

Voices of Hickling

Interview Transcript: Brian Phillipps

Interviewed by Ann Louise Kinmonth on 21st July 2014

ALK: Well, if you wouldn't mind, just to start off with, saying your name and your date of birth 'cos that anchors the tape.

BP: Oh! I see. Well, I'm Brian Phillips, Brian Douglas Phillips, and I was born June 1926, er, at 4 Lower Sloane St. in London and, um, my father was a doctor, um, a high quality doctor, in Chelsea. But, er, we, I was brought up by a nanny, um, Emily Wiggington, um, who looked after all our family. And we knew her more than we knew our parents.

In fact I very seldom saw my father at all 'cos we weren't allowed downstairs because of the patients. We had a consulting room in the dining room downstairs and the children weren't meant to have any contact with the patients in any way, and my mother was always on the telephone with my father's appointments and things like that.

And so we were looked after totally by, by the nanny, er, and we never saw any of the senior members of our family at all. Barely, except for on holidays. Of course I was always at school all my life, I've been to 7 schools and, um, if you work that out it's always changing every 18 months or so and this is why I'm such a recluse now I think. But anyway, that is beside the point.

We want to talk about Hickling do we?

ALK: Yes. How much of your time did you spend in Hickling?

BP: Oh well, very little. I mean all the holidays, um, and we could spend, therefore we got, we covered all the seasons you might say.

But my first memories were, we used to rent ... I say we, I'm not quite sure, I suppose my parents used to rent Hickling Hall from Lionel Borritt who was a tenant farmer there. Who had a son Jackie Bonnett, Borritt, who later on farmed at Eastfield, and he was helped to buy the farm, I think, by my uncle. Uncle Aubrey, who was interested in the shooting on the marsh, duck shooting on the marsh.

And, er. But, anyway my first recollections were when I was about 6 or 7, I think, er, on holiday at Hickling Hall. It was fearfully cold, awful, an awful place for a child to live and it was terrifying at night with this huge place and – oh, it was awful, and, um, and the only thing that amused us were all the toads in the wet cellars. The cellar down there, full of paraffin and petrol and stuff but it also had some very intriguing toads and, um, great big, fat ones. And this always stuck in my memory of being the only thing really.

There were moments (?) playing in the barn there, with all the hay – snuggling up in the hay and, er, but I don't really remember very much of my sort of 6 or 7 year old stays there. But I remember much more when I was about 12, um, around 11,12 and then we, we had great fun.

I never liked the beach very much. Um, I had a very horrible, floppy, knitted, full sized swimsuit in yellow and I was known as yellow belly.

I didn't like Hickling at all, although the pub next to the sort of cutting where you went on to the beach was rather fun. We weren't allowed to drink of course but we went in there in all our wet clothes – it was a curious pub, um, because they put up with all sorts of things. But they had to because the summer was when they made their money. But, anyway

ALK: What was it called? Can you remember?

BP: No I don't. It might have been the Plough but I'm not quite sure. But opposite there was a gift shop where they sold union jacks and spades, plastic, well not plastic spades, tin spades, and tin buckets and things. And of course we rented a, a hut, a hut on the beach there and on the other side, on the land side of the dunes, the Mc Crays – who, I'm not quite sure how they came into this. I think from some sort of South African, South African connection with the Douglasses. But they were great friends of ours and, um, they had a, a big hut on the land side of the dune, sand dunes.

But I never liked the beach very much and it was, I just didn't like, like the beach. It was wet and sandy and, um, got in your toes and got in between your swimsuit and yourself and I didn't like it.

I'm much more, much happier on the farm. And anyway, in the, um, the main occupation of the village was, was, that from my recollection, was running rabbits with the local boys when Lionel Borritt's main farmworker or labourer, as we used to say was Mervyn Gibbs. Now, Mervyn Gibbs was a, he did everything on the farm but he was the tractor driver 'cos they only just got, tractors were just starting really in those days.

In fact I may remember horses on a binder, cutting corn but I certainly remember Mervyn driving an old spade lug Fordson, standard Fordson, paraffin standard Fordson with a binder on behind, er, and, of course, you'd go out there and you had to choose the right size field where they could cut the corn all in one day and the rabbits couldn't get out at night and so the talk would go round the village.

Oh, they're cutting this field tomorrow and, um, you know, you want to be up there – it's going to be good. And so I'd turn out with all the local youths with knobbly sticks and you'd wait 'til the cutter, the binder had gone round to about, sort of, two thirds round and then you could see the rabbits moving, the corn moving as the rabbits were running around in there and you'd see a wiggly corn coming out to the edge and you'd point to everybody, keep quiet, you see and suddenly a rabbit would come out and everybody would be whooping and chasing after this poor animal and we usually got it.

We got it especially if it hid under, tried to hide under a sheaf of corn and you'd pick the corn up and he'd go off, but he was surrounded then, and that was the end. But at the end all the rabbits were auctioned off as a perks by the tractor driver and he'd put them out on the canvas of the binder and have a little auction, you see.

Threepence for milky does and, er, sixpence for a good big solid rabbit you see. And he'd say "Threepence up an orphan", what does he mean is he an orphan? Well, in the end I realised that he'd been offered, I'm offered,

offered threepence and then you said fourpence, "Fourpence I've been orphaned."

