

## An Oral History for Northwick Manor Community Project – NM06

**Name:** Reg Bird

**Date of Birth:**

**Place of Birth:** Yellingtree, Dreyton, Belbroughton

**Date of Interview:** 24th September 2008

**Interviewed by:** Julia Letts

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**CD 1 : Track 2 : 15:48:17**

*Reg, can I get you to start by giving me your date of birth and your name and where you were born?*

Well, my name is Reginald Lesley Arthur Bird. I was born at Yellingtree, a little tiny hamlet new Dreyton, Belbroughton. And I was born on the \*\* 1932, which is Lord Baden Powell's birthday, which I, quite honestly have always tried to be a good scout.

*Excellent. Can I start our interview when you first came to the farm, here. Can you tell me how that came about?*

Well, I worked for a man in Broadwas-On-Teme, well I moved from Belbroughton with him, down to Broadwas-on-Teme where he'd bought a farm and he'd retired from the edge tool industry in the Black country and he had a little farm in Belbroughton. And because I was a single chap then, he asked me if I would move down with him. And I was working for the neighbouring farmer at that time in Belbroughton on the Jersey herd, with a Jersey herd. The two farms joined and he swapped his two men for me and I went down with him to Broadwas-on-Teme. And that was in 1954. Well '53 really, towards the end of '53. I went to work for him and we moved down to Broadwas at the end, well during the autumn of '53.

And I worked for him for 9 ½ years, and then, he wasn't a farmer, and he did silly things like doing his wife's garden and getting me to clean the pool out for her gold fish, and things. So he didn't make much of, despite my efforts, he didn't make a successful farmer and he sold it to Mr Jimson, Joseph Jimson, who used to be the Chairman of the Worcester Porcelain and owns the biggest part of, this side of Ankerdine hill, from here.

And I didn't like the Yorkshire manager, I didn't like his methods, and I didn't like him as a person, so I looked for another job and I went to work at Spring Grove at Bewdley, which is where the Safari Park is now, for Major Webb and I'd only been there 18 months when my second son was born. When I took Myrtle into Lucy Baldwins, the maternity hospital in Stourport, we, I had to come over and fetch my wife's mother, and look after our other little boy. And at the end of the week when the farm bailiff paid me my wages, he said the old man stopped you 7s 6p for Thursday, is that alright. And I said, I wasn't at work.

But I'd had my suspicions that my wages weren't what they ought to have been for some time, but there was nothing that I could really pin it down. And I went to see the main agent who lived on the big estate at Kingford, that the Webb's owned, and found out from his ledgers that he'd been even booking overtime for me which he didn't even pay me. And I was paying tax and graduated pension on it.

*So you weren't pleased about that!*

And also he hadn't stopped me this 7s 6p. Said the old man would never do that, he said. And so I said, well, that's what he told me, and I said, I'm leaving. And my brother-in-law at that time, knew that they wanted someone here to look after this place, and look after the dairy herd, you know, so I moved here on the 6<sup>th</sup> April 1963, and I remember it being the 6<sup>th</sup> April, because it was my mother's wedding day, well, wedding anniversary.

### **Track 3 : 15:48:41**

And I've been here ever since.

*Tell me what it was like when you first came here? It's old Northwick Farm, that's the name of the farm, isn't it?*

Yes.

*Tell me what it was like when you first came here?*

Well it was the filthiest house I've ever been in, I think, because the previous occupant, he'd had trouble with, and, oh it was dirty. And my wife just wouldn't bring a 6 week old baby in. And she said, I can't bring my baby into that, she said, we shall have to clean it up. We creosoted all the floors upstairs, we ripped up dirty old carpets and threw all sorts of things out. And with the help of my brother-in-law and ourselves we redecorated, painted and we got the place clean and so the children then came and lived with us after the smell of creosote had gone off. But it was so full of woodworm, the rooms upstairs, you know, the floors upstairs.

*But that sounds like it was quite a stressful period for you, because not only were you trying to get the house up to shape, but you must have been starting a new job and all the stresses that brings.*

Yes, I was and an irate wife as well because he'd asked us if we would not go in to look at the house because he was having problems with the, his workman that he'd sacked, you see.

*And who was the he, who was your landlord?*

It was Fred Hunt, his name was and he only had one leg, so he couldn't physically farm himself.

*Where was he living, was he local?*

He was living in Lock Lane and he married the lady who used to keep the New Inn, and she had the shop built which is the Co-Op shop now, you know, almost opposite New Inn. Apparently this liaison was going on before her husband left.

