

Thorne & Hatfield Moors Oral History Project

Interview with: Brian Hibbard

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Interviewer: Lynne Fox

This is Lynne Fox for the Thorne and Hatfield Moors Oral History Project, It's the 8th September 2006 and I'm talking to Brian Hibbard, who, you worked for Scotts?

Yeah, I work for Scotts and I'm doing the restoration programme at the moment.

The restoration programme on, which...

Swinefleet Moor, Thorne and Swinefleet, Goole Fields area.

What I wanted to start off by asking you was to give me some information about, really about your childhood, because I know that you've, you've had an association with the moor for a long time. Can you tell me where you used to live, where your parents lived when you were born and when you were small?

Well I was born in Moorends and we lived at Thorne but when we was, I was eight years old I believe we moved to Creyke's Sidings and lived in one of the houses that belonged to Fisons Horticulture at the time.

And how was it that you came to live in one of those houses?

Because me dad worked for Fisons and he got the house cheap rent, or it was part of the job if you like, provided they lived there that way.

Right, can I ask you when you were born?

Nineteen, 30th June, 1955.

Right, okay and what did your dad do at Fisons?

Me dad used to dig peat basically in the winter and through the spring and summer they used to dry it and through a process of drying it and stacking it for the gangs to work in the winter to grind the peat for whatever they were using it for.

And where did your dad come from originally?

Me dad was from Moorends, pit village, his dad worked down the pit.

And had, had your dad worked on the moors all his working life?

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I believe his first job was farm worker and then he moved to work for British Moss Peat as it were, probably then at the time. Just 'cause it were better money really, basically.

And did he dig peat by hand?

Yes.

Can you describe that? Can you remember him doing that?

Yes, I can remember him doing it 'cause I spent all me childhood on the moors in the summer with me mum 'cause she used to help him do work. We just to go, and me dad used to dig it and me mother used to help him carry it out to dry ready for the next operation a few months later.

So is there a particular time of year when he would have been..?

Yeah, you dug it in the winter, when it was frosty and cold and laid it out and then when it turned March time, they would start and do the reworking to dry it and then towards end of summer stack it and what they didn't use that year would be restacked upon, or storage or for extra stoke for future times.

So did your dad dig it on his own?

No, there would be, I don't know, I guess about fifteen, twenty at different times, digging it.

But he worked on his own digging the thing and then, did, he would dig it out and what, put it on the side?

Dig it out and lay it out to dry yeah. Yeah, they worked by their self because it were piece work, it was their own plot if you like.

So when you say he worked for Fisons, he actually was working..?

No, British Moss then.

Yeah, yeah. Was he an employee and they paid him piece work or did he work for himself and they paid?

No, he was full time employee, they weren't all but the gravers and that were full time employees. If they got rough times, like in 1963, when they had that really bad winter and it was too, too cold to dig the peat, too frosty to dig the peat, I think that's the only time they got laid off.

And they worked all year round?

Worked all year round, yeah.

And you say your mum went out and helped out?

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Yeah.

Tell me, tell me what she did.

She went, she helped him carry the graving out, sort of, what digging peat were called, she helped him carry it out and in the summertime mostly, especially when kids were on, at school, she used to go and help wall it, dry it, and stack it. 'Cause a lot of it was like women's work, stacking it and drying it if you like. Not really women's work, but lighter work, they could do it. They couldn't dig the peat it were just too heavy going for 'em.

And do you remember going out with them to do that?

Oh yeah, yeah, for, my first memories were of 'em pulling the peat over to dry it and stack it on top of it to re-dry it was, very clear memories of that.

And was it from you being very small?

I think me mother said I was about, maybe just before me first birthday, so I've been going on all me life really.

And how did they control you when you were on the peat?

They used to use the peat blocks to make like a play pen and just box me in there to keep me tied down, if you like, while they were doing other things.

And have you got brothers and sisters or is there just you?

Yes, one brother and one sister.

And did you all, did that happen to all of you?

Not as much as me, but I suspect they did all see a part of it yes.

Are you, are you the oldest?

I'm the oldest yeah.

Okay. Tell me what it was like when you were, when you were young. What was your life like, what, first of all tell me what your house looked like and what it looked like around it.