And so. But I mean when you worked it out they seemed awfully expensive, but if you worked it out in today's money they were jolly cheap, sixpence, at forty to the pound, um, what's that, tuppence ha'penny in present money or something for a big rabbit. Well, there weren't, it doesn't sound bad. But anyway, that was running

Oh! and then we used, not only did we run rabbits around, and I'm thinking of the field behind High Hill cottages, I think of High Hill cottages, um, er, all the, er, er, families were, twenty kids used to live, Stella knew much more about it than I did because she could relay, she could relay all their names in order, Lucy, something, something, something, and we got up to 21 I think. But, er, all the family knew, knew all the names, the local large family there.

Anyway we used to run rabbits also at Eastfield, which was, um, the field up by the marshes. Um, by the duck shoot there, owned by, um, Jack Borritt, Lionel's son, only son I think, um, and he put up with us and we used to chase his piglets and things and, um, er, but also I used to go round shooting on this farm with a jolly good 2-2 BSA air rifle and shooting indiscriminately.

Everybody shot everything indiscriminately in those days. It didn't matter what it was, there was slaughter, especially on the Broads and Uncle Aubrey, my Uncle Aubrey, um, his office in town, because he was a very high falluting, er, partner, well he was a partner in Herbert Smith and Company, Aubrey Herbert Smith. His office in town, I heard that bit, his office in town was full of, um, game birds and usually water birds but extraordinary ones, all rare ones.

And it seemed to be in those days it was an occupation of the upper classes to kill as many rare birds as possible and get them stuffed, well that decimated a lot of ...

Anyway, up at Eastfield we used to run rabbits, at harvest time. I remember, um, one occasion when I was looking the other way and somebody swung their knobby stick around their head and hit me on the top and I was bleeding on my head, I was bleeding like a pig. I was taken in and all stitched up, I suppose I went to.... No, I don't think they stitched up in those days, I think they just put Elastoplast over it, but it was a big cut and I've still got a bump there that one can feel. It's about, it's about 2 inches long – a bump in my skull. I divert now, next to a big hollow in my skull which I've got, um, a big dent in the top, which I shouldn't have.

My father, much to my mother's disgust, when I was very, very small said "Oh! He hasn't got a soft spot in the top of his head" – and he pushed his thumb into it, which caused my mother chaos, and I've always had this soft spot and they said "Well, he's either, he might be nuts, it might affect him." I think it has, I think it has, I put all my problems down to this hollow in the top of my head.

But anyway I divert, so we got over that after a lot of blood and shouts, er, and er, so..... The other things we did on, at the Hall Farm, Ian, my brother and myself, we used to be down there when and we used to chop up mangel-wurzels and swedes – a great big machine with very sharp, er, curved cutting blades. You turned the handle, with great effort and all cut swedes would come out of the bottom, um, animal feed, and er, that was a source of interest to us.

As was a very similar machine where you, with blunt teeth, you might say, in it – which you grind up cake, linseed cake, which are big, flat, about 3 foot long – thin cakes of linseed oil, and that, broke those up, and turning the handle for that was fun.

The other thing was that I remember, I think they had a wagoner. I'm not quite sure whether it was with a wagoner or whether it was with Mervyn, Mervyn Gibbs. But, um, we used, they used to bring the bull, Tom ----- Tom the bull, back from the marsh in the evening and I went out with, um, Mervyn or the wagoner one night, one evening to bring Tom back and he said "Oh. You can take her back, and gave me the rope, and I said "Well, what do I do?" and he said "You just lead it but if it goes "mwaaah" you hit it on the nose". LAUGHS "What, hit that thing on the nose?" dear oh dear.

Tom was evidently quite an amenable bull, but I didn't think much of it. Um, of course it was a lovely farm that because it was.

There was a very stinky, every farm had a stackyard, of course, and a pool where all the water came and it was all full of slime and frogs and, er, mud, and stunk, but, um, it was a very interesting pool that and the horses used to go into it. It really, all the sewerage went into it too I think. It was, it was beside the pou...., what we called the pound.

There was, evidently the council owned a walled field there, um, which stray cattle on the road were put into and, um, that was known as the pound. And, um, so that, er, er, there weren't many other things that I think we did on the farm there that I can remember, except of course that we used to, well I, I don't think Ian was interested in this.

Yes, we were very interested in ferreting in the winter and Ian had two ferrets. Now I don't know who looked after them, whether he took them to Winchester – I can't believe it. But he had two ferrets, we called them Freddy and Gwen, after our parents. I'm not sure they weren't both male, but anyway, Freddy, Freddy definitely was a male, the polecat. One was a polecat and the other was a white one, and um, I remember Freddy was sitting on my shoulder and he stuck his nose into my ear and started licking around in there. I thought I don't like this and I shook my head and he grabbed the lobe of my ear and hung on it. It caused panic and blood and, um, even more blood when people tried to pull it off when it was attached to my, firmly attached to the lobe of my ear.

But anyway, we got over that and never suffered from any horrible disease. But we used to go ferreting in the winter, um, two ways – we used to go after rabbits, and that was great fun, we used to go down the field, hedges, and with a dog, sniffing at the hole saying something there, no, there's nothing there. And then we, when we found a hole we put the ferrets down, put the nets around and if we were lucky enough to have a small shotgun like a 410 or a guard (?) gun we, we'd wait and suddenly rabbits would come out popping up all over the place. Or, if they didn't then the ferret would get laid up. It would kill off a rabbit down there and go to sleep beside it. In which case you had to get the other ferret, put a collar and line on it and, um, put that one down to find where the first one was, and then dig, dig it all out. Very laborious, and we hoped that didn't happen.