*But he owned the farm, but couldn't farm it?*

Well, he was a tenant. Everyone thought that Hunt's owned the farm because his father had farmed here before him, but he was an actual tenant and he also, he rented the farm at, down Lock Lane and he had the one on this end of the small estate of farms and one on the other end.

*So, who actually owned this one?*

It was owned, then, by Miss Helen Curtler, one of the Curtler family, and there used to a vicar at St Stephens, who was a Curtler.

*And did they live at Bevere?*

Yes, lived at Bevere Manor. And they say that he used to ride his pony and trap from Bevere Manor down to St Stephens Church, over nearly all his own land, at that time. But the chap that set the farm was a cousin to Miss Helen Curtler, Captain Curtler, who was in partnership with Hallmarks of Worcester. It used to be Curtler Hallmarks.

*Tell me about the farm itself, what sort of a farm was it at the time that you moved here?*

Well, there were 24 cows here, 23 cows here, and a bull, Hereford bull, and mainly Friesian type cows, nondescript sort of cows, you know. I was responsible for the herd and for most of the things going on round to do with the herd, but the other chap, Harry Sansome, one of the Sansome family from Oak Tree Farm,

which was also on the estate, his father used to have and now his older brother's got it, he was running the other farm up at in Lock Lane by Warfords School.

*So, did he do some work down here as well, Harry Sansome?*

Yes. He did a lot of the tractor work, and things. I did some of the tractor work, cause it didn't fill my time with the herd.

#### **Track 4 : 15:49:15**

*So what was the extent of the land, and where was it in relation to the landmarks that people would know around here?*

Well, the farm is actually in the corner of all, the farmhouse and buildings is in the corner, the top corner, and it sweeps down to the river down the little lane here that is not made up at the bottom, as your know, goes down to what the locals call, The Slip, and the Council call it ....

*What do they call it?*

What do they call it, the Worcester, oh gracious, Lido. That's their posh name for it, but all the locals know it as The Slip. And then it runs up two large fields on the side of the river and there's a footbridge over a little brook that forms almost part of the boundary as it comes off the housing estate. There's a footbridge there that joins our last field and then it runs back up to the, virtually to the little, used to a turkey farm here, which is Lucerne Close now. It was built on just as we got here, they'd got planning permission for it and they built all those houses since we've been here. They've built all those houses opposite since we've been here, as well.

*So when you first came here in 1963, coming down Old Northwick Lane, what would there have actually been?*

Well, all the properties, except for these bungalows, next to me there's a bungalow, and then there are, there's a pair of semis and a single bungalow either side of Lucerne Close, and that was the extent of the land that swept behind mine at the back of Northwick Road, the houses that lined Northwick Road, and it was just a small poultry and pig farm.

*And on the other side ...?*

Well it was a private house where the old Northwick Nursing Home is, and Northwick House was owned by Spike, immigrated to Australia with his wife, because his family were over there. This is my trouble, I forget these wretched names.

*I think that you're remembering very well, so far.*

And, it'll come to me. And Mittens, the butchers lived in, what is now, the Nursing Home and shortly after we got here, they put in for planning permission on the land opposite that belonged to the Northwick House and part of Mittens land which went back to the playing field on The Lodge and they built Constance Road completely round, you see, in a horseshoe shape and had little roads off it, sort of thing.

*So, you have seen quite a lot of development?*

Oh, tremendous amount, tremendous amount. You see that was market garden land farther up Northwick Road opposite where we've got the donkeys. The, that was owned by the Brewer brothers and that was all market garden land, and then so was where Northwick Manor school is and the houses at the back of there. That was all Brewers land that was built on.

*So there was a lot of market gardening going on this end of the town.*

Oh, yes. Yes, a lot of market gardening and the Brewers also rented the land down at the bottom of the land here on the opposite side, on the left hand side, which is now the riding school. They kept cattle down there, but they just ran them for the summer and then sold them off in the autumn before the floods. How they'd have got off this year, I don't know.

*So, I mean, you must know every inch of your land, having worked it for all those years.*

### **Track 5 : 15:49:45**

*Can you tell me about any interesting landmarks, or parts of the fields that you have specific names for, anything like that?*

Well, there's the Marsh field down, right down to the river which is a deep depression from the river bank, and that was once a brickyard and we've, we have ploughed and reseeded a lot of the land down there, because the turf was absolutely worn out, it wasn't productive when I came. We ploughed up a lot of little burnt bricks, you know, old fashioned bricks that had got scorched in the making of them, obviously. Apparently there were some buildings on the river side, as well, to do with these brickworks, so I've been told.