At Creyke's Sidings you mean?

Mmm.

Difficult to explain really, 'cause it's all changed now, but there warh just in blocks of two, they'd be, two, four, probably be six and the one nearest to the mill was allus the foreman's. So he could have a look, keep and eye on, if there's any fires or anything like that when they went working and, used to be

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a bloke called Danny Vince when I, we first lived there, and he were, he was the foreman of the mill the last time it was open I believe and it was just, be about half a mile away from the moors and it was just, went down an old track, railway track to the moors and that was the entrance from like Rawcliffe, and Rawcliffe Bridge, way for people to get access.

So was it just these six houses all quite isolated?

Yes, they were isolated, well I mean in them, it's a tarmac road now, but in them days it was just an old dirt track, if you like, really. In fact, when we first moved down there there wunt be any running water if I can remember right, it were just, an old well. '63 that, be about 1963.

And was that a well for everybody?

They all had an individual well, but they, just like the farmer would have his own individual well in them times like.

And was it, was there just you three children or was there lots of children in those houses?

The foreman of the day lived next door, although it weren't attached, and he had one girl, who was the same age as me and we used to knock about a bit together, that was the only other kids down there.

So how did you amuse yourself?

Walking round on the moors, playing football, we made a five a side pitch for lads from Rawcliffe Bridge, inside the old mill 'cause it were derelict and we just brushed it all out, used to play football in there when they were rainy days and that like, when we started getting our own football teams. Basically like most lads, just a lot of time spent rambling on the moors really, pushing the old wooden wagons up and down an old horse railway track that no longer exists, I can remember that very clearly.

When you say pushing them you mean, just to mess about or was it..?

Just getting on end of it, running as quick as you can with it and jumping on it, just having a ride up and down until it stops, or until we got tired, whichever come first.

So they weren't that heavy then?

No, they dint seem heavy to push, you could lift, I mean I couldn't then, but an adult could lift 'em on and off quite easily.

Are you talking about the big, big wooden...

Yeah.

Wagons that they loaded up with peat?

Yeah, although they were flat bottom then, the tops had been taken off at that time, used for other things.

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So these are the ones with the slatted sides that we've been talking about?

Yes, yes.

Right. And how old would you be at that time?

Oh dear, went there in '63, tenish, ten, elevenish, something like that.

Where did you go to school?

Rawcliffe Junior School, then later on, Snaithe, Snaithe High School.

Now when you say you've been on the moors all your life, I mean you lived virtually on the moors, but what kind of things did you see on there and what, what was it like on there?

It was vastly different to what you can imagine now, because there weren't the advent of heavy machinery at the time, although it was coming into it, but there were just acre after acre of trees and dense thick growth and bracken and heather and that's basically all it was.

And what did you get up to when you were on the moors?

Just, just walking and rambling about really, and messing about wi' peat blocks, sitting and having like a den in old gang sheds we some o' kids that used to come and play with us at that time. Making dens, basically just being lads.

You weren't, were you into collecting bird's eggs and that kind of thing?

Well we used to go bird nesting and well I'm not sure how relevant that is.

Well, you know, I'm quite interested to know what you, what your interest and what your knowledge of the moors was before you started actually working there.

Yeah, can you stop that a minute?

[Pause]

What, were you, you're, what did you do when you, when you left school then?

Me first ever job was, me dad got me a job with a company, which at first I didn't fancy, but I went to try and, never looked back really, you know, been there ever since I were fifteen. 1970.

I'm just remembering where I was going the, sort of, train of thought. Was, you talked about, you talked a bit before about talking to the old guys and the diggers and so on, was that something you started doing when you were playing on the moors basically, or is that something that came when you started work?

Oh no we used to, used to walk about on moors and we'd nowt to do and sometimes you'd see some o'

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lads working and you stop and talk to 'em and, there were some characters as you can imagine like, and we spent a lot of time wi' them and we did help them a little bit, as much as we could in them days and from, from sort of them on, ten, twelve year old I used to go and help me dad, like me mother did, doing a bit of rework for a bit of extra pocket money, if you like.

And you said you didn't really want to go and do that when you left school?

