

Voices of Hickling

Interview Transcript: Harcourt Warnes

In conversation with Ann Louise Kinmonth on 6th November 2019

ALK: OK, so just tell me your name and where you were born.

HW: Well, my name is really Herbert Warnes, and I was born about a couple of hundred yards from where we sit now, in The Street in Sutton.

ALK: Well it's very kind of you to help us with this Voices of Hickling project.

And can we start perhaps with any special memories that you would like to share? Anything that you've been thinking of to tell us?

HW: Well, not actually sort of, I mean, I started work on the farm for Mr Roy Wortss, Bray Farm, as a boy of 14 and, um, I used to come through Hickling in the summer to get the milk 'cos his cows used to be all on the marshes down Eastfield. Now I'd a little pony and cart, and used to come down about quarter to seven every morning through Hickling and collect all the milk cans up and has to bring them back to the farm 'cos the lorry wouldn't go down the road.

And I done that for several years. I used to work in his farmyard, looking after all the animals, feeding the animals, the chickens and we had thousands of chickens, and everything, and, er, and then, of course, my dad died.

My dad and my brother just come out the war and, er, my dad used to do all the dykes, all round through Hickling and right down to Waxham and Ingham. And there was 13, we used to get paid 13 and a half mile o' dyke. We used to get 22 shillings a chain for doing both sides and cuttin' the weed all out the middle and trimming them all off and leavin' them neat. And I don't think they were touched after we finished.

And, er, well no I actually finished, well why I finished was because they wouldn't put the money up. I had to have a decent wage to keep, this was a council house and everything and I had to have a good wage and my daughter, she cost a lot.

Anyhow I left and, er, I went to a flour mill at Stalham and that's pulled down now. I been, well I done 12 years and then they - we were made redundant and they pulled the mill all down, sadly.

And then I went through Crane Freuhauf at North Walsham, in the factory and, er, me and a chap, we used to do maintenance in the factory like, all round the factory. Concreting, bricklaying, and all sorts and, er, I think that's the best job really I ever had.

But, er, my brother and I, when we took over, how sad we were that dad died – my brother and I, we used to go reed cuttin' at Horsey, for Major Buxton and we used to cut reed from just after Christmas till about April, till the young stuff grew. Then we used to haul sugar beet for Mr Worts and help him for harvest. Then we'd start dyking and HW COUGHS we used to be reed cuttin', you know, with a scythe, we allus had to have a scythe. You weren't allowed a machine, Mr Buxton wouldn't have a machine, because on account of frightening the birds. He was a very big bird man and HW COUGHS if we

found a bird's nest he used to give us a pound or depending on the sort it was we'd have two, two pounds. HW COUGHS.

Then we used to, then we used to catch coypus and skin 'em, and sell the coypus for Horace Friend at Wisbech for making fur coats. HW COUGHS AGAIN Oh, dear HW LAUGHS.

ALK: *How did you catch those coypu?*

HW: Traps. Yeah.

I think that's my flu injection. HW COUGHS

ALK: *Do you need a drink? Do you want a glass of water or something?*

HW: No, that, that don't seem to shift or anything. If I talk that seem to, yeah ...

ALK: *Take your time.*

HW: And, er, we used to reed cut, you see, and, er, we used to get 6d a bunch and that used to go by the fathom what they used to call the fathom and, er, what they called five bunches had to make 6 foot round 'em and that's why they used to call them a fathom. But some places they used to do 6 bunches for the fathom.

And, er, we used to, you know, reed cut – that was at -----(?) Marsh, just joined at the Hickling marshes and me and my brother used to cut on there 'cos that was nearer for us. Well, then when we finished that we used to have to a boat and cross, Meadow Dyke and, er, cut on the main marshes on the Meadow Dyke and we used to have to leave our bikes at Billy Nudd's Mill, the old Stubb Mill, you know – used to have to leave our bikes down there and, er, we used to cut reed then 'til what they call the young colt come through. Soon as it come through we used to have to pack up.

Then we'd go to Mr Watts's (?), hoeing sugar beet and, er, sort of working on the farm and my dad used to thatch, done his house, capped it and all 'cos he, my dad, could thatch and all that and me and my brother used sort of to try and thatch for Mr Watts (?) and, er, then we'd start dykin', we'd start dykin' roughly, just, um, after the summer like.