So, that was great fun ferreting for rabbits but there were also, of course, they made huge stacks up at Eastfield of all the wheat and oats, maturing over the

winter for the thrashing when they needed in spring and, of course, that attracted a whole lot of rats under the thatch of the, and these were very large corn stacks. And, er, we'd go up there and you could see the rat runs around the outside in the stack (18.08) and we'd throw several ferrets up on the thatch at the top and they'd work their way down and the rats would come out and you'd stand there with a turnip and a knobby stick.

You'd throw your turnip and knock the rat off the run if you were good enough and then belabour it with sticks when it hit the ground. And, er, that was a rural pursuit which was..... That was great fun. Um, everything went around, and, of course, later on, um, when the, the stack was thrashed with a steam, steam engine and a peg, peg drum thrasher, um, all the mice and rats would come out when it got to the bottom. And that was a, a great delight for all the terriers and all the kids bashing them all up. We had, we had a big rat killed sometime, um.

So anyway, then, of course, talking about outside, outside entertainments – from my own point of view, um, I used to go round with Ben Ling. I think he was Ben, he was certainly Ling, and he lived in the cottages as you went down from the back entrance of, um, er, the hall, Hall Farm. The back entrance, instead of going straight on down to Palling you turn left, and I'm not sure where that went. Um, but you turned left and then there was a row of cottages which belonged, I think to, to the Hall Farm and I believe Mervyn lived in one of them, Mervyn Gibbs lived in one of them, and, and certainly the end one, because they were attached row of 3 or 4, 2 or 3 houses and in the end one lived Ben Ling, and he was the local trapper.

Rabbits and moles. But he specialised in moles really because moles, dried moleskins were threepence each and he used to go out every morning and I, I'd go with him if, when possible. And he'd have a, a, a, ring of I don't know how many, maybe 100, 150 snares, rabbit snares, brass rabbit snares and you'd have a prick and hold the loop in place.

And you always put it, you know rabbits, you can see where they leap. There's an unmoved patch and then when their feet come down, about every foot apart or so, so you've got to put your snare where you anticipate him just taking off, when he's got his legs behind him and his head out and he, the unfortunate rabbit puts it straight through this brass loop and then suffocates – that's not very nice for it. But we'd go round his traps, collecting all the rabbits, re-setting his snares and, er, course he had a very good, he knew exactly where the things were. And there were these spring mole traps. And so he'd, er, take up the moles and re-set the traps in another run that he thought was suitable.

And then we'd go back to his house, and outside his house he had a, a load of old boards and doors, mainly doors propped up at the right angle to the sun, against his house, covered in moleskins with tintacks holding them open, drying out and, um, er, I don't know whether he treated them with borax or anything. I don't think he did, I think they were just sun dried and, er, and he used to package them up and send them to, er, coat makers I suppose. But he, he, I think he was paid threepence, threepence a skin for moles. Rabbits I think were, were a bit of a write off. I mean he sold them for the flesh but, um, I don't know about the skins – he, he did dry them but I think they, you know they were so much a dozen. I don't think they were

Anyway that was rather fun, going round with Ben Ling.

The last thing I remember, in the Hall, was that during the war when, er, I was at school, at Millfield, and this was before I joined the Royal Marines, and, er, when I was about six..., 16 coming up 17 and, um, my parents didn't know what to do because London was being bombed and, um, there were flying bombs coming over and so it was best not to be in London and yet I couldn't go to Hickling because it was restricted.

You had, certain people weren't allowed within a certain area for security reasons and, um, I think it's 3 miles from the coast, or something like that. So, I joined the Home Guard for a week. Well, they thought I was going to be there permanently I think. I don't think I got, I wasn't long enough, I wasn't long enough to get a uniform – I may have got a cap, I'm not quite sure. But anyway, on the strength of being, of a bit of paper saying that I was in the Home Guard I was allowed within the, there and so I.... I, I think I stayed at Crown Cottage with my grandmother, but I, so called, worked on the, um, I had to work on a farm to get the permit.

So, and so I theoretically worked on the, the Hall Farm. In fact it boiled down to picking plums and doing sorts of things that the boys did.

But anyway, that was, um, the only, wartime. Well then, yes, after the war when I came out of the Royal Marines, um, I was then 42 Commando, um, and, um, when the war ended they got us out very quickly. It must have been the winter, it must have been in nineteen, forty seven-ish, um, or late '46, '46-'47 then I was demobbed. I went up there with a friend of mine from the Marines, Colin Scott, and we did some shooting, duck shooting on the marsh. That's really the end of the sort of farming side of things I think.

But I was never very keen on the sailing on the Broad. I liked messing about on the Broad at Hickling, especially when it was frozen over and we were skating, skating or slithering around – and making sure not, there was still a small patch of water, you didn't get near that. But, you see Uncle Aubrey, the London lawyer owned Aldercar(?), which is near the Pleasure Boat – a large Norfolk country house on the, on the Broad. It had a big boat house on the Broad, and, er, we used to go there and, er, whether we rented it off him or not we stayed, we stayed there and, er, yes, we stayed there at Aldercar (?) and used the boat house which, in which we have several home-made, er, canoes, kayaks.