No, I dint fancy it. Don't ask me why, don't ask me why, maybe it's partly because me dad worked there, you don't always want to go into work wi' your dad do you. But I can remember thinking, it's not for me, that type of work, but I do like the, I do like being outside and working outside, but I just can remember, it's not for me. But that soon sort of went and as I settled in I were more than happy to be part of it like.

Was there anything else that you particularly had your eye on?

Well, when you're a fifteen year old lad and you have, have to leave school at that time of day you really don't know what you want to do, apart from being a footballer or a film star or summat like that! Same as any other daft lad but, no, not really, I was offered, me uncle offered me a job on farm, which, money were crap, I dint want that at all, and there was a van lads job, learn to be a van driver, I was offered that job it were at Dowses and Thorne and I dint fancy that. So it was good money on the peat moor, as people 'ill tell you, if you was prepared to graft, so sort of went for the money to start with but learnt to enjoy what they were doing.

And what was your first job?

The first job, there's a good question, first job was with an old guy called Alf Moffatt and he was learning me maintenance and repair of the railway line, and Alf had served, he must have been in his fortieth year, type thing, at that time. That warh me first job.

And what did you, what did you do? How did that progress?

That progressed into, we, we had a slack time with orders and there weren't as many jobs like that going so they said 'well, do you want to do a bit o' piece work just to fill you in', and piece work appealed to me when I was about eighteen, nineteen because it were a really quick, hard, six hours graft and home. So I went doing a bit o' piece work wi' gang lads and I ended up being in ones o' gangs and, helping as a lad and then when the time come I was offered a job in, 'cause we'd three gangs at the time, and it was a job that not everybody wanted. So I took it, 'cause I were courting, thinking of getting married, or thinking o' buying me house in first place and I ended up being in gang till, the end of the gangs if you like.

What do you mean by the gangs?

The gangs, there used to be a team of men that used to put railway lines down, portable railways down the flats and fill into the wagons with the, straight into the wagons or with a boom, and then we progressed to the smaller, which, like we've talked about and it just progressed right up to the surface milling steaks and then it just all mechanisation, it just went from there.

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And when you talked about being offered piece work what do you mean by that?

Well, when I was learning, being a trainee, to do maintenance repairs, it were only like a day rate job, it was a good job but the big money was piece working, you could basically earn what you wanted, or you could stop as long as you wanted because if you worked you got paid, if you dint work you dint get paid.

But still working on the mechanical side? You're not talking about digging peat?

No, not digging peat, 'cause digging peat were nearly a thing of the past then, but, like if I was on doing the railway line, 'cause it was only an eight hour a day job, but they'd say if anybody wants any walling to make their money up, you could go walling after that job. I went to do some of that to earn extra money, and at weekends and things like that.

When you're talking about gang work, you're talking about working actually on the rails and the mechanics?

The gang work were laying rails off the main track, down the flats for 'em to get the peat that'd been, been dug and stored for the mill to process.

Then tell me how that went on.

That progressed from hand, really heavy hand work, which were a young man's game, which I was in them days, to the advent of mechanical diggers. So we went from like two gangs of six men, down to two gangs of three men and later on they amalgamated both the gangs because it were that much more mechanised into one gang of four or five men.

And you would do whatever needed doing on that side of, that kind of work?

Yeah, we used to do us own fitting work and everything that were done on piece work, basically you had to do your self there were no help in that respect unlike it warh today. Used to do our own repairs, own maintenance, the only thing we did get done was, we had the railway line repaired for us then because obviously you needed outside help in that respect.

So when you turned up at work in the morning, tell me how the day went, what, what would you have to take out with you? How far would you have to go? That kind of thing.

Well we allus used to have a motorbike, and we used to go straight to the job which could be, you know, just say in the middle moors, we'd all arrive, I believe we used to start at seven o'clock, have a drink o' tea and then, some lads would go on and be laying the portable line, while the other lads would be filling behind 'em. Then they would rotate the jobs to give, 'cause some jobs were very easy and some jobs were very hard and they used to rotate it and there were a real, a real good spirit about it all and real good mates, which sadly we lost quite a few of them along.

What tools would you have and how would you get them there?