After harvest we'd help him with the harvest and then we'd start dykin'. And we used to start down at Whiteslea, we'd start from Whiteslea and work our way around. We used to come through Coleman's place and work out Hickling Street, go right down to the back of the butcher's shop, what used to be there. And then we used to go back to what they call the 12 Foot and work round the 12 Foot till we come to Bothy's Mill. You've heard of Bothy's Mill, have you? That other mill, Eastfield Mill, and how we used to go as far as Bothy's Mill and go up his outlet till Waxham Cut.

Then we used to come back and catch the dykes all opposite side of the road on the land that belonged to Hickling Hall – Mr Borrett used to have the Hickling Hall then – and we used to do the dyke all through there, and we used to go down to Waxham Long Course where Miss Pollis lived – you know Miss Pollis?

ALK: *I didn't know her, but I know who you mean.*

HW: And, er, that was terrible round there. 'Cor, brambles and, course, she wouldn't let no one go near her school. She knew us, and actually my dad and my brother.

She had a big badge cut out in the middle of the marsh – you heard of that? – well my dad and my brother, they cut a lot of that out for her, what they call hoved it out and, er, anyhow, me and my brother used to get as far as her place and then we'd go the other side of the road and go back of the Mound Farm, and go right round Ingham and down to Calthorpe and that then.

That were, that was 13 and a half mile we used to get paid. And that was all hand work.

See, my brother he used to do what they call meggin' he had a blade on a long pole, about a 16 foot pole, and I had a scy ..., my scythe blade used to go on about 14 foot and I used to mow the sides up, go in the Dyke and mow the sides up and the top and he used to do all the middle. You know, but, er, ...

ALK: *Was it called a middle?*

HW: Pardon.

ALK: *What was it called again?*

HW: The middle of the dyke.

ALK: *Yeah, but what was that knife thing called that you've got?*

HW: Um, the meg. Yeah, I used to what they call megging. I used to cut along the bottom of the dyke that was a scythe blade...

ALK: *Meg, like Meg, the name Meg?*

HW: No, no, not meg. Well meg is what we call it. Well, yeah, that's how

ALK: *Never heard it before.*

HW: You haven't, no.

ALK: *Not meg.*

HW: Well that's, that's the old Norfolk dyke man's

ALK: *Goes along with didling...*

HW: Yeah, that's right. Didling an' all, you see. And then, course, sometimes in the summer time when we'd finished hoein' if Mr Watts(?) had a dyke on the marshes where the cows had trod it all into the sides, we used to go what they call hoverin' – we used to have a blade, what they call it? A shore cutter, a blade and cut down the sides, then we used to have to block it like and comb it out. You know, that was hard work that was. Yeah, hoverin'.

ALK: *Doesn't sound very hover like...*

HW: Pardon?

ALK: *It was quite hard work for hovering!*

HW: Cor, hoverin' was, yeah, sure, yeah. But, er,

ALK: *And that left you with clear sides?*

[Transcribers note: the various tools used in dyke (deek) maintenance were a 'mearger' (a long-handled scythe), a 'didle' (a long handled shovel), a 'shore cutter' (knife) and a 'crome' (rake)]

HW: Pardon?

ALK: Left you with vertical clear sides.

HW: Oh yeah, yeah. But you see, and then talking about these sides, these coypu used to create big holes. 'Cos I mean the biggest one I ever caught weighed 22 lbs and I think I got about £3 for the skin and actually when you skinned them you had to skin 'em down to the middle of the back because their teats were on the back, not their tummies.

That's the fur on the tummy they want, and, er, they used to cut him right from his nose right through to his tail and pack 'em up and send 'em to Horace Friend at Wisbech.

In fact I never thought I got, I still got some of the bills upstairs, yeah. 'Cos we never throw nothing away, do we?

Lot of papers and that. In fact that drawer, I had to clear that out the other day. That was full of magazines and....

ALK: Well, that's a very good start and now we'll go back to the beginning of your life and fill in a bit if we can. So, you were saying before what house you lived in, where were you born exactly?

