knew what was going on in the world.

Were you quite, talking of that, were you quite isolated in Bevere?

No, no, not really. We had those cottages there. There was a farm over the road. There was another house there, but they knocked that down and built a bungalow. We had the farm, the farmer's house was across the green from us, so, and there was two or three houses at the end of the green, lodges to the big houses. And there was another big house halfway down the green, a Mr Hammond lived there, I believe he worked on the Council, something to do with roads and that. No, we weren't that isolated.

You were quite a community? We'll come back to that in a minute, but carry on going through the house for me.

Track 5 : 09:40:52

When you come through the front door, before you went out the back door, you turn right, left, sorry, into the front room and that's, well we used to put our bikes in, in the winter, so it wasn't to, it was not that they'd be stole, or anything like that, but it kept the saddles dry, and things like that. It's quite easy to get the bikes in there. There was a little cubbyhole under the stairs. Next to the door to the front room, the, the kitchen.

To get out of the kitchen, into the front room, there's two doors there, one to get into the other front room and one next to it to go up the stairs. You went straight up about 13 stairs onto a landing and we had one small bedroom with a single bed in and there's a double bedroom, the main bedroom, with a double bed in there and a single against the wall, plus two wardrobes and a dressing table and the old fashioned washing, wash stand where you had a bowl and a big jug for water for washing, and that.

There was a fire in there if we were desperate, if it was really cold. That was about it. There was a loft, but I never got into the loft.

And this cottage had, you say was a tied cottage, had your, had it been in your family for more than one generation?

No.

So your parents moved there ...

My father hadn't been in Bevere all that long, I not certain where he came from. It's one of the things you think afterwards, I wish I'd have said something about it. I remember somebody saying that he came there, there was about one of the

first farms where they had milking machines, that's how he finished up there. I think he came from Sinton, Leigh Sinton way, originally. It might be worth going round and having a look through the records over there.

What was his name, your father?

William Henry Merrick.

And so he was a farm worker?

A general farm worker.

Where the residents of the other two cottages, farm workers as well?

Next door to us was an old chap, old Joe Cotton, I don't know what he did. He was there when I was born and he could have been there for quite a while. And the end cottage with another farm worker. He worked for a farm out the back of the cottage, Harris'.

So, different farm to your father?

That was a different farm to me fathers, yes. Presumably the farmers bought both the cottages between them. Yeah, that's it, yeah.

So, your father worked for the farm, which farm was it, what was it called?

Mr Smith, that's all we used to call it, W H Smith, he was, not the bookshop. As a special treat, I used to go down to the farm house, which was on the green, facing us, and I was allowed to have a bath in a posh bath down there, instead of the zinc bath we had at home.

So, did the Smith's have family, did they, were there children your age at the farm?

Yeah, no, not at the farm. They had a daughter and a son, but they were older, like I was in the Infants, they'd be in the senior schools, and they left to go up London, yeah, that's right. There was, down at the end of the green, there's two lodges that go up to the big houses there, and there was a girl, they were the Wright's, they had a daughter. And the other one was McKnight's and there's two brothers down there and I used to play with them.

Track 6 : 09:41:13

And quite a few up by Ombersley Road used to come down there.

So, you had quite a gang?

Yeah, there's, having a green there it was a good place for playing cricket or anything like that without too much trouble and we all had bikes that we could get around on.

Tell me a little bit more about the farm where your dad worked.

It was a medium sized farm, general serial crops, sugar beet, mangles, kale for cattle feed.

And you said they had a dairy herd.

Yeah, we had milkers, about 20, 30 milkers. We had about, towards the last round of the war, we had about 120 pigs down there, but they were all, the one building was all partitioned off for pig pens. Every Saturday morning, when I could go down there regular, we used to have to weigh the pigs and all those, I think it was 10 score was the weight, about 120 lb, and they'd be, we know they'd be marked and we'd know when the cattle lorry came on the Monday, those were the pigs that had to go to keep the cycle, you know.

We had cows, quite a few cows, there for a time but I think he used to sell them on to other farmers. Every Tuesday when, every Tuesday we used to have a milk marketing man come. As dad got the milk off the cows, he weighed it and made a record of it and that depended how much food they got and each cow had a bucket in front of it and I had to go around, collect those buckets and go down the list and weigh the food out for each cow, put it back and when, as soon as I milked her they put the feed out of the bucket into the manger and leave them there to eat that.

So, it sounds like they were quite forward thinking on this farm. First, milking machines ...

Well, yeah, I don't know why it was picked out, or anything. That's another thing, you think well I wish I had delved into it, but it was me dad's job, and that was it.

We cut, we used to have a lot of cattle cake and stuff like that, but we had a lot of mangles and stuff like that, which we had a thing we could throw them in and it cut them up to big chips, and they used to get that with their feed as well, plus when they, specially in the winter, they'd be turned out in the field and we'd take kale, cooked kale, and take it round.

When I first went down there, it was by horse and cart, but as I got older, we had a Ferguson tractor and trailer, and that was a lot easier, 'cause we used to, a lot of the manure used to go on the fields.

When I first remember going there, and I was doing it in the end, we used to take cart loads of manure up to the field and put it, put a clump every 20 yards or something like that, then you had to, you used to get a long fork and used to spread it all the way round the rough 20 yards square.

That must have taken hours and been back breaking.