Tools? Wouldn't really have any tools apart from locomotives, a gang shed, we'd have a few spades

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and picks to put our lines in, the only real tools we'd have would be, we used to have a lot o' wooden blocks 'cause we used to have to build up the railway line to get down into the flats. But tools as such, not really no.

Now you showed me the, the portable fitter's wagon and the fuel thing, was that something you ever used? That's the ones that were like, like little railway trucks.

Well we used to have like two gangs, but the portable fitting shed come more, like, later on when we were doing the surfacing milling and they were vastly moving over the area very quickly.

We might come to that.

Yeah, the surface milling sort of come in the mid '80s and it was a massive change, it was all quick and work this area, and down to next area and then it become more mechanical and we needed a fitter, Peter Barnett was our first fitter, no, George Blanford was our first real fitter, who was more or less in charge of the cutting machines. Then we got Peter Barnett, who, Peter Barnett actually built the first boom on Swinefleet Moor, late '60s and he had the static shed down at the middle moors which no longer exists now. Down near Creyke's Sidings, that dunt exist any more. But when he left and we had a lad that sort of filled in from there to end of it all called Trevor Edwards and he made this metal shed on wheels that they could push with a little old loco that weren't used and they used to just follow people round the working and then if they broke down he was as near as on site to 'em as he could get and it saved a lot of time.

And that's the fitting shed, that's like a tool, that's like a workshop?

That was full o' tools it was, we made it steel and it was welded up and it had real good strong locks on the door so he could put all his welding equipment in, his burning equipment and all his spanners and such like.

And would you leave that on the moor?

We'd just leave that where we're working 'cause it were quite, I mean, it was very secure and it were that heavy nobody were gonna move it.

And that's different from the gang shed?

That's different from the gang shed. The gang shed were full o' stoves and somewhere to boil a kettle, such like, but although that was on wheels so it could be pushed about with the gangs as they moved up and down like.

So you just, you went to where the work was, everything was there?

[Phone ringing]

Excuse me.

You, you want to say a bit more about this metal fitting shed.

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Yeah, it sort of helped us through the transition of the gang works onto the surface milling. It sort of was a two, maybe three, year period, but after that, after the surface milling got underway and become really mechanised and really more intensive, we needed to build a really outstanding fitting shed, if you like, an up to date fitting shed which we still have on Swinefleet Bank top. So although it maybe of interest to you it's like the fleeting in the turns of history of the moors it was a very short, short period of time.

And the one that's permanent the one that you've built is that the one that I've, is that the one that you've given me a photograph of?

Yes, yeah. That sort of covered all the surface milling area, milling areas and that, but, because the moors by that time were more open, more dry, we converted tools at back o' tractor to carry things very quickly, so that fitting shed dint become necessary.

I'll come onto the milling in a minute if that's okay? But I just want to say, so, when, when you were still cutting traditionally, shall we say, whether it was by hand or by machine, you went out there to the place where you were needed to move, 'cause the rails all moved around didn't they?

Yeah we had a, at one time, I believe, we had something in the region of fourteen mile of railway line, made what we call main railway line and the two gangs would have about sixty, seventy chain each of portable railway line and that would be moved up and down the main lines from Medge Hall to Swinefleet, down Goole Fields and middle moor, as and where they wanted it, in other words, where the peat were ready or in stock, dry, for 'em to move.

And you put new line down, presumably you took old line up?

No, it was just what we call portable line, they were light enough to pick up and handle and they'd slot 'em in basically like a railway line, lay 'em on the floor, take the peat out and then start from the back, pick the line up, move the corner, which used to be turntables, and move it to the next flat and they went on right way through the moors doing that.

Okay. What do you mean by flat?

A flat is a, just an area that would work, if you worked an area, like in old days when they'd have worked an area, they'd cut it out, lay it out, dry it and stack it and that would be classed as a flat, and of course you just, just move on doing flats. Might, you could say a flat could cover about twenty two metres wide. That's roughly a flat.

So a flat is the, is the sort of baulk, if you like and the trench that's been dug out?

Yeah, once you've dug the trench out that sort of marked the end of the flat until there were, until you went to the other side of the trench.

Yeah.

And so they could vary in width, but it were just, they just named 'em flats, 'We brought a rail down

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that flat', don't really know why they called it flats.