HW: Er, in Sutton Street. Yeah. They were old cottages, they're all pulled down now and, er, that was, that's now been 93 years ago, and here's a photograph of me there, look. There's an old dyke there, and there was old bed soil that blocked that old dyke.

ALK: Setting you off in the way you were going to continue. Lovely. I don't know what you're doing quite.

HW: Pardon? Um, I, I weren't quite a year old then.

ALK: No.

HW: 'Cos, when I was a year old...

ALK: You were tiny!

HW: When I was a year old we moved from there, to Goose Lane in Sutton.

ALK: And who was there when you arrived? Who was in the house when you were born?

HW: Well, just my mum. 'Cos, you see, my dad, he went to sea nearly all his life, he was a trawlerman.

ALK: What was your date of birth? When were you born?

HW: 1927.

ALK: 1927.

HW: May the 16th, 1927.

ALK: And he wasn't there when you were born?

HW: No, I shouldn't imagine. I can't remember that. BOTH LAUGH

ALK: So, you don't remember him much?

HW: Pardon?

ALK: Do you remember him? What's the first memories of your dad?

HW: Oh, my dad. Well of course, since the war come along they had to finish trawlin' didn't they? All the boats, the fishing boats had to pack up and, er, that's when he started marshin' and that, you know. And, er, but he used to be goin' to Scotland a lot. Iceland, he'd be trawlin' around Iceland, just after the First World War. Course, he was actually in the First World War ...

ALK: And the Second?

HW: Well, no. Well, Home Guard in the Second. In the Home Guard. But, um...

ALK: What were you doing then?

HW: What, me? I was a boy working on the farm. I used to have to work seven days a week.

ALK: But you must have been to school shortly before that.

HW: Oh school, yeah.

ALK: School.

HW: Yeah.

ALK: Tell me about school.

HW: Well, I used to go to the little village school there at Sutton, with all my friends. And, I think, sadly there's only I think about one, well my brother and about one of 'em left now. Yeah.

ALK: What do you put your long life down to?

HW: Hard work. Always worked.

ALK: The love of a good woman.

HW: Well, well yeah, I mean, we, we always have ----- (?). Main thing, we've always shared everything, haven't we?

Mrs W: Yeah. And argued.

HW: Yeah. You could say, never quarrelled. We ain't actually sort of had bad quarrels, but we tell each other off sometimes.

ALK: Where did you meet?

HW: You ask my wife.

ALK: No, because I'm interviewing you.

HW: Well, we met in a pub. She come down to the pub with her mum and dad.

ALK: Very good. What here in Sutton?"

Mrs W: Stalham.

HW: The Harnser. Stalham Harnser, yeah. And, er, I took her home and that was the beginning of that wasn't it?

Mrs W: Yeah.

ALK: That's one that's lasted...

HW: I mean, we've been married about 63 years, something like that. We lived here over 60, yeah.

No I don't know all about shiftin' about and I mean most of my mates all kept here, we all kept here. Yeah.

ALK: Do you know Doddo?

HW: Yes, lovely, yeah.

ALK: Yeah.

HW: Yeah.

ALK: He's done a great recording for me.

HW: Yeah. Good. Yeah.

ALK: He went on the trawlers didn't he, on the drifters?

HW: Yeah. On the drifters Doddo did, herring fishing out o' Yarmouth.

ALK: Yeah.

HW: Yeah. Yeah, he's a good old boy. Yeah.

ALK: And he did, he did stuff on the marshes as well.

HW: Yeah, he was reed cuttin', him and George, um, ...

ALK: George?

HW: Newman.

ALK: Yes, exactly. Nukes.

HW: Pardon?

ALK: Nukes. He's talked to me as well. I've got Nukes.

HW: Have you?

ALK: Yeah, bless him.

HW: Yeah, I knew all the bog men. My eldest brother used to play football for Hickling before the war.

ALK: Ah, Nukes was a great footballer.

HW: Yeah, but my eldest brother, he played for Hickling like Bob Nunn and all them, they used to call, Stanley Nudd and -----(?).

Then Ludham wanted him to play so he went and played for Ludham and then soon as the war broke out. War broke out on the Sunday and on the Monday he went and volunteered for the Navy, and they said "Have you had any sea experience?" He said "Well, no, not really."

So they said “well, we’ll call you when we want you.”