Totally dangerous things, they were made of canvas with wax which had been put on with an iron and they were sort of triangular in shape. They were most unsafe sort of transport you could find – but they were alright if you got used to them. And we used to go fishing on the Broad, but mainly with, because the, um, the Brietmeyers, my aunt Clarice owned a ship, owned a boat, the Clarice. Beautiful, beautifully kept yacht, and her husband, Cecil Brietmeyer, um, a very wealthy, um, Well, he never ever did a job in his life I don't think, but he was a country gentleman, and, er, with his faithful dog, Sheila – a curly, a brown, curly haired retriever – and he, er, was a wealthy chap and he had a beautiful, um, mahog,...., varnished mahogany speedboat, the Frozo (?), which they kept alongside in their ..., the Brietmeyer's boat house, um, on, on the staithe at - well, I don't know where you'd call it exactly but, um, they had their own boat house, er, with the Frozo (?) and the Clarice in it.

And, the Primrose, which belonged to,,- who did it belong to? , um, – eventually it belonged to my sister, Stella, but, er, errr. Well, anyway, the Primrose, it was our sailing boat. I never liked sailing very much.

But anyway, at Aldercar we used to have pirate parties and all the various families, the Mc Craes and the Brietmeyers, that is Elisabeth Brietmeyer, um, and Alan Brietmeyer, the sons of Clarice and, um, Cecil, um, they were all older than me, I was the youngest and, er, so I was really never into these things very much, We used to have pirate parties and all go off in various boats and had a party at Turner's Island, um, the only sort of island in the middle of the Broads. Which I understand really.

You see the Broads were, um, er, were peat diggings I gather in the early days and for the, for the people to use all their tools and to use up some of the space they usually left islands in the middle, so they could keep all their tools and things on it, and, um, that was Turner's Island – Lady or Mrs Turner – Turner's Island. And everybody went there, you know, for picnics and things.

So, we had pirate parties but I was more interested in the fishing, in the winter, spinning for pike. And I caught a big pike off The Pleasure Boat, um, now The Pleasure Boat pub was run by my mother's god-daughter – oh, now you will know, um.....

ALK: Gwen

BP: Gwen

ALK: Gwen Amis

BP: Gwen Amis, yes. Um, and

ALK: Took your mother's name.

BP: Oh! Yeah, well, er, Gwenny, a well-built young lady, used to be my host at the, er, at The Pleasure Boat and we used to go there and fish off the end, and I caught a 7lb., 7 or 8lb. pike there one day. I was very chuffed and I was very upset when my brother hid it and said that it had flopped back into the water again. I was furious.

But anyway, yes, there was a, Teddy Barnett, I don't know, Teddy Barnett was a fr...., great friend of my father's. My father had made friends with Teddy, um, in his medical days and maybe university days as well, before that. But they studied medicine together and Teddy Barnett we looked on as a sort of uncle. He had the, he didn't have any children, he was rather an odd chap I think, Teddy.

I think somehow he was, um, my father was his protector in some way I think. They used to go out drinking together, my father was a big, strong chap and, and, and, um, Teddy Barnett got away with being a joker, rather tubby, joking fellow. He was a very nice, kind man and, um, er, one day he wanted me to take, when we were at Aldercar, he wanted me to take him round in one of these kayaks to The Pleasure Boat. And, I was quite happy to do that but I think I was forbidden by all and sundry because we would have probably all drowned on the way round.

Anyway, near The Pleasure Boat there were several little dykes, I think, opposite Waldo Beale's garage. Now Waldo Beale, things mechanical near The Pleasure Boat circulated round Waldo Beale who was, had the garage there and he sold us paraffin petrol in square "Shell" cans, two gallon cans. He had a pump I think with a handle, reciprocating cylinders going up and down to measure it exactly on a little clock telling you how much you'd had.

Anyway, opposite Walto, Waldo Beale's garage was a, one of these dykes and in it was an old houseboat, a very small houseboat and in it I think he was Ben, he was certainly Ben Lacey. He was certainly Lacey and he was certainly Ben, yeah – and he was a, what would be now thought as a rather dirty old man. He was an old seaman and he was, I suppose, looking back he wasn't much more than about 80, but 80 was old in those days really and he was a retired seaman. He lived on board this boat and, er, he taught me how to tie knots, in particular the American Sheepshank, which was a totally useless knot, but interesting. And, er, he gave my brother, Ian, a, um, er, a boat in a bottle, a ship in a bottle which I was very envious of. Um, but, um, old Ben Lacey was rather good value but very frowned on by my parents who thought he was a rather dirty old man and shouldn't be associating with him.

But they underestimated him because he was very kind and, er, um, really he was a very lonely man I think, and to talk about matters of the sea and knots and things, um, you entertained his day a bit.

Anyway that was, er, really the - our life was spent around the Broad, and from my point of view one of the interesting things really was catching mussels in the boathouses, 'cos when you go in the boathouse it was like an aquarium turned upside down – you could see everything in the dark that went on under there, you could see all the mussels breathing, their holes, and you could poke a reed down in, and when they clamped up on it you could pull them up. You put them back again but I mean it was rather childish, innocent amusement and, of course, at that time before the sea broke in and the, the Broad went mucky and horrible, green it was absolutely crystal clear, you could see shoals of bream swimming round and eels wriggling around in the weed. And, um, you could see everything that went on underneath the,

It, it was brilliant.

ALK: Whenabouts was that?