And that makes sense, 'cause at the end of each flat you'd have a turntable where you could run the, it off the main line, down to the flat, load it up, bring it back onto the main line.

Then you'd pick your line up, move it to the next flat, which, when it first started, you could like get what, what people could physically chuck onto a wagon, which would be, I don't know, ten metres, then after that it sort of become too hard work. So you'd pick the line up and move it and into another flat. Hence the booms, the booms would cover five or six flats in one time. So you would only have to move your line once, rather than six times, if you understand what I mean, so it, it cut a lot of work out, saved a lot of time and effort.

And the booms would, tell me how the booms worked.

Me first recollection of the first boom, they were a chain elevator, and they would have an Honda engine on the incline end, which was just one that you could move up and down from the machine, so you dint, into the wagons, and, an Honda engine, petrol engine at the very far end. So they used to chuck it on at the end and in the middle, and it used to run up to this little elevator that used to then just lift it into the wagons.

And would the, would the boom run the, like down the flats? So that....

You would have to, when you, we'd after go out in front and work out how the boom were gonna fit the flats, so you couldn't just say 'oh we'll', you could just say 'oh you're going there', but if you did that and it worked out that you were missing an odd flat you would have to come back and just put in for one flat again. So you had to work out where your line went and how your boom could run in relationship to the line, so in other words if your line went, you just put your line down and your boom run, we'll just say for argument's sake ten metres and you got your measurements wrong and you got it eleven metres you could have a track in the dyke, so you had to measure out and make sure that the tracks run in relationship to your machine.

And did the boom run along the top of the flats, so that, so that you loaded it up from each flat?

I'm not with you.

Where did you position the boom in relation to the flats?

You've lost me.

You, the, the line rang along the top of the flats didn't it and then down, the main line rang along the top and then...

The main line, they come from the main line and you went straight down the flat, and opposite the line, running parallel to the line your boom would run on another flat, so it wunt run on the same flat it, there might be two flats in-between that, so there'd be like two dykes to jump over and the boom would run down parallel to the line and they'd just put the peat on the boom, into the wagons and just kept working down the wagons.

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Right.

Do you follow that?

I think so, I'll have a think about it!

[Laughter]

And that was, were people still hand graving then or was it graving machines?

Cutters, cutters come on in mid '60s on Swinefleet, mid '60s, but there was occasions, I mean, basically the heavy graving hand work would have stopped at late '60s but I know there warh times in early '70s where they had to bring 'em back because the banks were to narrow for machines to run on. So they had to take 'em out be hand, so some old lads that were still about ended up taking the last of the peat off, just so they got all the flats level to start again, if you like, from the top peat down to the mid peat and the bottom peat.

But did it feel the same, even though you were using machinery did it have the same kind of feel and the operational side of it was very similar from hand digging to machine digging?

Yeah there weren't a, once you'd laid the peat out, I mean there was a difference, but they were still blocks o' peat, you'd could still block the peat, you could still stack the blocks o' peat like you could stack hand blocks 'o peat. They was slightly different in size and shape but it was basically the same apart from it was a lot easier, they used to cover a lot more ground with machinery obviously.

Now we're moving onto the big difference, the big change now, where they introduced milling, can you tell me what that was like from your point of view?

Milling completely changed the way we work, it completely changed a lot o' lads lives in a way, because they went from really hard graft one, not in a week, not in a day or a week, but within a matter of months they went from really hard graft to sat driving machinery. It was a real big change to people, a lot o' people didn't take to it because they been that used to working and grafting they got really bored out o' their head, if you like, sat on machinery and it didn't suit a lot o' people. Apart from the obvious fact that they changed, the landscape changed because it were more intensive, and it, it really changed the operation of the moors altogether.

How did it change?

Well that, if you were working flats they were still, it were still a moor if you like, it were still a lot o' greenery, a lot o' growth, but of course when you opened up for surface milling you'd sort o' level all flats in one. Although we had drainage for surface milling but it were just, looked like a, I don't know, they took all the vegetation away apart from the sides and they would mill every inch. Instead o' taking the, like, the gravers would take four foot six out and they cut at summat like two foot six out, just channels, they worked the whole surface and it, there was a completely, the biggest change we've seen.