And they did. They called him ---- (?) and I’ve got a big photograph of the 9th Norfolk’s when they then paraded in front of King George VI on Norwich Thorpe Station – it’s a big photograph on the stairs there. Course, all my three younger brothers, they were all in the forces, they actually all fought in the war.

ALK: *Yeah.*

HW: Course, my brother who still live at Stalham, he got a blast and all that and he can’t hear. He used to have to go to hospital every six months and have treatment for it.

ALK: *How many of you were there?*

HW: Five. There was me and my three brothers and a sister.

ALK: *Poor girl. Where did she come?*

HW: Well, she was... My brother, eldest brother – he was about 14 years older than me, just over 14 years older than me, and then the sister was about 10, then my other brother I think was about 7 and my brother who lives at Stalham, he’s about – nearly 4.

ALK: *There’s the two of you now?*

HW: There’s only two left, yeah.

ALK: *Yeah. Yeah.*

HW: Yeah, but, um, that’s how it go isn’t it?

ALK: *Did they all survive the war?*

HW: Oh yes, they survived.

ALK: *Amazing ‘cos those Norfolk, that Norfolk Regiment, that had a bad time.*

HW: Yeah, but actually my brother wasn’t in the Norfolk’s all the while. They wanted signallers in the Navy – for D Day - so he volunteered and he got out the Norfolk’s into the Navy and they were shovin’ ‘em out to France and each signal on the bridge and take it on a bit, they took him to Malta.

He spent it in hospital in Malta, he spent about 3 months in the Malta hospital.

But my other brother, he got hit out in Italy. He was in Italy. In Italy he was at Cassino – ‘cos they got a special award, didn’t they, for Cassino

ALK: *Sure he deserved it.*

HW: Sure. Yeah. But, I suppose actually well actually there was none on ‘em dropped in Sutton, but when I was a boy then goin’ to school, well wasn’t goin’ to school I was a boy that come from school, we’d finished. Me and my friends, we’re flying up Goose Lane, a German plane he come over, he dropped 4 bombs that side of the houses and 3 this. And there weren’t one land in Sutton. The field they dropped in is just in Ingham, and the field they dropped in this side is just into Stalham.

Yeah. Then they went on and hit The Grebe and the baker’s shop in Stalham and killed the baker and his daughter.

Yeah, yeah. Of course actually we were boys – I, I, I was about, I dunno, about 12, I suppose, something like that, and we ran and got the shrapnel. 'Cos that was a dull old horrible evening like, about 5 o' clock and we went and got, found some shrapnel. And that was hot and these poor old fellers who'd retired, they come and told us, they said "Come on or he might come back and machine gun you." Yeah. But I, we never thought nothing about that. We got the shrapnel. Oh dear!

ALK: *There's a story. Did anything else happen that you remember in the war?*

HW: **Not really. There wasn't nothing much excitin' there.**

ALK: *But you left school?*

HW: **I left school, um**

ALK: *You should have gone to Stalham*

HW: **No, I didn't. Because Stalham hadn't quite started then, you didn't have to go to Stalham then. So, I finished at Sutton and, er**

ALK: *Where would you have gone?*

HW: **I'd have gone to Stalham school. Yeah.**

ALK: *But you didn't?*

HW: **No. Because when you were 11...**

ALK: *Yeah.*

HW: **You used to have to go to Stalham School, do you see?**

ALK: *Yeah. So, you left school when you were 14?*

HW: **I left when I was 14. The war finished on the 8th of May and my 18th birthday was on the 16th of May, so that war in Germany that finished just before I was 18.**

But, anyway I tried to get in the Navy but my eyes – course when I went to school I used to have to wear glasses...

ALK: *Yes.*

HW: **...and my eyes were so bad and they wouldn't pass me. But, um, what caused that, they said, was I had the measles.**

ALK: *Yeah.*

HW: **Yeah, and I had to be in a black room, blacked out room for, I dunno, about 3 or 4 weeks. Yeah. But that's how, that's how life go, innit?**

Yeah, yeah, they were funny old days but they seemed better than these ones, 'cos there's no-one seems to know what Brexit is!