BP: Ooh, well, when was it? Um, it would have, it must have been about 4 or 5 years before the war started I think. Um, but, er, I remember the sea broke through and, um, I took my kayak and I went as far as I could to, to see where the sea had come through. But, of course, when the sea had come through it killed off all the freshwater fish except for those which managed to get far enough up the dykes to, to escape them from the freshwater coming off the land kept those ones free and counteracted the salt water coming up.

ALK: Were you there when the sea broke through, at Horsey?

BP: I was in England. I was round about. But it broke through twice It came through in a minor way around Horsey once, and that was thought to be a rather major one. But then there was a huge storm a few years later when I believe the pub at Sea Palling was washed away and, er, a lot of damage was done, and, er

Oh. To revert a bit, this rich uncle, errr, Uncle Cecil, Clarice's, Clarice's husband, um, apart from having the Frozo he also had a huge, beautiful, expensive Lagonda, um, a touring Lagonda with, sort of, about half a dozen beautiful hand plated exhaust pipes coming out, and a hand brake on the side and, um, it was the essence of luxury and huge, and we used to go down very carefully because, so as not to damage the leather upholstery.

We used to go down to Palling with it, on very special occasions and there was one special occasion, when going down to Palling, this huge Lagonda, there's a, there was a T crossing before we turned right to go to Palling, you come down through the marshes, and then on the right of that was the old abbey, which I can't remember much about, but there's nothing left. That was on the right, you go all the way down, then there was a T crossing, where you go right to Palling and left I think was, er, Somerton or Middleton – I don't know, Winterton. I can't remember.

Anyway, on that crossroads the Lagonda slowly pulled out, there was a horrible crash and a little Austin 7 had turned over on its side, run up on the bank and instead of having a collision it turned over on its side. And the chap was actually pretty polite and cursing, cursing Cecil. Cecil was rather dismissive of it though, see my solicitor sort of thing, you see.

But, that's the one thing I remember about, that's stuck in my memory about that Lagonda, which was a beautiful machine, and, um, so

ALK: Do you remember Whiteslea at all? The Desboroughs?

BP: Yes, well, um, not really, no. I mean I remember seeing it, there's a building there, next to the Broad. Which brings up a little matter of, er, Crown Cottage, where my grandmother used to live, and we used to stay, and, um, what's associating it is your measure, is your mention of Desborough. Now, his Head Keeper, um, was, um, Jimmy, errr

ALK: Vincent.

BP: Vincent, and he lived in the house to the left, and he was our air raid warden later on, and a very officious one and everybody, he didn't get on very well with everybody because he got panic stricken when the war started and thought all the bombers were coming over regularly.

But anyway, that brings, um, to mind, er, Perrin. Not Perrin, er, I'm getting mixed up with Piggott. Piggott was the under keeper for Desborough, and, um, my man Piggott, according to Vincent. But anyway, to get back to Crown Cottage, which was a, my grandmother of course lived there with Arthur Cross, it is Arthur, yes.

ALK: Yes.

BP: Arthur Cross, her second husband after ----- (?) Herbert Smith. And they had two sons, I think they only had two, two sons, who both died during the war, um, with German, in Japanese prisoner of war camps. They were planters, I think they were, I'm not sure whether they were rubber planters and there was, I can't remember their names, ... Jack and I don't remember the other one.

They had a most intriguing little car with a dickey at the back. A dickey where you could fold it back, two seats, open air in the back whilst the others lived in comfort. It was a throwback I think to when you had your footman out in the cold and damp whereas you, the elite, lived in the warmth inside.

Anyway, um, and they had that, they, and they were their sons by the later marriage. But, of course, there was around, um, the Green, and I think I'm right in calling it The Green, that little triangular grassed patch in front of Crown Cottage was a little hamlet on its own, you might say.

Separated from the village but it had at one time been a centre of activity. Well, not a centre of activity, it was a centre of wealth when they built the church. 'Cos that church was a, like all Norfolk churches, built on the wealth of, er, the wool trade presumably. And smuggling, but the wool trade mainly and a huge church and only inhabited by a few dozen people on a Sunday then. Opposite was the Reverend Bullough in the Rectory.

To his right, opposite Crown Cottage were, I think, the App...., Applegates. Um, I don't remember, I think the Applegates. And then, um, further on, er, was the White House, um, White Cott...., White House, which the Breitmeyers used to rent, I think. I'm not sure if they owned it or rented it but the Breitmeyers used to have that.

And, er, of course, the top of The Green, by the main road Mrs Fox had a sweet shop and, um, she was a funny old, very old lady all doubled up. Very good, she had a good heart, and, er, we used to buy bull....., gobstoppers and things there and, er, um

But when you went in she had a little bell attached to a spring on the door which would go tinkle, tinkle, tinkle. And she had an intriguing brass tortoise where you pressed its head, and that rang and she would come shuffling out and serve you.

But, of course, next to there was The Bull, on the other side, was the pub, The Bull, Mr Gedge and his wife, where we used to get our fresh water to drink. Because we weren't allowed to use pump water because that was near all the bodies in the, um, cemetery. And so, we used to get up and drink in the pub down there with all the locals, and, um, we'd go up there.

But on a Wednesday, um, the fish man used to come around from Palling, with a horse and cart, um. Stella would know the name of this cart but it was a, bigger than – oh yes, we're coming on to milk distribution – um, it was bigger than, errrr, the Hall, the Hall used to sell their milk and, er, um, Gibbs, I'm going a bit mental nowadays, we've mentioned him before, Mervyn Gibbs, used to do the milk round and he used to come round in a little sort of chariot with, the sort of thing with an iron step at the back. Anyone put their foot on it the, er, the wooden things that go beside the horse, I'm going mental

ALK: Shafts.