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And you say that they kept the drainage around the edges. How big were the areas that were contained within the drain?

Well on Swinefleet, which warh, it was different to Hatfield because Hatfield warh virtually not, not had a lot o' that sort o' work done in an area so it were like just opening a great big field up in Hatfield, but Swinefleet we had to work to old lad's flats, where the flats, they used to dig out and they were smaller, they were smaller sections, if you like, 'cause they left bankings for railways and put railways nearer together so it didn't look as vast as it did on Hatfield.

How come that there was that difference then? Why did they work within like the old landscape within Swinefleet?

Because they'd cut out in blocks in olden days, they cut an area out here and an area out there and it, it, they cut out which were good cutting for 'em and they might, I know they left areas 'cause it were too hard from 'em to cut in middle moor, you know, so they'd just leave it and, so it all got sectioned off into different squares and different little areas. Whereas, if you go on, if you were starting a moor now to do surface milling you'd just put a dyke round it, drain through to your dyke and you'd just open it all up and you'd just use it like they would farming if you like. But Swinefleet was contained a lot more, simply because they had to follow what the old lads did.

And you say that some people made the change and other didn't. Did they actually use the same people who had always worked on the moor to do this new kind of work?

Yeah, I mean, the gang lads were allus the favourites because they were the main workers if you like, that's not being derogatory of anybody else, but they were the main workers, in fact that they did the most production work. They just moved from production of hand work, to production to surface milling work.

And how did your work change then?

Myself, I went from, I was in the last of the gangs, a couple of our lads went from the gang work to drive a Bogmaster, which used to pick the peat up, fill it in a tub and it had a fast track and it used to run it to the side of the line, so that was a big change in itself. That was sort of in-between the gang work as well as the surface milling, if you know what I mean. Then when they went to surface milling they still used the Bogmaster to take the surface milling and run it about, but it become less and less and they had lots of bins and tractors and trailers.

But the lads they'd do, they'd move from that sort of work onto the milling sort of work. But we did go through a period of redundancies because obviously it warh more less intense, less men were needed. But fortunately it was allus people that got to early retirement that wanted the early retirement, if you like. Some of the old lads really couldn't, from going on some of 'em you worked with others, you couldn't imagine some o' the old lads changing to machinery, they couldn't just take to it.

So what were the kind of jobs that were available to you and your fellows in the gang then?

Well myself personally I, the peat that was then put at side o' the lines in big stacks for the surface milling I use to fill onto the main loco that used to take it through to the factory. So a really steady,

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easy job if you like, to what we were used to.

What did you use to do that?

Sorry?

What did you use, how did you get it into the wagons?

By that time we'd gone from the Smalleys, which were our first mechanical diggers to the Hy-macs on Swinefleet and we used Hy-mac excavators to fill the peat with, at first we had grand buckets on them, but we just went to a normal size bucket.

And how did milling operate, what machinery was there that did the work?

Well they called it a miller because the first process of it, once it was all opened up, was to what we call pin mill it and it was just basically like a, a rotivator with very fine pins, but a lot longer, covered a lot more ground and it used to chew the top, I don't know, inch, inch and half up and they would go across it and mill it, grind it all up, leave it to dry. Then we had what we called a set o' spoons that used to come and set it out in very little rows and then we had, a wind row machine that used to come and just drag it into a wind row and the bins used to follow the wind row which were just basically a big trailer we tops on with an elevator that used to run at side o' the row that they'd picked up and it used to just put it straight into the bin.

Is that sucking it up?

No, it was a small elevator that used to go, rotate through hydraulics and it used to just pick up at speed, and it used to just pick it up on this elevator and, I don't know, flaps we used to call 'em, and they used to just spin round and flick it into drum. That was at Swinefleet. At Hatfield they used, what they call an Harvester which were just a long thin belt that used to pick it up like a 'tato harvester if you like, but a lot bigger. Used to pick bigger rows up, it were put in bigger wind rows and just put it straight into tractor and trailer.

I've seen some pictures, I'm not, I think it probably was at Hatfield, it's like blowing it into the, I'm not quite sure it's blowing it into trailers, but certainly blowing it, is that not, did that not happen at Swinefleet?