We were fit. That's why we were so fit, I think. Well, it was a day's job plus when we had sugar beet, they'd plant the seed but then you had to go down and single it out, so take all the extra (inaudible?). Really when the sun shone, you'd have one side brown, you'd be burnt, and as soon as the sun came out you took your shirt off and the only sun tan oil we had was olive oil.

Track 7 : 09:41:33

And did you use that?

Yeah, of yeah, and we used calamine when you got sunburnt, plastered calamine on you, that used to take the sting out of it.

So, you obviously started working at the farm, at a very young age.

Well, yes, I think, I used to do a lot of potato picking, that's what I remember the first job I seemed to do a lot. I did get paid, I didn't have to do it for nothing, I'll give him that. Oh, no, the first job I had was actually on the green. When the cows were turned out at night in the afternoon, after milking, I used to have to take them up onto the green and they would graze that grass there, to save me having to mow it. I think I used to get about a shilling a night, which was quite good, to look after, about 2 hours I had to watch these cows. And, as sure as anything, if I went in the house for a drink, somebody'd come and say, your cows is walking up Green Lane, can you go and get them before they go in somebody's garden. One or two times, they did.

So, they'd just be, effectively, loose on the green?

Yeah, they'd be loose on the green, 'cause you had the three roads. You had the road at the bottom going up to the Kidderminster Road, and the road, the cottage end going up to Ombersley Road or Northwick Road. They weren't much problem.

Did anyone else use the green for grazing, just the cattle?

No. I believe it belonged to the farmer.

How did you keep control of them, just you and a big stick, or something?

I just rode round and keep sending them back. They weren't no trouble, no.

Tell me a little bit more, then, about your work on the farm. That was your first job, managing the cows, and then you moved on to potato picking during the right season?

Well, it was seasonal work, whatever the seasonal job was, it might be pulling beans or anything like that.

Was this after school, or was this weekends?

Yeah, usually after school and Saturdays. 'Cause Saturdays was an all day, your dad didn't get a half, well sometimes he got a half day, if there was two of them working there, one would have the weekend off. Else otherwise it was seven days a week, especially if you're milking. You can't, you can't just say, oh, I'll go, you had to be there to make sure they were milked, and all that.

So what time would your dad have to get up in the morning?

About half past six, well he used, liked to be out the house by half past six, but he'd come back up about quarter past eight and have some breakfast.

And would the milk lorry come every day?

I'm not certain, I remember on Sundays, I used to go with the farmer, we'd put the churns in the trailer on the back of his car. We used to go to the Co-Op Dairy at the bottom of Ronkswood bank, as it was then, where Lidl's is now.

So you actually had to take the milk down there?

Well, you drove in the car, you'd take, just to get the churns. You backed up to a loading stage and just load them off and they'd take them away.

We used to grow sugar beet, as well. We had, the person who owned the New Inn, Jimmy Hunt, he used to, I think it was his lorry, used to take the sugar beet to Kidderminster and they'd have the sugar out and the pulp that was left, the farmers, I presume, bought the bags of pulp, and I know we used to have bags of it for cattle feed. I presume it was a cheap form of cattle feed.

Where, did the cattle, over-winter inside, did they come in the barns, in winter?

No, we never kept them in, they always went out unless the river was in flood. In 1947 when the deep snow came, we kept them in. That's the only year I remember the cows still being kept in, 'cause it was a bit expensive, really. If they could get out they'd always find something to eat.

So, there was enough barn space, though, there was plenty of barns to keep the cows in?

We had one big one with 20 cows in, and two smaller with, oh, about 7 or 8 cows.

Track 8 : 09:41:53

You mention the winter of '47, it was obviously quite a infamous one. Can you tell me a little bit more about what you remember of that winter, you'd have been about 9 years old?

Yeah, I got lost in snow drifts. I used to have to go round and make sure if there's any animals out, they were alright, of course the snow was that deep. Along Green Lane there was a snow plough stuck for, must be about 2 or 3 days there, because the lane was absolutely packed. It would blow off the fields into the lane and it'd just get filled, filled the lane up and it was a bit of a game to get rid of it because there's no way you could push it sideways. I remember that snow plough up there quite a while.

It must have been quite miserable? These days, when it snows, the youngsters are absolutely delighted, 'cause they see so little. But it must have been a miserable existence trying to get through that period.

It was cold because we really didn't have the clothes like we've got now. But, you just, if you're on the tractor you turn a bag inside out and made it, put one corner into the other and you'd put that on your head and turn your back and that would keep you mainly dry. Well, it was alright like, you just got used to it.

And when that snow eventually thawed that winter, was there much flooding?

Yes, it was the biggest flood I know, anyway. We had to take the animals up to Fernleith, where Mr Smith had a brother. And we left them at his farm and dad had to go up there and do the milking.

So where did the floods come up to?

Well, you couldn't get down the farm road to the actual buildings themselves, it was all covered, it was ... I know there used to be a mark on the side of the public house by the bridge. There used to be a mark on the wall there and they came out at the ground floor windows. It was, that was 'cause all the snow we had, it melted.

You must have got quite used to smaller floods, though, over the years?

Yeah, well, June and October, we used to regular have floods. But they'd just cover most of the fields round the farm. We could still get down the farm then.

So you were used to dealing with it, and soon you kind of recognised it that the water was going to coming over, you'd move the ...?