ALK: *It's worse than measles.*

HW: **That is I think, yeah!**

ALK: *It affects people's vision.*

HW: **Yeah.**

ALK: *So they can't see straight.*

HW: But, er, I had bad eyes. That was my right eye, I was, um... My left eye can see pretty good but I just couldn't see anything with my right eye. And I, my mother used to have to take me when I was a schoolboy to Mr Hayden's at Yarmouth, the Eye Specialist, and I used to have to go, I think, about every 6 months, because they used to have to pay then, didn't they?

And that cost quite a bit. Well, then there was an optician like, come to Stalham, named Sargant, Mr Sargant, and he examined my eyes and he said, he said "Where you been going to?".

I said "Mr Hayden's at Yarmouth." Well, he said "I worked for them once." He said "I don't remember you." "No" I said "It was a ----(?) lady treated my eyes."

And, em, he treated my eyes. He said glasses aren't doing no good. "Well" I said "Mr Hayden allus give me glasses". He said "yeah, 'cos they sell 'em."
HW LAUGHS He said "That's the muscles in that eye."

And he said to go your doctors and he told me to sort of get some tablets, so I don't know what name it was, the tablets were, tablets. He said "Take these tablets for a while." I took these tablets, one a morning it's practically gone, and I mean to be truthful, I've got perfect sight now: I can see that smoke going up that chimney with both eyes. And, er, my eyes are almost perfect. You see, so that was lucky he come to Stalham.

ALK: *It was.*

HW: Yeah, but...

ALK: *Were you well otherwise, apart from your eyes. Did you get any other bad illnesses?*

HW: Well, I can remember...

ALK: *Broke things, or anything?*

HW: I can remember me and my friend, we had the mumps. When we were about 14, I think, one of our mates had the mumps, and he didn't say nothing. He kept playing with us 'cos he didn't have it bad but me and my mate, that affected both, we both had bad ears after that, yeah, for a long while, yeah.
HW LAUGHS.

Yeah, and then, of course, we used to, once like sort of old enough, I used to go with another chap round the pubs playing the accordion. And we used to go round these different pubs – Cantley Cock, Stokesby Ferry and all different pubs.

And we used to, a chap used to take us in a little Austin 7. We used to be 3 in the front and 3 in the back. Well, I used to sit in the front, in the middle on a board and a cushion and the chap who drove used to say when he wanted to change gear, he used to say, I used to change the gear, and he said "Up one or down one?". Coo, we'd have been locked up now wouldn't we?

And he was a big chap and he used to smoke a big old pipe and, er, he could drink anything they give him. He walk..., he used to walk out the pub as straight as he walked in and he used to drive home – never did have no trouble.

Yeah, sure, they were funny old days, yeah. But, er, actually now Mr Hadley come – he live at Chelmsford - and he come over and see me about the old singers – used to be down at the Sutton -----(?), Charlie Chettleborough and Elijah Bell and, er,

ALK: *The singers?*

HW: Singers, yeah. These old Norfolk singers, he knew old Norfolk singers, but he, he'd bring me a lot of photographs he did get, and he'd blow 'em up

ALK: *To name them?*

HW: That's right, yeah, oh yeah! I got some here.

ALK: *Were you a singer?*

HW: Huh, when I was a boy you used to be in the choir.

ALK: *Here?*

HW: Yeah, church choir, yeah I got a pile of magazines, what are they, about 1926?

My cousin when he passed away he left me, oh, I don't know how many, you could hardly lift 'em, a big pile of old local magazines of Hickling, Sutton, Stal..., not Stalham – Waxham Deanery that was called.

Yeah. All Waxham Deanery and they were all, sort of, fairly big magazines.

ALK: *Ray likes those.*

HW: Yeah, he's seen 'em. Yeah, he put 'em all in order. I think in order for us.

Mrs W: *Yeah, he put 'em in order for you.*

HW: 'Cos my niece, she'd like to have them, and you know, so they'll probably go to my niece and that. 'Cos my niece, me sister's daughter, used to go to the little school here. Well, there was a bit of a problem when they went for the 11+, they said she'd failed, but she'd allus been top of the class. My brother in law, he wouldn't stick for that. So he got in touch with Lincoln Rolfe (?).

He said "I demand to see her papers." "Oh" he said "We can't show you 'em." He said "We can't."