*But you've never seen any evidence?*

No. The only evidence I've seen are the little burnt bricks that we used to plough up, you know, down in the bottom meadows, in the marsh field. That was made an SSSI, many years ago, but they have never really done anything with it.

*It was made an SSSI because of its importance as a habitat?*

Flora and fauna, yes.

*And did you see a lot of flora and fauna?*

Oh, the birds we used to get down here were tremendous. Still do, at times, but not as many as we used to. The Birmingham University Bird Club used to come down and net the birds down on that marsh, and ring them. They once brought me, they used to bring me the account of what they'd been doing for the year, and send me that through the post. A Meadow Pipit, from this marsh that they'd netted, the ring off its leg was found in a fox's contents, a dead fox's contents, in Ayrshire. And I thought that was fantastic, all those miles, you know, that this Meadow Pipit had travelled.

*It must have been wonderful, down there, of an early morning, with the birds?*

Oh, tremendous and they netted 97 species from here up to the weir at Bevere.

*So, that was the marsh field. If you had cattle in there didn't they ever get into trouble in the bog?*

Well, they're sensible, normally, you know. We've had the odd cow fall from the bank in the river, but we didn't graze it from the end of October until the beginning of May, that was, they asked me not to do that with the SSSI people. I think its English Nature, they call it. But it's been called all sorts of things since, before that. They keep changing the name, I don't know. They have to change everything, these days, nothings like it was.

*It never stays the same for more than a year, does it?*

No.

*So, tell me about the other fields. You called that the Marsh field, what about the others?*

Yes. And then there was the 13 acre next to it, and that was higher land than the marsh field and it used to be almost the last to flood, when it flooded. That was a very, I got that into a very productive field. We used to make the hay in the summer, on it, you know. Set it apart for hay making because it produced most of our winter feed for the cattle.

But, when I came here, I did market gardening as well as started a dairy herd. I bought very good quality heifers in Gloucester market. I also bought some, at reduction sales, at pedigree sales, I bought some pedigree cattle. And then

through the society, I graded up any of my cattle that were, on confirmation, they had to be inspected, and they had to produce milk and fat of a certain standard before they were accepted.

### **Track 6 : 15:50:18**

Every one of my heifers that I bought, was graded up through the herd book, A, B, C and D register, and once a calf is born from a DSR cow, and that goes into the full herd book. And so, I've enjoyed the breeding side of the dairy herd and did, well, I won a prize or two, you know.

*Oh, here's a lovely picture, picture of the silverware.*

Yes, with my two bulls.

*Wonderful. So presumably, you were milking, morning and evening, yourself?*

Yes.

*With milking machines, did you have milking machines?*

Yes, we had a milking machine and at the time all these little pens had different numbers in, like, and we were carrying the machines from pen to pen and we had the airline went right through the buildings, you see. The milk pump was up in a little loft where the bathroom is now, and where the hall is where you came in, was where our dairy was, you know.

*And did the milk lorry come every morning?*

Every morning, churns initially, and Tuncils? which is a local hauler from Worcester, had a contract with the Milk Marketing Board, and they collected our milk for many, many years. We had a stand in the yard, in the drive, which we had to take churns across and lift them onto the stand, so the lorry could back in off the road and just roll them across onto his lorry.

*But it wasn't all plain sailing, the milk prices during those years here.*

No, it wasn't too bad, initially. It was really in the '60's that milk prices weren't compatible with what shops, I'm afraid supermarkets have done a lot of damage to the farming, in general, really. That's a great pity.

But eventually we went, bulk milk. I put a tank in and we put in a milking parlour, second-hand one that we went to Broadway and bought it for £40. It was a bit dilapidated, but I made all new feed troughs and had some, it had been cut off at the concrete level and I got a chap to weld on feet on the bottom that we could sink into the concrete when we put it in. Very, it was very efficient compared with

carrying the buckets from shed to shed, you know, because the cows came to me in there and it was a six abreast parlour. We had three come in and three go out, you know. Well, actually, in actual fact if it, it was a low yielder and sometimes one went out and one came in and you kept getting the next three washed and ready for milking, while the other three were milking.

*So, how long would milking take, of a morning?*

Well, usually about an hour, not much more. But the washing down, of course, and the cleansing of the pipelines and things, that all took time. That went on, well, the cleansing of the pipeline, that went on while you were washing down, you see. You just put your cleanser through and then you rinse and you'd scrubbed out, by then, you see.

*We'll come back to the farming in a minute, but I want you to tell me, if you can, anything you know about the history of the house and this little area where it is?*

Well, I was told when I moved here, that it was built in 19..., in 1864, so it was just about 100 years old when we came. We've been here, well I've been here, 45 years now.