Oh, yeah, you'd have a rough idea when it was going to ... I used to go down by the river, you could soon see if it was coming up. It used to rise quite quick, but we never had many cattle stuck out in the fields, far from the farm, anyway. But, it's only that one year where I remember we actually had to take the animals up to his brother's farm.

That can't have been easy!

Well, I think they used, we didn't drive them, they were, they had a ride, yeah.

Take me back to your earliest memories of going down to the river and as a child, playing down there. Did you have favourite places that you would go to and things you'd do down there?

Oh, I used to be playing up by the weir, Bevere, yeah. There's a bridge there, I've often wonder, there's an article in the evening news about it once, why it was built and who built it, but I didn't, it was a bridge and that was it.

That went across to the island?

To the island, yeah.

Did you ever go, did you ever get across it?

Yeah, I had to take a tractor over that bridge, 'cause sometimes the cattle were on there and they'd put some more feed down for them, especially in the cold weather.

So, who owned the bridge, or was it just ...?

Well, it came with the farm, presumably. Somebody, years ago had wanted to use it and instead of going all the way over there, he went halfway.

So, the island belonged to the farm as well?

Yeah.

And you used to put the cattle on that?

Yeah, the cattle went, well if we put them in the top field, they'd wander over on their own. Towards the end of it's time, it was getting a bit dangerous, there was bits missing. But we all used to, I used to play on the weir a lot.

Track 9 : 09:42:12

What sort of things would you do and play?

Well, always swimming. Once the weather was alright for swimming, we'd be down there, somewhere down there. Up from The Slip, there's another couple of sandy beaches, that sort of thing. I think there's only once when I really got into trouble which, but I remember somebody said, I'd gone too far and there weren't good places to get back on the bank, so I was trying to swim back up. I was getting done in, and I remember somebody saying, well, just turn round and go with the current, and I did, and I lived, anyway.

So, you managed to get out at one of the beaches further down?

Yeah, one of the beaches further down.

It sounds, I mean, gosh, these days you would, you know, you'd never get children playing in the weir.

Well, the big thing then, was polio. There's quite a lot of that around. Well, we didn't worry about that, we just went in the river, and that's it. 'Cause years ago there used to be a ferry across from our side to the camp. A bloke would come over, there's a couple of us used to knock around together, we'd go over that side and wander up round the locks and all round, that's another bit of play area.

So how long did that ferry run for?

Well, I can't remember it after 1948.

And how would you call it, was there a bell or a system to call?

Shout. It's the same people who own the public house now, Wainwright's, as it was when we were there, used to go over there.

So would the folk from Bevere, say your dad after work, or on a day off, would he go over to the camp?

We did a few times, but he mainly used the New Inn, the Mug or the Raven. When we went out Saturday and Sunday night, it would be one of those pubs that they would use. And in the week, me dad used to go to Tibberton, but I think somebody used to pick him up in the car to, 'cause it's a bit far, he used to ride his bike, everywhere. But it's a bit far for him, I think.

How far would you roam, how large an area would you tend to sort of use as your playground as a youngster?

Well, up to Fernhill Heath, Hawford, we'd play around there and up round the school, Cornmeadow. I knew a lot of people down there, Colin Road and that.

What were your favourite, did you have any real favourite spots or dens or really memorable places?

Not that I remember. The one cottage at the end of the green, it belonged to the big house, that's all we called it, oh, The Manor. When I was a youngster, during the war it was an auxiliary fire service place and they used to have fire engines up there, presumably if Worcester got attacked, they could use those fire engines to get down to Worcester in case a building down in Worcester had been bombed, or anything like that. I don't think there was any bombing, really, apart from the MECCO.

That's very interesting, this was the Manor House and it was turned over to Auxiliary Fire Engine headquarters, or ...

Pardon.

... were they people, the auxiliary fire service people, living there, or was it just a place ...?

I think so, I think there was, because up by there as well, the one chap who lived in the one lodge, well he lived in both lodges. He lived in the Curtlers one first, which is the other Manor House, and then they moved to the Whitelight, we called it, and he, up by where the big houses were, there was two big gardens there.

Track 10 : 09:38:58

They belonged to Owens, now, I think, or the one side does, Owens Nurseries, big greenhouses with grape and peach vines in them, and Saturday mornings he had an old Hillman Imp, an old Hillman car and he put potatoes on the wings, 'cause in those days the wings of the car stuck out a bit, pile it on there, on the bonnet, and he'd go down round the local district selling veg. He used to grow all different veg.

So this was the gentleman who lived in the Lodge?

Yes.

So he worked in the gardens?

He, I presume he rented them. He worked in both sides at the time.

And would those have been the original gardens to the two big houses?

Yes, they were. And then after the end of the war, the fire brigade left there and it became displaced person's hostel, they're all Polish, Yugoslavs, what else did we have. Well, all foreign people who'd been displaced owing to the war and it was fantastic as Christmas, 'cause we have Christmas 25th December, they have Christmas the 8th January, so we sort of had two Christmasses while we lived there. Yeah, great bunch of people.

How many of them were living there?

There must have been a hundred, I should think.

Gosh, so your community suddenly expanded enormously.

Yeah, well, it did, I suppose. They worked on the farms quite a lot. All seemed to have jobs somewhere, mainly on the farms. It was like a little barracks up there, really. Wood huts and that.

So there were wood huts in the grounds of the Manor House?