BP: Shafts. They'd go up and down, so a very lightweight thing. But on it was this beautiful copper, well, copper embossed vat with a spring top and around it were these copper hook handled measures for pints, and half pints and probably less, I suppose, for cream. He had cream in some container and this thick milk, and you'd go with him, to him.

Every morning he'd come round at a certain time and you'd bring (45.10) your own cracked jug up and say "It's a pint for Crown Cottages" or something really, and he'd use these measures, put it on. But the horse, his horse, he didn't have to talk to it, he just said "Go on" and it would stop at all these regular stops.

The horse was the most amazing horse, really. I mean horses were amazing in those days, they got to learn things.

Anyway, the pub, yes. We had The Bull, and then, er, coming down there was another house between The Bull and the, Crown Cottage I believe, and with Crown Cottage it really was a, a very old cottage.

ALK: Why was it called Crown Cottage?

BP: Well, it must have been owned by the Crown I suppose. I don't know. It was, it was called Crown Cottage wasn't it? Yes. I mean other people have called it Crown Cottage apart from me, have they?

ALK: Not sure. I'm just not sure. Don't know.

BP: I mean it comes to me as being Crown Cottage. No, so I don't know why. But, um, well, I mean there's no reason why it shouldn't be, it wasn't attached to the church I suppose in any way apart from when, er, Cross, um, Arthur Cross was he? Um, retired and, um, was the vicar after, before he was the vicar there. I suppose he had to, maybe.

The vicarage, I don't ever remember him being, being associated with the vicarage when he was vicar of Hickling. I mean, I always remember him being in that cottage, so who lived in the proper vicarage I don't know.

Anyway, but, um, it was the most awful place really, that cottage. It was, there were bedbugs and, of course, you can't, you can blame the bedbugs on them but you can't blame the mosquitos which were everywhere, and the horseflies, 'cos there were so many horses. And life in the country was, was, er, at various periods was arduous in many ways. I mean you had to put up with the mosquitos and the bedbugs, which caused heat bumps.

Our nanny always said they're only heat bumps and I always thought it very funny that heat should give you a hard lump, usually round your eyes, for no reason whatsoever. And it wasn't till later that I realised that these ruddy bedbugs used to come out at night, and, er, so the mosquitos, horseflies, two sorts of horseflies, the clegs, the brown, the grey ones and the yellow other ones that were very good at alighting on you, and you couldn't feel them alight before you bashed them.

But then there was also the, um, er, we used to bath in a little tin bath with literally two inches of water. You'd get a brass sort of, what looks like a watering can now, filled up from the copper with boiled up, um, mosquito larva in it, and, er, you'd get it – that was the warm water, I don't say hot, warm water and then you had a jug of cold water. And you would sit in this little low tin, it was like a saucer, it was only six inches high with a spout to pour it out. You'd sit on that in the middle of the room in the freezing winter, um, with lukewarm water, trying to have a bath.

It was cold, miserable and horrible and, er, so that was, that was what one had to put up with at Crown Cottage.

ALK: What did your grandmother make of it?

BP: I don't know. She was marvellous, the way she carried on, er, and er, in her own way. I don't know how she existed really. Um, but, she had this personal servant and, of course, it wasn't so bad for her. I suppose she had, well I mean she had hot water every day from the copper and we only had hot water once a week for our baths, sort of thing. Um, but no she, she seemed to cope very well and she's very nice, very old fashioned and nice, BRIAN COUGHS.

Excuse me, I've got a crappo in my throat. Um

ALK: You must tell me when you've had enough, you're doing very well.

BP: No, no, I like reminiscing but I don't think I've got much more to reminisce on actually.

ALK: Oh, you'd be surprised.

BP: Um, where have we got to? We've got to the

ALK: Crown Cottage

BP: Crown Cottage.

ALK: Were you there when the fire broke out opposite or was that after, after, before you were born probably?"

BP: I don't remember it.

ALK: Stella watched it.

BP: No, it was after, it was after I was born.

ALK: Right, but Stella was there."

BP: Well.

ALK: It's one of her earliest memories, looking across at the fire.

BP: Well, if Stella was there there was four, four years between us.

ALK: Yes.

BP: She was 5 or 6.

ALK: She was, couldn't have been more.

BP: I was 9 or 10, er, I don't, I think it was probably before I remember things.

ALK: Yes, I think so.

BP: In fact I don't remember seeing a burnt out house there. I only remember seeing a new house there, so

ALK: Yeah.

BP: Or maybe I remember seeing it being built. But, anyway, no I don't remember that. Um, er, I remember the Reverend Bullough, who didn't like us playing on The Green on Sundays.

Well, nobody did when people were going to church we had to behave ourselves. And, um, when we weren't going to church, we didn't always go to church there I think. But it, it was, I suppose we did fairly frequent, frequently, I remember it, yeah. Um.

ALK: He didn't want you to play bomble, probably.

BP: No, we used to play with our yo-yos. Where you have those two sticks and a string, and a sort of dumbbell shaped job that you flip up and down and you do certain things with, and that was all the rage. And also, of course, the yo-yos. Diablos, that's right. We had Yo-yo's and, er, and other things we used to play.

We had to be careful when people were going to church and coming out. Um, what else?

ALK: What about other people? Do you remember the Forbes?