#### **Track 7 : 15:50:35**

*Was it the farm to one of the big houses round here, of course, when it was built?*

Well, it belonged to the Curtler family, the whole estate and there were 5 small farms on it that comprised the estate. There was old Northwick Farm here, which is actually in the City of Worcester and Bevere Farm, Oak Tree Farm by the roundabout and the one this side of Oak Tree Farm by the, what is now the farm shop, was Fir Tree Farm. And then there was Lock Farm, down Lock Lane.

*So, those were the five small farms on the big Curtler estate?*

On the big Curtler estate that was left after they sold a lot off for building over the years, obviously.

*So, the big houses in Northwick, didn't have their own farms, as such?*

Not after, no, not at the time that I came. Northwick Manor, which you know, when they built part of the Northwick Road, Roger Tuppin, who, you know well, I think in their garden they found big blocks of stone from Northwick Manor.

*They reckon their house was built on the site of stable yard, the barn yard.*

Well, yes, I think perhaps it was, because it also went down to the Geneva Close, where the nursery was, and when they excavated there to do the building, they had great stones from the old Northwick Manor.

*But as far as you know, this farm was never connected to old Northwick Manor?*

Not as far as I know, but it might have been, originally, you see.

*Have you ever found anything in the house, grounds, barnyard, of interest or historical value?*

No, not at all, really, except these old bricks from the old brick yard, which was many years ago, apparently the brick yard was down there. And that's why the depression is there, of course. And there's also a raised track that comes from the edge of the depression, which is the marsh, across to the little lane.

*And that would have been the route the brickworks would have used?*

The horses and carts went, yes.

*So, back in the early '60's, was The Slip used a lot by the locals?*

Oh, tremendously. Black country people, particularly. It was their little Blackpool, really. Weekends were very, very busy down there and people used to, not only local people, used to get down there, so did Black country people used to come down. Because at the time that I came, this fishing on the, our part of the Severn, was rented out to the Birmingham Anglers and so, of course, the chaps knew where they could bring the families and deposit them and have a day's fishing, suppose.

*Did it look very different than it looks today?*

Not very different. Unfortunately vandals haven't helped, because they did plant a lot of trees and put the netting round to guard them, tree guards on. And I've had tree guards go through my mowing machine, in mowing grass, which, right, oh, 400, 500 yards away from where the trees were planted. Vandals, we've, well we've had a lot of problems with vandals.

*Does that go right back to the sixties, or would you say that's a modern thing?*

It's been a bit more modern than that, probably in the late '70's and in the '80's it started to. They pulled up new fencing posts and had a camp fire down there, you know, somebody would pitch a tent and burnt my fencing posts and of course, I was always going down there to repair fences.

**Track 8 : 15:50:57**

And then, at that time, people could drive right on to the river bank, but they've stopped that now and put up a little car park. One lad, he drove through my fence, round the big oak tree, and back out and he drove out through a different part of the fence and so he wrecked my fences in two places.

*Goodness. So, where people used to be allowed down onto the bank, was there more of a beach than there is now?*

There was, like a little beach there, but the better beach was in the end field and there was quite a little beach, there, that was quite pleasant, really. The bank had obviously gone away at some time, but then trees had grown half way down it, and this little beach, very sandy, of course, I mean the soil is very, very light here.

*But that doesn't exist anymore, that beach?*

Yes, it's, at low water, it is, yes.

*But it's eroded over the years?*

Over the years, it's eroded. But the River Board, at that time, its Environment Agency now, but it was the Severn River Board, they used to take the big trees off the side of the banks, because they said the swaying of the trees was moving the roots and loosening the banks, and so they try and keep, they did, well, they still do, to a certain extent, anything right on the banks of the river, they try and keep it sort of wispy, sort of ...

*So they've taken out the big trees?*

Yes, so that they tend to have a more clumpy sort of root, if they keep cutting them off.

*Right, I see what you mean. Just to try and stabilise the banks.*

Fresh come up and it stabilises the banks a bit.

*What about vessels on the river, you must have seen a bit of a change in that over the years?*

Yes, well, of course, when I first came here, all the barges were going up to Stourport from the docks and the petrol barges used to come up and also timber barges, which were tremendous really, because the timber was stacked higher than the barge and then built out, so it could go over the walls of the locks. And, they were quite wide loads of timber. Those used to amaze me, they looked almost top heavy, you know.

*And would they come up really quite regularly?*

Oh, yes, every day we'd see petrol barges or timber barges going up to Stourport, and the little tugs pulling them up. And also, we used to see dredges, which we never see now.