Yes. In front of them. Well the Manor House faces the river, to the left hand side in the gardens there were these wooden like barracks there and they lived in those, and I think they disappeared about 1950.

And what happened then at the Manor House?

It was changed around, rebuilt. They sold it off as two houses, sort of thing. I think a Mr Love has bought some of the ground, he built a bungalow there.

So, before the war, not that you would remember, but you might have been told, but before the war and before the Auxiliary Fire Service moved in, who owned the Manor House, was it a family?

Haven't a clue.

Right. So that was the White one?

That was, yeah, the White Lodge belonged to, the one nearest the river. The other lodge, which was a brick built one, the drive went up to the big house and I think, if I remember rightly, that was Curtlers, they owned quite a bit of ground. There used to be a, fields in front of that, the one, they always called that The

Park, presumably that's what they used as a playground, more or less, horses and that.

You didn't see much of the people who lived in the big house?

No. Well mostly, the foreigners, we did, because they were always walking down the road, got me mum drunk on Christmas, that's the best pastry she's ever made.

Yeah, it was Curtlers, that's right. Something else I was going to say, as well. Oh, it'll come.

I was wondering, as you talked about, obviously the way you got around was mainly by foot or bicycle, were there many vehicles that came around the area when you were a youngster?

We had all the butcher, the baker and we had a, you could hear it coming, smell it coming for ages.

This was the baker?

Track 11 : 09:39:25

A firm called Cadells, and they sold, it's like a mobile hardware shop and they, in it they had a tank of paraffin, that's what you could smell coming and we used to get our paraffin for the lamps, off him and he used to sell soaps of different sorts, carbolic soap, that sort of soap. Floor cloths, tea cloths, all things like that, that we couldn't get at, there's no shop handy, really to get things from.

And he would come up round the community?

He'd come every so often, about once a month, I should think. I don't think he came every day. We had the fish and chip man from Checketts Lane, he'd come up on a Thursday with the fish and chips. We used to fish and chips then. Kirsty's But the nearest shops for us were down Northwick Road at the top of Slip Lane and Cornmeadow they used, three shops there, I think they're still there now. I haven't been around there lately.

There's a paper shop, and I think there was another bit of a, sold dresses and things like that, sewing, dress making materials, and things like that.

So were you ever sent down to go and get anything that had run out, or whatever from the shop at the top of the Slip Road?

Well, when we had, when we had some workmen there, they're always sending me down to get cigarettes. Buy anything you like, bar Pasher, they were, I think they were rolled tea leaves.

And another thing we used to do, during the war the American convoy used to come down from up north going somewhere down the south coast, I presume. And they always used to stop on the southbound lane, it was a dual track, as it is now, on the south side, going south, they always parked up there and we used to go up there, well there'd be about 3 or 4 of us go up there and they used to give us piles of things that we couldn't get, bits of chocolate, sweets. The only thing me mother used to say was, bring anything you like back, but their cheese, tinned cheese, it was always terrible.

And, can you describe the convoys to me, were they huge?

They're about 40 or 50 lorries, yeah. I think they used to like to listen to us talk and they couldn't get over that. They probably might not notice it so much today, but we used to get quite a few things we couldn't get, so, yeah.

It must have been quite handy. Was that the first time you'd seen black GI's?

Yeah.

So, it was quite intriguing for a small boy?

Well, yeah, I thought they'd been in the sun too much.

Oh, we must have had a paper delivered from somewhere, we used to have the Daily Express, cause I always used to read the Rupert, the Ruperts had a piece in there and that's the first sort of, well me mum must have been quite rich, I think, because we used to have Beeno on a Monday. When it first came out it was only printed every second Monday, presumably papers felt the shortage, because I think that came out in about 1938. On a Tuesday, I had the Film Fun, Wednesday was the Knockout, Thursday was Radio Fun and Friday, towards the last run, The Eagle came out, The Eagle comic.

So you had a comic a day?

Near enough, yeah. I always remember having those to read, so presumably she spent the money. 'Cause I lived quite well really. Dad was on the farm so he could get all the veg for us. Mom had her chickens, she used to keep chickens and people would go mad after the eggs. They'd give her their butter rations for a couple of eggs, or something like that.

Track 12 : 09:39:48

Well, you had your jobs as well, for looking after the cows.

My bits of jobs, yeah. Well, me mother used to go down every morning, bar Sundays, and she used to wash the milking machines. They were washed in a big zinc bath and then they were put in a steaming box that would really clean all the milk off. That used to take her about three hours. That was her, sort of job. And then she'd go up to the farm house and do the cleaning for Mrs Smith and any washing she wanted doing.

So you didn't sit still in your household, that's for sure?

Well, at night you're sat by the table straight into whatever, whether you had school work, or anything like that, with the oil lamp, now I don't know how we did it, but, we managed it.

And then you said, was it, did you say 1948 the electricity came?

Yeah, I think that was it, it was a shilling in the meter.

Can you actually recall the day when the lights went on?

Not really. I came home from school one day, we had a cooker in the back kitchen, we had an electric cooker and so, mum was happy.

I bet she was. Huge change. And the water, the same?

About the same time, yeah. It was only cold water off the mains. It must have been about 1948, I think.

What about school, where did you start school?

Five. I went to the Institute by the church.

St Stephens?

Me mom used to take me up ...

Which one was it, St Stephens?