BP: Oh yes. Yes, of course, the Forbes. **BRIAN COUGHS.**

Excuse me, let me have a good cough.

The Forbes were great friends of the family and they owned the mill, the, the windmill, um, the mill, what do we call, the mill, yes. On the way to the Broads, between the Greyhound, which was a pub up there, which all the local yobbos and lads used to hang out.

The girls never liked to go past there, certainly alone, but they were very wary of all the cat calls and whistles from the local youth who seemed to congregate outside the Greyhound.

But we used to, we went to the Greyhound now and then, at odd times but if you went on the road, I think, to Catfield, past the turning off opposite the, um, Greyhound, um, the Forbes had the mill and a lovely large house on the left there. And we used to go shooting in the garden there, my gun and this sort of thing.

Edith, they had a, um, Edith.....

“Myhill?”

BP: Myhill. Used to look after them and lived in the cottage next door to them.

She was very nice, she was a general factotum and, um, er, the Forbes, there were two sons, Colin and Tony, Anthony and they both, I think, had, were in business in London, stockbrokers or insurance.

Well, their father, what was his name, Forbes, it'll come back to me. The father Forbes, um, was an insurance, was in the insurance business. He started a company, Forbes, in insurance, an insurance company in London.

And he had a wife who we called Mowgli, and really it was very rude, but she looked just like, at that time there was the elephant boy on, um, as a cartoon, not a cartoon but on Indian life, and the elephant boy was called Mowgli who, who was in charge of an elephant as I remember it. Um, and this good lady, his wife, was small, diminutive, very dark, very Indian looking, and very ugly. And she was called Mowgli, to her face.

And I, I thought, you know, that was very rude. We used to call her Ugly Mowgli, you see, and she, I think she, you know, being young we never realised that, to her we used to mention. But that was, you know, rather distressing to me at the moment I think. Not very, but yes she, she was very ugly actually.

Surprising that a man of his standing married her. I know ----- (?). But anyway, they had two very upstanding, well, the most upstanding was Tony, who was very upright and a good friend. Colin was a, a little odd, not odd, but he, he never seemed to be in with the rest of us very much at all. And, um, but Tony – they, they, of course, owned, they owned a boathouse on the other side from the Clarice. Um, they had, they had boats of their own, when I don't remember but, um, no, they were great friends. And as you went up that road from them

you could then turn off left to the Pleasure Boat, and on that corner there lived, do you know, um, Well, Wells, Well Oh no I, anyway

ALK: Turner?

BP: Turner. Turner.

ALK: Jimmy Turner?"

BP: Jimmy Turn ... No. Yeah, a relative of Jimmy Turn...

ALK: His son?

BP: Yeah, I think it was Jimmy Turner.

ALK: His son was a deaf mute, or a mute at any rate. They were very good boat builders, both of them.

BP: That's right, yeah. Um, that's right. I must be getting him mixed up with Arthur Turner, which is an apple. Turner. Yes he was a very good boat builder and he built lan's, my brother lan's, punt for him – specially a one off thing. Yes, that's right. What was his name, Turner, what was his Christian name?

ALK: Jimmy.

BP: Jimmy, that's right. Jimmy Turner, he wasn't, he wasn't the Jimmy Turner that my uncle used to go out fishing with, did he? He, that was one of the Nudds wasn't it? Um, but he left all his fishing tackle to Jimmy Turner, I think it was. Because he had a boat and they used to go out pike fishing together. And he left all his fishing tackle to Jimmy Turner. Yeah, that's right.

ALK: I think Gwenny might have been a Turner before she was

BP: Gwenny, yeah, Gwenny was a Turner but I can't remember quite, I think the Turners, yes, lived... I think maybe a mother Turner lived in that house on the corner.

Now you mention this son, yes I remember him being up there. But I also remember and I hope it wasn't, it couldn't have been him, because when I was very young I used to knock around with the village boys.

There was a, um, er, let's call him an imbecile, I shouldn't, one shouldn't do now, but this is the name that comes to me at the time. Now he would be a backward learner, or difficult learner or a somewhat refined term for being an idiot, the village idiot as he was known and he used to be called Jimmy Rabbit.

And, um, I don't think I, I'm not sure I ever knew him, but he was a sort of local, everybody knew him, all the boys knew him because he was unfortunately the butt of all their jokes really.

And this unfortunate fellow, he was, as I say, rather dim and they would, um, er, if they really wanted a bit of fun they'd go up to Jimmy – no, Billy Rabbit, sorry, Billy Rabbit, they'd go up to Billy Rabbit and say "Billy, there's a rajah coming" see and Billy Rabbit would go furious and run off in terror you see. A rajah being a really furious storm in those days, they came in from the sea. It was known as a rajah for some., I don't know how you spell it. It was known as a rajah, like a rage I suppose, a rajah, and Billy Rabbit, the one thing that terrified him was telling him that there was a rajah coming. But it was one of those things.

Now, yeah, that, er, the Forbes. Yes they were really sort of, all but part of the family. They had this boathouse and, um, there was another boathouse beside theirs, all thatched boathouses. And, of course, they were opposite Red Roofs, what is Red Roofs now. Not sure what it was then, I can't remember who owned it before the Breitmeyers had it. But beside them were the Perrins, um, and I think, unfortunately, old man ... , Perrin, of course, was related to Lea & Perrin.

ALK: In the big thatched house are you talking about, or the little thatched house?