*I was about to say, was the river better looked after when it was such a main highway?*

Well, it had to be, really, didn't it, for these bigger sort of barges and things, and tugs.

*So, there was so much more activity on the river, and with a lot more people bathing, and things down there, did you witness any accidents over the years?*

There have been accidents. In fact, the girl, the lady that lives next door now, she lost a cousin down there that was drowned down there, many, many years ago before they came to Worcester. Because, her grandfather used to be the Station Master up at Shrub Hill and so they got family connection from Worcester, you see. And this cousin was drowned down in The Slip. There's parts of the River Severn, that are quite treacherous, really.

*Absolutely, and I'm just imagining you down there on your tractor or mower or whatever, you must have been around when people got into trouble or been asked to help out on occasions?*

Yes, some of the lads used to cling to the pleasure boats, you know.

### **Track 9 : 15:51:13**

SSS Bell used to come up and the lads used to swim out and hang onto the sides and I used to think, my word, those lads are lucky, really. And they used to put a rope on big tree on the side and swing out over them on the river, you know, and then drop off when the boat had gone and swim again.

Yes, some of the very good swimmers, used to come up there and swim every morning. There was one particular girl, every morning, in the summer, she used to go up to a secluded little place up off the river. And, I didn't know why she was going there at all, until one day, I was down there earlier and she was swimming in the river. I can remember her well because she had a big black pigtail. She had lovely black hair, with a big thick pigtail. I thought blimey that's the girl that goes down the back.

*And she swam every day, gosh.*

Yes.

*She must have been fit.*

Yes.

*Going back to the farm yard and around here, am I right in thinking there are some paraphernalia left over from the Second World War?*

Well, they say that apparently in the farm yard, was one of these bunkers, you know, but I've never found signs of it. And apparently farther up in the barn, in the farm they, someone said that there've been bunkers, but I've never found any signs of it.

*There's no hidden underground room somewhere, as far as you know?*

No, no, I've never come across anything, except I was told there's a well right on our boundary between, what is now the farm house, the old farm house, and our fence now between the two. I was told there was a well there, but it was all concreted over, like, you know.

#### **Track 10 : 15:45:58**

*Reg, we've just had a little break and I wanted to come back to talking about the river again, and the flooding, because that must have affected the farm over the years?*

Oh, yes. When we first took the tenancy, it was in 1964, September 1964, and 1965 and 1966 were both two very wet years. To be able to get, we hadn't got much money, I borrowed £3000 just to start off with and we'd only got about £800 of our own, like. We grew market garden crops to put that cash that we got from that into getting the cattle numbers larger, you know. And we grew tremendous crops of string beans, or runner beans and we did very well. In fact, we picked 11 ½ tons of beans and I didn't take everyone up to market, because we sold quite a few at the door, you know, because word got out that they were very good beans.

*Where did you take them to, Birmingham?*

Birmingham market. So I'd get up at five past four, and don't ask me why it was five past four, but five past four I used to get up and make myself a mug of tea and drive to Birmingham with this van full of beans. And we also grew lettuce and cauliflower and we used to pack them nicely in cardboard boxes, 14 lbs in a box. And we did very well out of those which enabled us to progress, you know. But, unfortunately we couldn't make any very good hay, and ...

*What, because it was so wet?*

... because it was so wet. And we had to rake the hay off the fields and burn some of it, you know, because it just went black and it wasn't fit for baling and getting dry even. But we struggled through and I've had a flood in every season of the year. We've had winter floods, obviously. We've had that summer floods, not the last two that we've had, before that we'd had floods and I've lost a hay crop and I've lost a barley crop down in the marsh, next to the marsh field. It was just ready for combining and the contractors, they always leave the little farmers to last because they go into the big acreages where they really can earn some money, you know.

And, so we were always left to last, and because they didn't get to me before we had a flood and I lost a crop of barley. Not only the crop of barley, but also the straw because ...

*That must be pretty devastating?*

... oh, it knocks you back. We've had our problems. I've also lost mangles, we used to grow mangles for the cattle and we've, I've pulled them and rucked them up ready for carting, and we've had a flood and some of those have gone down the river, as well. So, yes, the flooding has affected me in every season, at some time or other. And yet, some years, we went through the winter, never had a flood.

*Can you tell when it's coming? You must be very in tune with knowing when it's come over?*

Well, yes, we, the river, now, in this last flood, I have never seen it come up so quickly. But we had a complete day of rain which was heavy rain, for the whole day and there was all the local water rushing in, as well as that what was coming round from Wales as well, you know. And I have never seen the river come up as quickly as that. But we used to be able to judge when to keep the cattle up from the bottom meadows.