No, Claines. I remember my mum used to take me on me bike, 'till I got too heavy.

Because that's quite a way, isn't it, to get to school?

It would have been about a mile and half, mile and a quarter, something like that. We always used to, normally after that, I used to walk. I was, went to the Institute

when I was five, they had a class down there, two classes I think it was. I think a Mrs Davis used to do it and then I went to the big school, what we call the Big School, up the top of the bank.

Mr Cresswell was the headmaster and there were 4 classrooms there. Normally you stuck there 'till you left school, but me father was very friendly with Mr Born, who was headmaster at Christopher Whitehead School, and somehow I finished up there. But then we had a free pass on the bus, we went on the bus, well we used to get a bus into town, then walked from own up to Chris's. Because when I was at Claines, I never stuck at school there, I used to go home for dinner.

So, you would walk a mile or so to school in the morning, a mile or so back at lunch time, mile or so back for afternoon school, a mile back and then go and do your jobs on the farm?

Later, when I got older, I had me bike, 'cause there are a couple of cut throughs when you're walking.

I was going to say, which way did you go, did you go over the fields?

Yeah, you could, at the back of the cottages you could get over into the fields, cross the field, and that was Mr Harris' farm, and he had a right of way down the hedge that brought you out on the main road. You'd cross the main road and there's another right of way that brings you out by the Mugg House and that cut the distance down a bit.

Was there a bunch of you walking from Bevere, or did you go on your own?

Well, the McKnights who lived there, they'd left, they must have left about 1948, '49, I think they left. No, it was just me. No problem at all. There wasn't much traffic on Ombersley Road in those days.

CD 2 : Track 13 : 15:12:24

What about church, were you a religious family, did you go to church at all?

No, I can't remember going. I don't know why, because all mother's family, they were all confirmed, like her sisters and all that. Mom just didn't seem to bother, I don't know why.

Can you recall any kind of high days or holidays or anything that got the community together in any way?

Well, the 3 Counties Show. That came up to Fernhill Heath once, when you come through Fernhill Heath and pass a house at 30 mile limit, there's a bad bend at the bottom, and there's a field to your right hand side there. I think the

lane to the police station, well, the land up to there, I believe, that the three, there was a very big agricultural show, when the farmer took us, so I guess it was the 3 Counties, I always remember going to that.

Oh, we went to the 3 Counties show every year. Sometimes it was at Gloucester. I never went to one at Hereford. Went to Gloucester one, about 2 or 3 times.

Did you go as part, was the farm showing any animals or taking part in a competition?

No, no.

It was just a day out?

Just a day out. I was in the Cubs then, a gang of us who were. I remember used to knock around with them, go carol singing.

Where did the Cubs meet, was that at Claines?

Claines church hall, Cornmeadow, round Cornmeadow. It's still there now. Mrs Higgins used to run it, well she was the Big White Chief, I think, and I think she had another lady, Mrs Powell, who used to live opposite, there's a little road opposite the ... She seemed to, she was like second in charge and we used to meet on Wednesday nights, I think, and we'd have paper chases. One would set off, they'd go spare if you did it nowadays. Throwing paper. We used to have to follow him and try to catch him after we'd run all around the fields up towards Claines, the church, round some of the fields there.

I can't ever remember going camping with them. I don't know if they ever did or not, whether there was then, oh there must have been.

But it was physical, they got you doing plenty of outdoor exercise.

They told you how to tie knots and things like that. Signal flags, like morse code. I always remember those.

Did you do anything else, sort of group activities-wise when you were a youngster, did you play any sport or anything like that?

I think I was exhausted. No, I didn't. Oh, we used to play football on the Rec, at Stonecall meadow, by the British Legion. Always playing football around the house or on the green if, seemed to play more cricket on the green.

There wasn't a local cricket team or anything that, officially, played there, it was just fun games?

No, for our game you got together, slung your coat down and that's the wickets.

Was the green used by anyone else, I mean, did travellers pass by and stay there, or anything like that?

No, there were gypsies around. They'd come round every, well seasonal. But I think they stopped in a field more up towards, Scaldag? Lane, Bill's mill, Porters Mill, somewhere round that area. They used to stop there but it's the same people who came, they used to come to school, the same ones. I remember when they knew how to make harmonicas out of bits of wood and the tuning part of it. They used to make them up. I think they used to sell them off, if I remember rightly.

Oh, that's another thing the foreigners at the big house, did, they made slippers with raffia. Oh, they were lovely, they were.

Track 14 : 15:12:54

Sometimes they'd line them with a cotton material, or something. They were quite comfortable. They wore well, you could knock around in them, but they made quite a few of those. I don't know if they actually sold them, but mom and dad used to have, get them.

When, as a, as far back as you can remember, if you were to say, cycle or walk down towards Worcester, where was the city boundary, where did the houses start?

From where they start now, it's as it was when I was born. There was one house there, the lady let us ride our bikes from the cottage up to the bus stop. 'Cause the busses came up to Green Lane, well they do now. Originally they only came as far as Checketts Lane, and we had to walk. Then they extended it to Becketts Road, and then in the end, it used to be every other bus would go all the way up to Green Lane and she let us leave our bikes at her house, like save us having to walk all.. if we walked from Checketts Lane, we rode the last bit.

'Cause a lot of building has gone on in that area over the years, well since the ...