"Well" he said "I'll go to my MP then." "no." he said "We'll give her another chance." So, they give her another chance and she went through and she finished up at Durham University.

ALK: *Great.*

HW: And she finished her career at Chatham, Head Teacher of a big school at Chatham, 800 pupils under her, and when she finished they had a photograph – oh, it was longer than that one³.

Yeah. Well my brother's two grandsons, they're schoolmasters. And his granddaughter was a schoolmistress, yeah.

There's me sat here – as thick as a cloud.

ALK: *The University of Marsh Men. You and Harry Nudd*

HW: Yeah! That's right, yeah.

ALK: *Could have done anything...*

HW: But, goin' back, talkin' about marshin'...

ALK: Yes.

HW: ...there's a lot of people actually think you just pick a scythe up and reed cut.

You don't. You see when, when we used to get in the marsh to cut the reed you have to pick, you know, the nice reed, like, you see, one year old reed – they call the single wale, and two year old they call the double wale.

Well, you normally didn't cut single wale 'cos that wasn't thick enough, you know, make the bunches, you always cut double wale, you see, and when we used to get there we used to look at the feather on the reed, you know, what they call the feather on the reed to see if that was blown and my brother and I, we used to always mow, mow just slightly off headwind and mow the first what they call swathe on the reed.

And when we walked home, you know, at night to come home, as we walked through we used to feel the reed and where that would tie, we used to mow a bunch of that and just leave it and pick it up the next morning when we went back.

'Cos you had a board, used to have a board you used to thump the reed on to, and a little rake, you used to have to dress it all out and, you know, so that was nice and neat and tidy and, er, course, er, Mr Dove at Horsey, he used to be the foreman for Mr Buxton and then there's the gamekeeper, Mr Greaves, and Mr Greaves he used to look after all the sort of bird life and that.

ALK: *Tell me about the birds and things that you saw when you were out there.*

HW: Well, we used to see the old Montagu Harriers and, er, what they call the Reed Pheasant, the Bearded Tit, and little, little reed warblers and all them. We used to see all them and, um. Course, actually if we sort of found a nest and that was good reed we wouldn't say nothin' until we'd cut that good reed. No, we'd cut the good reed out, then we'd tell 'em and he used to give us either a pound or a couple o' pound, that depend upon what value that was and, er, his – well, Mr Greaves used to bring us the money.

Used to tell him because he lived in the little bungalow didn't he? On the right as you come in from, er, Martham rather than Horsey. He lived in that little bungalow on the right hand side. Mr Dove, I think, lived down the Church Road. Course we went and lived over there didn't we?

Mrs W: Yeah.

HW: In a big, old thatched cottage. They wanted me to go and live over there, you see, and do the reed cuttin' and that. I said "I can't come here, there's nothing, no shops or anything", and I mean, you had to get to hospital with Carol, didn't you?

Mrs W: Yeah.

HW: Our daughter, you used to take her take her to hospital every little while....

Mrs W: For a check up.

HW: Yeah, 'cos I mean that's the last place on earth, Horsey. That's the next step is the North Sea...

ALK: *So, you never thought of moving to Hickling then?*

HW: **Oh, no, no, No.**

ALK: *But you did a lot of work round Hickling?*

HW: **Oh, I done a lot of work round Hickling, me and my brother and... I mean, you know, I know no end of Hickling people – there were Beales's, Nudds and Lamberts. Yeah Yeah. Yeah. Poor old Mike, he lived in his little hut there. Old Ben Lacey, he used to live on a little boat there, him and his dog, Popeye. I've got a photograph o' him somewhere here.**

ALK: *I think he taught my uncle to tie knots.*

HW: **Oh yes, sailor's knots you mean, do you, or?**

ALK: *Well, rope knots.*

HW: **Rope knots.**

ALK: *Phillipps, Brian Phillipps. Did you know him?"*

HW: **Pardon?**

ALK: *Did you know him? Brian Phillipps, Bob Phillipps.*

HW: **No, I can'....**

ALJK: *He was in the Home Guard for a bit.*

HW: **No, I can't remember. No.**

ALK: *But he was out in the harvest a lot. But you probably didn't do the harvest in Hickling, did you?*

HW: **No. No harvest in Hickling. But my father and my brother, Jack Warnes, he used to live in Hickling.**