### **Track 11 : 15:46:24**

And that made problems for me, because I hadn't got much top land, you see, if we had a flood when they should be grazing.

*So, what would you do with them?*

Well, they had to come on to the top land and then we'd have to augment their feed if we got short of feed. They'd have to have some of their winter feed that was earmarked for the winter. But I used to rent some, well I didn't rent the ground, my old uncle would let me use his orchard at Dodford, and I'd go and make hay over there. And my old boss kept a field in front of his house, when he

sold the farm, he kept the field in front of the house so no-one would ever build in front of him, and he used to let me go and cut the hay off that crop from Broadwas.

I used to come through the middle of Worcester. And I can remember coming through on carnival day and we got held up coming into Worcester and one of the policemen on duty, he shouted to me, you're just too late, it's all finished, because I was coming through with a tractor and a loader on the front and a big load of hay behind. So, you remember things like that. Although it's all work, you know.

*So, would you say that, you said it came up the quickest, but did it come up the furthest, last year?*

The one last year, yes, was the highest I've ever seen it. And according to the photograph in the paper, it wasn't far off the '47 flood, which was the highest as far as I know.

*As well as wet winters, did you have any particularly cold and snowy ones?*

Well, we, haven't had any desperately snowy ones. We don't seem to get a lot of snow here, do we? And I think we're very fortunate in a way. We've had a few snowy ones and there's some photographs where they were building those houses and I've got my kids and a friend, lived just 3 doors away, his children were the same as my two, roughly, and we've got them on the sledge down there, giving them rides down the lane, you know. But that was quite snowy and once or twice I've gone in the Close and scraped, with my bucket on the front of the tractor, and just up some of the neighbours, sort of scrape ...

*Make-shift snow plough.*

Yes, that's right.

*But it never freezes down on the river side, it's never iced over down there?*

No, it's never iced over. The Severn used to ice over, apparently, years gone by and so they must have had some very severe winters, then. I think it runs a bit too fast to ice over, generally. You know, moving water doesn't have time to freeze, really.

*Can we talk a little bit about the community, because obviously you're quite a central character in it now. When you first moved here and had a young family, what was this like as a community to live in?*

Oh, it was grand, really. It was grand. We were involved. The young lads, both joined the cubs and a friend of ours was an assistant cub mistress. Her boy was

in the cubs and he got very friendly with my eldest lad, and they're still pals now, when they see each other, you know. They don't make any effort to see each other, but if they meet here or he's in Worcester, they'll always pop down and see Richard, you know.

The cubs and scouts, I was in the cubs and scouts, and I did quite well, I enjoyed it. I think it's a wonderful movement. Richard didn't think that he should be made to go to church, on Parade Sunday, that shouldn't be a condition, but Bill Wilson, Scout Master, who was a very good scout master, he was a wonderful scout master, and lived at the end of Green Lane, he insisted that the lads had to go to Parade Sunday.

### **Track 12 : 15:46:46**

On Parade Sunday, Andrew, the younger one, used to read the lesson, more often than not. He was the only one that Bill could get to do it. So, we're involved, really, with the cubs and scouts. Also Andrew, there's a photograph on there, I think, is it that big one by the bricks, there. That was when he was awarded his Queen Scout Award because he became a Venture Scout, as well. They had a very good leader for the Venture Scouts, who lived at Hallow. When we went down for that presentation, unfortunately Myrtle had just had a big back operation and couldn't go, so my sister went with me. There were 7 lads from the Vigornian group, which was the Claines group and all had their Queen Scout awards. He still sees some of those lads, now, when he comes home, Andrew does.

*Did they, did the scouts have a camp down here, on your land or farm?*

Well, we've had cubs come down for the day, but they've never stayed overnight. They've done activities down there, mainly down in what they call the Elephant's Nest or the Elephant's Den, whichever they called it.

*Just recap and tell me about the origin of the Elephant's Den, to you?*

Well, I don't really know. It was just a place where all the kids used to love to play in amongst these old trees. Some of them were cracked Willows which had split open and so there were always boughs there to swing on and climb on and I think it was just an attractive place for the kids to play, really. I've had quite a bit of trouble with trespassers.

Hay making was the worst time, because they used to get into the hay, you'd put it all nicely done in the rows and then they'd heap it up in great heaps and you had to go and tease it all out by hand then. And then they'd make little dens with the stukes of hay bales. They'd pull them together and make little dens and things. So, yes, it hasn't all been easy, you know, but, it's part of life, I suppose. We didn't do mischievous things like that, we used to scrump apples and things,

as youngsters. But that was the cubs and scouts, and then we got involved with the schools.