Well, Green Lane's not altered except halfway along, there's a big pylon off to your left, an electric power grid pylon. Originally that was a rugby field before they moved up to Six Ways. And there was some land a bit farther up, going up towards the end of Green, the Ombersley Road end of Green Lane, that was built on. I think an Estate Agent, Watley, or something like that, he must have bought the ground up, and he built houses all over there where the rugby ground was.

Grange Avenue, they built quite a few houses there, but Cornmeadow and Colin Road, they're as when I was a lad. They're exactly the same, more or less. I can't think of anywhere down that road that's been, apart from where it joins Droitwich Road, and there's quite tall flats now. They were just terraced houses when I was a lad.

So those have come down?

'Cause we used to go down to the park down there and play there a lot.

Which park?

Guelevelt. 'Cause towards, for a while, they used to run a steam engine. It's moved to Diglis now. They had a tractor and steam engine running for a while, but that was only a single, sort of, track.

What, going round Guelevelt park?

No, it just, where the tennis courts are, you got a flat bit and then it rises up quite steep, and it went along the bottom of that rise. Marvellous engines, there.

So you used to go down and watch them and go for a ride?

I think it was about the last Sunday of the month.

What sort of date are we talking?

That must have been 1950, I should think.

Another thing we used to do, was Saturday nights, we used to have Burnham people come down. They'd have bungalows along the river. They used to be friends of mum and dads, and we used to go down to Pitchcroft and the chap at the one end of Waterworks and Pitchcroft, he used to hire boats out, 2 shillings, we used to pay 2 shillings, I think. And we'd have a canoe, and we'd canoe back up to Bevere, have a drink at the pub, lemonade, and then we used to paddle back down and then usually he'd gone by then, we used to just tie the canoes up at this place and go.

Track 15 : 15:13:15

That cost about 10p, new money, 2 bob in the old money.

Good value for an evening's entertainment.

Well, it was, because it took us about $\frac{3}{4}$ hour walking down to Pitchcroft, it'd take about $\frac{3}{4}$ hour coming back up and down again and $\frac{3}{4}$ hour back up, back to get home. Really, it was a cheap night's entertainment.

Were there lots of pleasure boats of different types on the river?

Yes, oh, yes. The pleasure boats, the boats as they used, pleasure boats, now, used to bring petrol from Bristol up to Stourport. Well, Pride of the Midlands, I think that was called, there one was called the Severn Traveller and Pride of the Midlands, but they were the original boats, but the names have changed a bit.

And they were big boats, weren't they?

Well, yes, we had a tug as well that used to bring non-motorised tankers up. This was during, during the war and they were brought up and converted for pleasure. But there were two others, beautiful they were, Duchess Doreen and The Bell, they had glass saloons on them.

So they were pleasure boats?

They were proper pleasure boats.

And they were operating during, well, not during the war, after the war?

Well, weekends, well, summer, weekends mainly. I don't think they ran much during the week, no, because they tied up. They used to come up quite fast, really. When you're swimming, there's quite a draw on the tankers, quite a draw, but the pleasure boats, they'd make a bigger wave that you could swim through.

Sounds absolutely lethal, you lot all swimming around.

Yes, were there weren't that many people. I never went swimming down The Slip, I'd always be swimming off our side, farther up the river. There were never too many of us, there was always, we always made sure there was two of us who went. That seemed to be the rule, I think, during those days.

Do you recall any accidents, accidents to do with the water?

Well, we used to get people drowned regular up on the weir. I know me father used to say, 'cause they used to bring the bodies over to the farm and they had a tin hut there and they used to put them there until the ambulance or undertaker come take them away. If the door was shut, I didn't go in, 'cause I never knew what was in there.

And they would have people who'd been on the river and got stuck on the weir?

Quite a few, from what me dad said. 'Cause he said there two of them, the bloke was a lifesaver, he said he didn't do any good. He drowned as well. 'Cause there's very little force of water coming over on the weir, the only way you've got a big force is down the salmon run side, that was our side of the river, and that's where you had to keep away from. And if you went down the bottom, when it came over the top of the weir and it run down to the bottom of the concrete, it was, there was rocks there and you could easily slip over with the force of water. That the only dangerous place to be.

Was there anybody whose job it was to look after the weir and look out for accidents?

Well, presumably the lock keeper would keep his eye on the weir. But we had the dredger up every year and they would dig all the top end of the island. They were always having to dredge that, because being sandy, a lot of it fell in. That island's a lot shorter now then it was years ago. When, it would go another 100 yards farther up than what it is now.

You're joking! So how big was it when you used to take the cattle, when the cattle used to go over there?

Track 16 : 15:13:36

I wouldn't like to say, but I know every year, after we'd had the floods, there'd be a bit more broke off and, 'cause, 'cause all the Sand Martin's and that used to nest in there. 'Cause they'd leave all holes there and once the water got in that, it'd break it off and... I should think there was about a third of the island, no, a quarter of the island smaller than what it was years ago. It was, gradually broke away.

They used to, they used to dredge it and what they dredged up used to go in these boats and they'd float it round the other side the island, and they'd drop it in that channel and I suppose, it's out the way then. They'd got a deep channel on the one side, on the other side the river, but it would fill this one up on our side the river. But it, there was a fair current at times, you had to watch it.

Did you ever discover anything ancient or interesting on the island, or after a flood?

No.

Did anyone talk about the history of the area? You know how rumours go around about this was the crossing.