ALK: *Oh, yeah.*

HW: **In the old thatched cottages up there.**

ALK: *Mmmm. He went shooting. He went shooting with them.*

HW: **Yes.**

ALK: *I've got a picture of him.*

HW: **Have you? Yeah. 'Cos, um, a chap who was in the Home Guard, I worked with a chap who was in the Home Guard, was in. And, er, he said one Sunday mornin' they were down again, just past Borrett's farm on the marshes there. And he said there was a hare got up and he said, yeah, he got his rifle and shot it.**

And, 'cos he said the officer come down and said what was that ----- (?) and he said "Yeah, Mick shot a hare". Oh, he said. He said "Where did you get your ammunition?" 'cos they had a rifle and no ammunition didn't they? Yeah, so he said "Well, my lad bring it out the army for me."

He said, he told me, he said that's no good having a gun if you ain't got ammunition, and so he sort of quietened down and, you know.

'Cos old Jack, he, he swore a lot, you know and chew

ALK: *Baccy.*

HW: **Cor, he used to chew baccy, yeah, and drink beer.**

ALK: *What did he shoot?*

HW: **A hare.**

ALK: *It **was** a hare.*

HW: **A hare, yeah.**

ALK: *What was it doing in the marsh?*

HW: **Well, they, the old hares are round about on marshes, land don't you see. A hare will roam anywhere really.**

ALK: *Yeah.*

HW: **You see.**

ALK: *There weren't a lot of reeds, were there, then?*

HW: **Oh, no, not among the reeds. No it was on the grass marsh, yeah.**

ALK: *Where the cattle are?*

HW: **Yeah, that's right, like, yeah. Yeah, 'cos of course he was a hard 'un. Jack used to go to sea in the old sailing boats where they used to have to tow 'em two or three out the harbour at a time, when they went herring catchin'. Well, he was on them old boats. No, I mean they were hard, weren't they.**

But my dad never did, my dad when he started, he started on a, you know, steam boat. And he was on the, when the First World War broke out and, er, they wanted him in Scotland, minesweeping. On a boat called the Ocean Plough, and they're minesweepin'.

And, of course, the Dutch weren't at war then, the Dutch were neutral and the Dutch fishermen come and laid mines all round the harbour. And there was 5 boats he said went out, like in their boat, and how they got free, and he, they put him on a , they wanted to crew big, big luxury liners for hospital ships in France.

So he said they asked for volunteers so he said we should write, we'll volunteer so that they could get crews for 'em. And, of course, once they got crews then my dad he, he went, er, abroad on a boat, um, um, they sort of dropped spies, they used to drop spies... He was actually in the Secret Service, like, and, er, my niece who live at Chatham, she wanted to find out, you see, all about my dad's and that. And she couldn't.

ALK: *Mmm., it was secret.*

HW: **She went to Chatham and they said no, they don't know nothing about 'em. Well, she said he must've been at Chatham in the Navy so they said And she come down to Norwich and went all around and then she went back to Chatham. She wasn't sort of high up at Chatham. And she said my dad was, grandad was in the Navy.**

He said well what it is, he said he was in what I call the Secret Service and they won't release these things till 100 years, after 100 years, and so, er, he wrote her a letter and told her, he said If you go to London and see this

captain, he'll help you. Of course she went and of course he told her, he said we can release some of it now 'cos he said that's almost 100 years and so, 'cos her husband – I think he got a bit fed up o' travellin' about, 'cos they were travellin' all over the ----- (?).

But , er, course, she sort of made a family recording of all my mother's side and all my dad's side and that.

ALK: *So, she recorded you?*

HW: Yeah, me and my brother, yeah.

ALK: *Lovely.*

HW: 'Cos actually one of my mother's uncles – he was a Police Inspector and he finished up at Smallburgh, then he moved to Cawston, yeah.

And, of course, we're small but, er, one of our grandsons he's about, what's he? He's 16. He's about 6 foot 3, and the other great grandson he's about 6 foot odd. Then one of my grand...., my boy's son, he were about 20 stone and my boy, he must weigh 18. The boy, when he was a young boy, he was as thin as a rake.