No, no, I know North America allus used to have like suction harvesters that they'd use to blow it into bins but we never used it in our process. It maybe appeared to be blowing 'cause when it's picked up it's that dry and dusty, it just causes that much dust, it probably looks as through it'd been blown, but it never was on Swinefleet.

And how did it affect, you talked about how it affected the men a little bit and the changes that, that involved. What were the other changes that happened because of the milling? I'm thinking in terms of, you talked about how you, this interim period where you had this portable tool, maintenance shed and then you went into a more permanent maintenance shed and that all came about because of milling, was there anything else that was a major change because of the change in the process?

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No, not really, I suppose, I suppose the biggest change that was to do with the surface milling was the road, the stone road they put through Swinefleet. That was put through so they could run lorries and they could be put into lorries rather than railways, quicker, faster, that type o' thing.

Did they still have the railways or did they just use lorries?

They used both, they used, I mean, we really went intensive then you've got to think, and the plans were to go really, really more intensive which never took off because Hatfield took a bigger scale of it, if you like. But the stone road was a big advent to the surface milling.

Is it, I always think of peat bogs and this is where most people who don't know much about them think of them in term of being very dangerous places, where you could sink in and all that, and I've noticed that, well I'm thinking when you're using a lot of machinery on there, how did that cope with the environment? How did that cope with being on a bog? I'm thinking that you showed me some pictures where the tractor had been slightly adjusted so that it could go on there.

Yeah, the bog is dangerous in its first element, if you like, but when we drain it, really drain it and dry it all out it becomes quite solid. But still you need bigger than average tractor wheels, bigger expansion of tracks on, a normal track machine which might be just, you know ones you see on side o' road, which, I don't know, two foot, these would be four and five foot wide, to cope with the strain, so it spread it's weight, so it wouldn't damage the peat as well at the same time. 'Cause if you broke the dry area you could have real trouble, you could be sometime trying to get back out like, so, they were, machinery was adapted for bog use, rather than land use yes.

'Cause you said something about, you've just mentioned it again in fact, it's not only the fact that the machinery will get stuck or whatever it is, but you said it had an effect on actually the production of the peat for use, when you were cutting it, in particular?

I'm not quite sure what you mean.

Well what I'm thinking of is, you said that some of the big machinery, before it was actually milled and it's still being cut, if you put big machinery on it actually affected the peat.

Yeah, we, at Swinefleet we'd got a machine called Smalley, which is a fraction of the weight. They were really small mechanical diggers, you'll see 'em now digging side o' road, that type o' thing and they were on canvas tracks and they claimed that they were that light they could run over your foot and they did no damage to the structure of the peat, so that the cutting machines could still cut the peat in blocks, are you wi' me?

I am.

Yeah, so, 'cause we did, we did try a track machine, and it were too heavy and it broke the structure of the surface up so we went for these little ones instead.

And what, what effect did that have on actually the digging of the peat?

Well, if, if the weights were squashing into the peat it would make it all, it would not come out in a

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block form, it would just come out more like mud and it wouldn't dry in the block form but of course once, once you went to surface milling it didn't matter because they wanted it all ground up and, the more ground up it was the easier it was for the mills to take. 'Cause the mill had to change its ways from grinding out block peat, to mill peat.

So did, you made the road and so regular lorries could go on there?

Yes.

Right okay. And did, I mean, I've actually been with you onto the moor and it doesn't actually feel quite solid.

No, because we're going through the restoration programme now, we're holding, we're retaining more water and, than we would have retained to do surface mill work, so, when we were surface milling we would drain the moors all the year round. We'd have a pump running so although it was wet in winter the drains were still running and the first sign of spring and the dry weather started to come you were straight on it as soon as possible. So we would retain very little water at all. But whereas now is they're retaining water for restoration purposes, so it has gone back to, very spongy, very boggy. There are parts of the restoration work we've done now that you wouldn't dream of going on with a machine now.

How did it feel like before they brought milling in when you were working on it?

In what way?

How did it feel underfoot?