What I read in the books years ago when the black death was around, all the Worcester people came up and used our island to, like quarantine, sort of, plus, I

think when the Battle of Worcester and all that, I think they went up there as well, then.

It was only what you read, it wasn't kind of handed down stories from people who'd lived around there?

No.

Did anyone else use the island, apart from the farmer?

No. 'Cause there was a house, not on the island, but at the other side, and that seems to have disappeared now. I should imagine they got that fed up of getting flooded, they must have knocked it down. I don't know where that one went to.

What about the lock keeper, did you have anything to do with him, did you know him?

Well, yes, 'cause they used to come across, across the river through the farm and up to the, catch a bus at the top of Reed Lane. I presume that's a shorter way than having to, well, I think we had more frequent busses than what they had the other side the river.

So, it wasn't somebody who lived there, a lock keeper, who came, every day, to do his job?

No, they lived there.

They did live there?

There's lock keeper cottages.

More than one lock keeper, or just one?

Oh, yeah, I think, there's usually two, I think. We always used to see them, well when they come through the farm.

Did you know them by name or spend any time with them?

Well, I always remember we called the one Bill, but I can't remember who the other one was. The one was quite talkative, he would always stop and chat, but the other was a bit miserable.

Do you remember any incidents with boats up at the weir or at the lock?

Boats used to get stuck up the far end of the island, and if I was around they'd give me 10 bob to get the tractor and tow them off, they'd likely where the island

fell away. It must have got a bit shallow there, because they didn't dredge all the way around, it was just the channel and it'd tend to be a bit shallow up the Kidderminster end of it and they'd get stuck on there. I used to get the tractor from the farm and a rope and just, tow them off so they could, that's the only time we had problems.

So, we've talked about, well, into the '50's. How long did you stay in the cottage with your parents?

Track 17 : 15:13:56

I finished school 1953, and I had to do me national service, 1956, but I signed on and went full time, yeah, 1956 really when I left there.

So '53 to '56, you worked on the farm?

No, I worked on British Rail on the Telegraph department.

OK, so what made you make that decision to go for a completely different job?

Me dad knew somebody there and they said, ooh there's a job going there. I'd left school, like, and ...

You weren't tempted, though, to work on the farm or ...

No, me dad didn't want me to. It's hard work. 'Cause, like, we used to thresh our own wheat, one time. And the bags, they were 200 weight bags. You know, we used to throw them around. Thinking back on it, it's a wonder it didn't cripple us.

Did you have a threshing machine?

He did have one, I think he used to come around. Usually he went to the field where to save carting around, he'd go to the field where they were working, cutting, and do it, yeah, that's right, they used to come to, field to field. 'Cause I remember after the war, one thing I always remember. There were quite a few trees in the, what we used to call the park, and it must have been after the end of war, and to get these trees up, they blew them up.

They had a chap there, I didn't see what he did, well, I wouldn't have known what he was doing. He must have put a charge under the tree, and he'd be, well, a few yards back, you know, presumably a safe distance, that he thought, and it just, I'd see him push this thing and bang, the tree shot up in the air. You know, not that far but it'd be out the ground, 'cause the roots were flipping tremendous and if you're ploughing and those roots, you flipping knew it, it broke the end of your shear off, your plough shear. So, obviously they wanted to get rid of them.

So, can you remember how many trees went that way?

Must have been about 10, 12, something like that.

These would have been big, old, oak trees or whatever, in the park?

Yeah, be all oak trees.

They blew them up!

I presume he sold the wood off. I think he had, I remember seeing a timber lorry there, once. That's another thing I never found out, when I was, where we had the pigs, before we put the pigs in there, we used to go in there, boxes of lard, Ministry of food, and I presume round the country there were stores of lard, you know, for emergencies. I never saw anybody, I never saw it go, but it stopped, it must have stopped about 1950. And that's what, I presume that's what happened. Had these supplies, emergency, for, if anything happened. Well, if the ships couldn't get in.

So, during the war, do you, apart from the convoys, going up and meeting the convoys, do you remember any other particular incidents or happenings?

Plane crash at Perdiswell. I think it was a film star who was flying in it.

Clark Gable, wasn't it?

Yeah, I think, well it was in the paper and me mom took me round there to see it. It come, that's right, I think it had been very wet that year, and it shot across the grass, straight over the road and it use to be a, they dug sand out and there was like a bank there, and it hit this bank. I remember the one wing being stuck up, whether it actually was, I don't know.

And me mom once took me down town to see something, something at the bottom of Broad Street, but I can't think what it was, whether it was a plane or a tank, although I had chicken pox the next day, anyway.

Did you used to hear the planes coming over?

Yeah, we used to see search lights, and all that.

Track 18 : 15:14:16

Oh, we used to get silver foil, I think they dropped that, it was a deflector for radar, or something like that. But German's really didn't have that much radar in their planes, I often wonder why they, 'cause we had radar, all right, but, but that's what I heard.

So the silver foil would just come done and you'd find it just littering the ground?

Find it next day on the fields, yeah. Yeah, strips of it, about a foot long.

I've heard of that before. Did, presumably a lot of the planes would have used the Severn as a navigational aid!

Yeah, they would, I think they did.

So did you hear them droning?

Yeah, could hear them and see the searchlights, but, apart from the MECCO, I don't think any bombs were dropped.