ALK: *Yeah. Well that's a big change isn't it?*

HW: Well he used to dredge, drive a dredger on the rivers, you see and, er, ----- (?)

And, of course, he's got 4 dogs, 4 spaniels, 3 cats and he got a wild cat he call "Bandit". And old Bandit, he probably go away for 2 or 3 days and then he come back. And they all sleep together don't they?

The dogs, cats – they just all lay there together and we go over and they always come and greet you and then they go and lay down and they lick each other, don't they? Dogs lick the cats and that.

ALK: *So, we're, um, coming towards the end, 'cos I think I'm going to exhaust you. How have things changed then? How have things changed in the marshes, around Hickling, 'cos obviously the focus is Hickling...*

HW: Oh, have they changed...

ALK: *Over your lifetime what's changed?*

HW: I don't think, I don't know what the dykes were ever done after me and my brother finished.

But, my eldest brother – him and a chap, Tom Gower, I dunno if you knew Tom, or heard of Tom? Tom used to drive the dredger and my brother used to be with him and weed out. They used to dredge sort of round the dykes. But I don't think anyone ever done the dykes by hand after we finished.

ALK: *Were you involved in the Drainage Board?*

HW: Well, well actually Mr Worts (?), he was Chairman of the Drainage Board and he, he used to do all our wages and everything. His wife used to do all our tax and everything and even when we were reed cuttin', she used to do all our tax for us. Mr Buxton, you see, he used to -----(?) on the first of the month (?) He used to tell her what we got and she used to do our tax and all that. And so actually we were on Mr Worts's books more or less all the while and because,

you see, if he got in a muddle (?) we used to hoe his sugar beet with all the other chaps or at harvest and that we'd go and help him in the harvest. If he, sort of, wants jobs done he'd just come and tell us and we'd leave off and go and do the jobs and that.

ALK: *So, there's not really anybody doing what you were doing, do you think?*

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

ALK: *Its gone.*

HW: Its gone. That's all gone. You see, like Hickling Broad. These old boys used to reed cut all around Hickling Broad and all that. But now they say, what is it, the storm was it that destroyed it.

Well, that's silly to say that 'cos every year they used to cut and it used to grow back, so how do it destroy it?

And up at, up at Waxham there used to be what they called bean weed – that's a weed with a little black seed on it and the ducks, cor, the ducks used to feed on that and we used to go there mornings sometimes, I reckon there was easy a hundred ducks, used to just fly off out the dyke.

And , er, oh, vipers. Cor, that was a terrible place for these old vipers – Waxham, cor. When that had been a lovely day we used to walk across a long old wall and you'd see probably nearly a dozen old vipers lay in a heap on top of the wall.

And we used to take a spade and clout 'em, yeah. We had to kill 'em 'cos there was so many.

My brother sat once on a bunch of reed like this. "Cor" he said "something moved about my head." I said "Just keep you still that's an old viper." I said "Sit you right still", I said "He'd slide down." Yeah.

ALK: *And he did.*

HW: Yeah. Oh, yeah. But, Kreese (?) – the gamekeeper for Mr Buxton – he told us that he'd had his dog bitten twice. 'Cos he said to us that you allus want to carry a little bottle of whisky with you. He said and if you get bitten take a swig of whisky then get to the doctors, 'cos he said that's shock what actually take you. He said if you take that whisky that stop the shock and he said he allus carried a bottle.

I finished up at Herbert Woods's boatyard at Potter Heigham and there weren't the vipers there but they allus had a drop or two of whisky.

ALK: *What were you doing there?*

HW: Well, I went there as a gardener, sort of handyman, but one of the chaps worked on the yachts, paintin' and varnishin' the yachts and that.

In the winter he said to the foreman "Can't he come along o' me, on the yachts?" He said "He can't do the gardenin' in the winter.", you see. "Well, yes," he said, "certainly." So, he taught me how to varnish the yachts, how to caulk the yachts all up and everything.

Yeah, to be honest I had a very varied life.

ALK: *And what do you do now?*

HW: Well, a bit o' gardenin' when I can, don't I?

Do a bit o' gardenin' or have a sleep...

I cut my lawns, don't I?.

ALK: *Very good.*

HW: Cut my hedges. No, my grandson he cut the hedges last time 'cos I, my back isn't too good.

*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...*