BP: Er, I think it was next, next door. I don't, I don't remember, it was just....

ALK: Quite a big house?

BP: It was next door or near next door to

ALK: Yes. On the moor down towards the Tallowin farm.

BP: Yes. Away from the

ALK: Road

BP: Away from the road, yes.

ALK: Yeah, that's right.

BP: I think one of the Nudds owned the first, um, the first was a local chap, I think he was a Nudd who owned the first cottage or set of cottages as you go up, now I don't know what you call that lane that ran up to Red Roofs, whether it has a name.

ALK: Hill Common

BP: Is that Hill Common, oh! Well, up, um, Hill Common. I think the Nudds had the first house. And then, I don't know who had the next one and I think Red Roofs, I don't know who owned Red Roofs, but the Perrins owned the house up there.

Unfortunately the chap died of a heart attack on the road there one day. Very quick, he had a heart attack, died just like that. But that was Perrin, um, he was always a rather severe man I thought. Well, all these old chaps were rather severe, except, oh yes, things are coming back to me now. I, I'm not sure that I can elaborate much more on the ... I can if my mind is jogged on the, the, oh dear, oh dear, yeah, the family who owned the mill.

ALK: The Forbes.

BP: The Forbes family. Um, but, um.

ALK: Old Nudd. Are you thinking of old Nudd?

BP: Well, yes, old Nudd

ALK: He was younger Nudd then. He was younger Nudd then.

BP: No, he was old Nudd with me.

Because there was a young Nudd, and they used to have punting, quanting, um, matches across Hickling Broad in, in the old Norfolk punts, and quanting in the marsh men. And, old, old man Nudd always came first. I mean it, it was

sort of established that he, he was the leading light when it came, came to quanting, punting across Hickling Broad.

But then his son came along and so, er, he, in the races he'd look over his shoulder when he was leading and see his son was second, and then he'd drop back. And then his son would, and, and that was And if anybody else was coming up the old boy would go ahead.

But, er, he was, you know, one of the old fashioned marsh men, er, cutting, cutting reeds for thatching up Catfield Dyke.

We used to go up Catfield Dyke and, and pick blackberries, 'cos it was very prolific with blackberries and you could reach them from the water. Being, you know, in the swampy pools they grew jolly well, these blackberries. We used to go on blackberry picking expeditions, mainly up the dykes there. Um, but of course we used to go to um, er, I'm going mad, where they had the fairs up at, um

ALK: Yarmouth?

BP: No, where the bridge was over the river at, um,

ALK: Potter.

BP: No. Oh well, it'll come back. But ...

ALK: Loddon(?)

BP: Nudds, there was something, yeah, to go back to, Mervyn Gibbs had a son, I don't know if I mentioned him, um, again things are getting a bit hazy – hold on – um, Teddy Gibbs.

Now Teddy, Teddy was, um, when I was I suppose 9 or 10 Teddy was about 16 and he was the boy on the farm. In fact he was probably the chap who sat on the back of the, the binder with the stick and when the knotter on the binder stopped working he would bash the metal back of the binder and Mervyn would stop his tractor and sort it out.

But, anyway Teddy Gibbs was sort of a very pleasant, cheerful, red faced individual and we got on with Terry very well and he eventually, um, went into fishing.

When the herring went out and, during the war, he joined, he joined the Royal Marines. And then he retired up Stubb Road. Now, have I got Stubb Road named right? If you go up from the Pleasure Boat, from the Greyhound towards the Pleasure Boat, about the turning on the left....

ALK: Yeah.

BP: Um, about the last turning, I think, on the left, before you got to um, oh.

ALK: I think it's the

BP: Yes, it's before you got to Hill Common is it, and he'd retired up there into a cottage.

ALK: Stubb.

BP: and went to see Teddy, last about 5 years before he died I think and said Teddy still looks exactly as he was. Um, but he's getting on now and he's, you

know he's, well he must have been getting on because, you know Now, I should, if he was 6 or 7 years older than me know he'd be 93 or 4 – he still might be there I don't know.

But anyway Ian remarked that he'd gone and seen Teddy and talked over old times with him, and, er, yeah, oh, one thing I missed out, um, when we were talking about, and I got carried away I think, with milk deliveries.

ALK: That was great.

BP: And, um, on a Wednesday the fishmonger, um, a man from, used to come from Palling and sell fish on a Wednesday. He had a big, a bigger cart than the sort of chariot which milk came in. But, um, your mother would know all the names of these sort of carts, but it was a bigger one and he sold fish from it, and he, he was a, his name was Kerrison. Um, I seem to have a name, Christian name for him, why I shouldn't No, because he would probably have been Mr. Kerrison, But, er, Tony?

No, it'll come to me I think, but he, he was a local fisherman, he came on a Wednesday and we'd He did rounds, the local villages on certain days – whether he was a fisherman, he was probably a retired fisherman and his son did the fishing and he did the selling I should think, to various villages on certain days.

But that was, um, Lionel, no, Kerrison, no, can't remember. That was Kerrison.

ALK: Time for a pause. It's an hour and a bit. BRIAN LAUGHS Well done.

BP: I don't know how much more I can tell you if prompted – about fishing, the Broad freezing over and that.

*This transcription has been made to back up, not replace,
the audio tapes that form the main record output of the VOH Changing Village project 2015 to 2020.*

The transcribers used their best efforts and checked back for proper names and places.

We ask for forgiveness for any errors...