Did you have any evacuees around you?

No, I can't remember any.

Or land girls?

Yeah, we had a land girl working on the farm, Joan, but what happened to her or where she lived, she probably lived in the farm house. But I know she used to come to our house for her dinner, for her main meal, I think.

Presumably, your father was reserved occupation, and didn't go off to war?

Yeah, he was in the Royal Army Veterinary Core and I think I saw, on his discharge papers, services no longer required. So he came back and worked on the farm. No, I can't remember anything else about that.

Well, you've done brilliantly so far.

Track 19 : 15:14:25

I apologise for anybody who's eating at the moment, but when we used to go back to school, Friday, dinner time, there was a horse and cart with a big tank on it, going round emptying all the toilets, and you could smell that for miles. We used to run like hell then to get, make sure we were back at school before he came.

And that was every Friday the cart would have gone out?

Every Friday, for what I remember.

What a job, what a way to earn a living.

I was in Singapore for a bit and they have a lot there, Night Soil Operatives, they call them, a very posh name.

Did you have any other horse and carts coming round in your youngest ...

Brad Bowman, he'd come round. Me dad used to catch, Sundays we used to go out, and there's some land drying rabbits would get in those and chimney sweeping and we'd go and push them out, and I had to hold a bag at the end when they came out. We could get a penny each for rabbit skins, then.

I was going to ask you, you mentioned the Sand Martin's, you must have seen and come in very close contact with an awful lot of wild life, much more than you probably see today. Can you remember any particular memories?

Well, on Bevere Green, as you walk down towards the Kidderminster end of Bevere Green, over on your left, there's a big long lake there and there's some giant size fish in there when we were children. I think they're carp. I never caught one, but there are loads of snakes in there. I didn't like those.

Grass snakes, presumably?

Yes, I think they were grass snakes. We didn't stop to look too long. But there a few animals in there, you'd get a few odd wild cats, cats they'd gone wild, as well.

Do you ever remember any otter or mink round the river?

No, I doubt whether we had mink, because that's in later years that they let those out.

Otter?

You couldn't be quite in that place, there's too many, the paths were strewn with reeds and no matter how careful you walked, you made a lot of noise. I know up the one end it was like a marsh, as well, we used to play in that. When I think of it.

And I used to raid, that's one thing. During the war me mother used to have cocoa, and we used to mix sugar with it and use it as a dip, wet your finger, oh, it's terrible. I've tried it since and I don't enjoy it.

You mention the fish in this lake, presumably fishermen used to come to the riverside, as well, was it a fishing area?

Oh, we had the Burnham anglers, they had all the water on the river. This was, years ago in the big house, that was where they, like the monastery's they had

places where they could keep fish. And there's another lake, we didn't go in there, that was, I think that was 'no go' for us, I don't know quite why.-

Was that on private land, then?

Yeah, that was Curtler side.

So you reckon the lakes were put in, man made lakes put in to stock fish?

Yeah, I think they were man made.

So who fished the one on the green?

Nobody fished it, no.

But you reckon it was originally man made?

Yeah, for the houses. We used to fish now and again, but there there were a few Perch in there, and Roach. We caught those, but we couldn't catch these big ones, too sly. But you'd see them drifting along in the sunlight.

When you go up there now, Jim, revisit your childhood haunts, what's still there, is your cottage still there?

Track 20 : 15:14:43

Yeah, the cottage is still there. Hang on, no they used all the cottage area to build this bungalow. The only bit of the cottage is left, is the middle section is a front wall of the old cottage, that was there.

So, when would that have been, when did your cottage come down?

I suppose latter end of the '60's.

Did your parents live there up until shortly before that?

Yeah, they did, I think, and then they had a Council place up Fernhill Heath.

So, that must make you sad, actually, seeing there's not a lot left of your home, apart from a bit of a wall?

It is in a way. It's like the garden, me dad used to grow lovely dahlias, and it was a good garden for growing dahlias on, that was. Another reason we got friendly with the Burnham people, he used to come down here. Over the road is another farm, belongs to Williams, Eric Williams, two brothers, Eric and Don Williams.

They had a motorbike shop in Pierpoint Street, they turned out an old garage in later years.

But there was a lady worked there, Fanny, she was sort of maid of all works, she looked after the cows, the pigs, the ferrets, and the bees. The Burnham people used to come down, they used to get 7 pound tins of honey to take back. Oh, they worshipped that, they did. They'd go home staggering with these, they're quite heavy. Like big pots of paint. It was nice honey, and she used to make us butter, sometimes.

At the very beginning you said that the tenant in the end cottage worked at the other farm, was that the Williams farm?

That, the farm was just up from where Gwilliam, as is fruit and veg building.

So, there was just the two farms in, what you would call, in Bevere?

Yeah. There's one or two others, like there's Sansome's farm is the, yeah, 'cause there's three or four brothers.

Was he the milkman, Sansome?

Yes, Peter Sansome.

And where was their farm? That was ...

That was on the corner by the big roundabout, at the end of the link road. The house is still there. I don't know what's behind it, whether, it's a wonder they haven't used it for building. It's up 'til just recently, they were doing the milk round, I think, and they comprise most of Claines church choir, a lot of the time, they're quite all good singers.

I'll have to track them down. Thanks ever so much, Jim, your memories have been fantastic.

That alright.

Transcribed by : Sharon Kettleby – December 2009