Well, it's difficult that, because, like I say, it was, there were still a lot of vegetation, you could still walk on dry areas, but where they were digging it was soft, obviously. But when they were digging it by hand it was self channelled, you dig a channel, like we've talked of flats, and the water 'ud run down the flats into the main dykes, but there were still a depth of peat which retained a depth of water, if you like, like a sponge, so it felt different. Whereas the surface milling, dried out, would feel solid. I mean peat in its early forms when, before we start to open it up and dry, you'd put dykes in, you could jump on, you could actually see it wobble like a jelly peat which you will see again now the restoration work's taking place, but you never used to see where the machines were working on the surface milling area, it was more solid.

When I was, when I went on Thorne Moor last year, 2005, I was walking on there and it feels, as you say, quite solid because it's, the restoration work hadn't gone on very long at that point and it was where the track was still there and I could feel that it'd start to vibrate and after a while I could see the locomotive coming towards me, you'd could actually feel it and like you said a jelly.

Yeah, well, I mean even, even when it were dry, but the first, the first locomotive I worked with and it were, we're talking '70s now, it was still a bit more...

[Interruption]

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You said the first locomotive you were working on.

The first locomotive I encountered, you could see going across the moors and you could feel the vibration two mile away because it were boggy and that type o' thing.

Have you ever seen anything lost in the, in the peat?

We've found bombs, we've had Catterick out to defuse bombs, we believe they were dropped from a plane 'cause they'd lost their way from, this is the story, there was lost their way from Finningley to take off to land or whatever, they were just all bog, they thought it were just a bog in them days and they just ejected some out o' way like. I've found three me self, or I've been wi' people that's found three. The first one I ever found were at back o' paraffin mill. We dint know what it warh, but we know they'd been no machinery at the time before us, and somebody said 'We think it's a bomb'. So we called Catterick out and they diffuse, well blew it up actually, but I remember it having Simpsons of London on.

You never actually lost any of your machinery through, through the surface into soft bits?

We, we've never lost, what do you mean stuck?

Well, stuck or completely disappeared or whatever.

We've had Hy-macs that it's took us four days to dig out. We had a cutting machine on Casson Gardens which had a depth of peat at it's time, stuck and we had three machines tied to that pulling that out. So we have lost 'em at different times, yeah. We've left 'em stuck over night, come back next morning and they've sunk about four foot and they've been a real sod to get out to be honest. We've had all sorts like that.

I was talking to the warden at Crowle Moors this morning and he's, he's seen something just disappear basically, it's driven on there and it's just gone. But I understand that Crowle's quite a lot wetter than a lot of the other moors are.

Crowle went back to restoration, oh, must be twenty years back now, but of course they've done all their damming works and it's, it is wet to what it would be to what it was when they was working on it and it would be boggy yes.

Now tell me about the work you do now, since peat extraction's stopped.

Well since, since the agreement between Scotts and English Nature for the buyout I've been in charge of Swinefleet's side, restoration work, last four years now, we're on the last year now. It's all coming together we've about three months work and we'll be finished. We've done a lot o' retaining water, putting bundy walls out to retain water, pipes in, dams in, sheep pail dams in, god know what, lots and lots o' work. Certain drains we've kept open so they can control the water and we're now, we're now on the last throws o' taking the railway tram out.

And when does that come to an end?

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The agreements, we should be done by September the 30th this year.

At the end of this month?

The end of this month and we will be done, yeah. We have a little bit extra work we're doing to just to finish off, above what we should have, the agreement controlled if you like 'cause obviously they see things different to this change, and you know we could do be doing a bit more here and bit more then but we will be done by September, end o' September.

And what change can you see over those four years, in the environment and landscape?

Massive, people wunt believe how the bog has restored. You would have to see, I'm talking Thorne Moors now, not Hatfield, it's nearly, I would say it's ninety percent covered back we cotton grass and within four years there's areas got a good covering of sphagnum moss which is really taking off now. I know they're very, very elated with it, if you like, really through what's happened to Thorne Moors and I've just heard, I can't remember the chap's name, he was on yesterday and he was telling Kevin Ball, Manager, Site Manager at Thorne and Hatfield Moors, that they've found one of the invertebrates that's come back on and he were really excited about it, which he never thought he'd see again. Within four years.

Well thank you very much.

[Recording Ends]