*Your children went to ...?*

They both went to St Stephens, originally, you know, and then it was moved to Northwick Manor.

*Were they still there?*

You know, I can't remember the actual date that Northwick Manor opened. And then they both went on to Bishop Perowne School. The headmaster there, Ken Tyson, is the chap that got me into the Probus group, because he felt that I ought to be in it for the work I'd done for the school, you know. I was on the, well, originally six of us got together and we held functions and sponsored walks and all sorts of things, to raise money and in 18 months, six of us raised enough money to buy Bishop Perowne a new mini bus.

*Good for you.*

Ken was so pleased about it, he decided to make a Friends of the School Association and we had a bigger committee, but the bigger committee didn't work as well as the little one. There were workers and talkers, you know, which there always is on committees.

*Committees, the world over. So, how did you have time to fit all of this in around the, a busy job?*

I don't know, I honestly don't know. I've, when I look back at my life, I think how the hell did I work so hard. When I first started farming, I went for 9 years, milked every day of those 9 years, apart from 3 milkings.

**Track 13 : 15:47:15**

And we went down to my cousins, who lives in Ringshall, not far from Whipnade. I took Myrtle and the two children down there, and we just had, from the Saturday, after milking, and I got a relief milker to do it in the afternoon, and to do it on the Sunday, two milkings, and that was the only time that I went away from the farm and missed the milking for 9 years.

*That's astonishing.*

I still don't know how I managed it, but I did.

*So, you were never poorly, or not so poorly that you couldn't milk?*

No, I've had accidents and I've had illnesses that have been, what I call, minor illnesses which you never stopped work for and just kept going, you know.

But, I fell out of a Damson tree and chipped a couple of bones in the back of my neck. I'd got, we were building the pole barn at the back of the Dutch barn here, and I was getting these spent poles off the GPO and they were laid down along this bank, farther down. And there used to be a row of Damson trees along here and I was, from the other side out of the paddock, got the ladder up in the tree and somehow I went over the top of it and fell on these telegraph poles. So I spent some days in hospital, I think it was 10 days with my head between sand bags in Garlic ward in the Infirmary. Then, of course, we had to get a relief milker and Myrtle didn't milk at that time.

*But you got her trained up, in case you fell out of the tree again!*

But, she did learn to milk when I had my heart attack.

*You had a heart attack?*

Yes, I had a bad spell after I fell out of that tree. I had a kidney operation. I had foot drop and I've worn that calliper ever since I was 44.

*Gosh, was it related to the fall?*

No, not really, it was a slipped disc that had caused it. I had a laminectomy because of the foot drop and two days after I came home, I had a heart attack and was off work for 3 years. That was when they used to pussyfoot about and nurse you, you know. And now I reckon it was only because I was determined and went back to work that I got myself fit. I didn't think I should live this long, because the things that have happened to me.

*So, who managed the farm when you were not working?*

Well, with the help of friends and some paid labour, occasionally, and Myrtle learnt to milk with a friend, and somehow we struggled through.

*So, I bet when you say you didn't work for three years, you did actually work?*

Well, I cooked the meals and looked after the kids in the house when they came home from school, and things, you know. Originally they wouldn't even let me walk across the yard to see me cattle. They were very strict on me, you know, and I had to have my bed downstairs, wouldn't let me go upstairs. I look back on that and I think, well how did I survive all that, but I have.

*Going back to building the pole barn, presumably, you know, you were pretty much a one-man band, so you didn't have much help!*

Well, I just had part-time labour. One chap who walked at Austin's. His wife had helped us to do bean picking and he used to come down and see us when she was here, if he was on nights. I said, you haven't got a weekend to spare, have you, or something like that, or evenings, evenings in the summer. Myrtle's cousin, he was a lorry driver, and he used to come sometimes and help me. By and large I was a one-man band, except I had a good woman that was helpful with the straw and the hay carting. And we had a little part-time lady, who was very good picking, she was very small and very quick and she could pack beans and things.

**Track 14 : 15:47:35**

She was as strong as a little ox, 'because she used to help us with the hay baling. All the hay, then, was handled manually and it was quite a few years before I got a lift for the front of the tractor, yes.

*Are you about the nearest to the city, farm, in Worcester?*

Yes I am in the City of Worcester.

*The boundary is further up, is it, well it is now?*

And it's, part of our land now, is still in Wychavon, they haven't moved the boundary down, that runs through the farm. But, they've moved the boundary on the other side of the road, right up to the link road, haven't they?

*So, you're partly in Worcester and partly in Wychavon?*

Well, all the buildings and part of the farm is in, biggest part of the farm, is in Worcester City.

*There can't be many farms in the city?*

No, well, this, John Bennett's, Manor Farm, he's in the city, too. And there used to be, oh, the chap down at Blackpole, that was all built on and the Elgar High School is there now.

*So, you're one of a couple of farms left in the city?*

Yes, but I was one of the last working farms, but now, you see, I've let the girls down the road graze with their horses.

*So, when were the last cows here?*

Well, unfortunately, a year after I'd had my heart attack, after I started work again, after the heart attack, the doctor said to me, he said, Mr Bird, you've got to make a decision, he said, it's either the cows or you. And I said, I've got a young family, I suppose it had better be me. And he said, no, I don't think you were going to say that. I said no, it's going to be hard but it's got to be the cows. So we gave up the milking herd, but I went over to buying calves, baby calves, and rearing them through for beef. We didn't make as good a living out of that as we had done out of the milk. The milk was damned hard work, and I didn't realise until I stopped milking, how hard I'd worked.

*So, the beef calves were a lot easier, were they?*

A lot easier as far as time spent with the cattle and so you had time to do other work, you see, arable work and hay making and things. But, I've always had a good sense of humour and I've always gone through life looking on the bright side. I will not get down in the dumps, I won't allow it.

*Well, on that note, in relation to Northwick and the community, the area, the land, give me a few highlights over the years for you, the best bits?*

Well, I was very pleased to get the Tansey in the first place, because I didn't really think I stood a chance, I had to show so many people over the farm, because it was put out for tender.

*This was what, a year or so into you moving here?*

That was the year I, yes, I was only working for Jim Hunt for 10 months, when he died, you see. And, he'd promised to have a bathroom built on for us, which he never did, and he didn't intend to. There you are, that's how farmers are, some of the farmers. But, anyway, he died and his widow said she would keep it on, Mrs Hunt, but she didn't trust people. And she once saw me down in Worcester in my lunch time. I'd torn my working trousers and I wanted a new pair and I went down to get some. She said, this is what we pay you for, she said, is it, come into Worcester and do the shopping.

### **Track 15 : 15:47:57**

And I thought that was uncalled for because I worked as hard for other people as I did for myself, because I enjoyed it so. Farming's been my life. Father didn't want me to go into farming, but I wouldn't have missed it for the world.

I've had me ups and downs. We've had our setbacks, but I'd still do the same as I've done before if time came again, you know. I've no regrets.

That was difficult, giving up the cattle, but I built up a very good pedigree herd and I did quite well as local shows. There's a little cup in there that I had the most

points in the Bromsgrove Farmers Show, with the cattle and a bale of hay which was judged and mangles and all sorts of things, you know. Yes, I got 6 champagne glasses in the cabinet, as well. John B Wilson, the Feed Merchants in Bromsgrove, they gave you either a bottle of champagne or 6 champagne glasses, and I thought, well, once you've pulled the cork out of a bottle of champagne you got nothing, so I had the glasses.

*You can enjoy them again and again.*

That's right, yes. I did quite well in local shows and its hard work getting them ready and doing the rest of your work before you go, and when you come back from a show, but I enjoyed it. And also, I did very well in the Worcester Milk Recording Society, and was quite successful in that. And the one year, that year, I think, was '71, I won both the Small Herds and the Young Stock Cup for the small herds, as well, and reserve champion, so that was, I think, the highlight of my farming, really, that I can show you something.

*What do you feel like, now, living in, what was once, your cattle barns?*

Oh, it's lovely, I didn't want to do it. I'd thought that was the worst day of my life, was when that young tax inspector said, you've got to sell your farm and we'll have our money out of the farm, the farm house. That was, I walked out of the meeting, went and sat on the bonnet and left my wife and the accountant in there. I didn't want to know. It was the worst day of my life. I loved that old house next door, lot a features about it were lovely. We'd got it nice inside, you know, and it was, I loved that old house.

Myrtle always wanted to convert these buildings and we did and I've been very happy. It has a lovely feeling about it because we, you know, we used to store our potatoes in here, for instance. Hay bales, straw bales all the way round the walls and these were double doors here. And then, in the summer, it was a very cool place, so we'd put the lettuce in here and pack the beans in here, so that they'd kept fresh, you know, before we took them up to market the next day.

I, I wouldn't have missed it for the world. I've enjoyed every minute of my farming life.

*Reg, thank you ever so much.*