

**Interview with: Brian Hibbard (no.2)**

**Date: 24<sup>th</sup> October 2006**

**Interviewer: Lynne Fox**

Q: This is the second interview with Brian. Brian, you've told me about this--, we've talked already when we last spoke about the general cutting of peat on the moor but there were two special places, or two special customers if you like, that you might not really think of as expecting to want peat. Now, can you tell me about those two?

A: The health spa peat which they used to dig out and send to Harrogate in small quantities, it wouldn't be really massively viable but it was done in the late '40s and '50s. A lad called Alf Moffatt who worked on the moors for 40 years, I know he had summat to do with it because he sort of passed information on to me. The whisky peat--, the spa peat was done from certain areas but the whisky peat wasn't as specialised as that, but it was taken from certain parts of the moors simply because they was working them at that time.

Q: What do they mean by whisky peat?

A: Whisky peat was peat they used to--, as they fermented and did the whisky, they used to flavour it somehow, I'm not really sure how they used to flavour it, but they sort of smoked it into it to give it a certain flavour, and we did that for like ten years, through late '70s, 'til, well, early '70s to start of early '80s. Then that--, that ended simply because we went more on to the surface milling side of it and it wasn't a thing we used to do after that, because it were a dug peat that were sort of semi--, kept semi wet, not fully dry.

Q: Do you think they wanted it from Thorne specifically or do you think they got it from other places as well?

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- A: Well, I know it were a Scottish firm so there must have been something in that, this is just my opinion, there must have been something in it, because they used to keep coming to us from Scotland to Thorne Moor for this whisky thing.
- Q: Do you know who it was?
- A: I don't, but I think--, I'm nearly sure I can find out for you.
- Q: Okay. And the peat that went to the--, the spa peat, as you call it, now you say it was dug in a certain area?
- A: Yeah, it was dug not far from Cassons on what we used to call Medge Hall area. Whether it was dug in that area because they simply worked it at that time and at that time in the '40s and '50s, they were working that area, I'm not really sure, but I do know it was the only area they took it from. Like I said, the old lads used to tell us all about it like, and that sort of just faded away. Whether it because they got it cheaper or there weren't the demand for it as modern life progressed, I'm not really sure.
- Q: And did it--, was it treated in anyway differently to the rest of the peat that was taken off the moors?
- A: I--, that I couldn't really tell you. I know they just used to dig it at the side of the tram, leave it for a little bit of time and then fill it. I know it weren't fully dried out like we used to dry peat out, I guess because with them bathing in it, we assume that's what they were doing, that it needed to be wet and muddy if you like.
- Q: And you say one person used to dig that? Was it always that same person?

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- A: No, no, he's just the person that when I started as a young lad, that told me the story about it and he had something to do with it, I suspect it could have been anybody digging it at the time.
- Q: And one of the other things we talked about last time also was about how the thing--, how the peat was actually dug and the casual workers that were working on the moor there, and you were saying you did--, you used to do some work with those gangs?
- A: Well, there were contract gangs, they weren't really part of us, but they worked for us if you like. I started in 1970 and you could have as many as 50, 60 in the summer, turning the peat over to dry. That come less and less obviously as we got more mechanised and we just sort of worked their way out up to surface milling area there at the time.
- Q: So these will be up to, say, 60 extra people that were just brought in?
- A: Yeah, yeah, when I first started with our--, I think we had 38 regular people on the moors and these 60 would sort of come in the dry time, shall we say, April to September, just working the peat to dry it up for the winter, and then of course, we wouldn't use them through the winter until the following spring.
- Q: And is that just on one moor or is it alto--?
- A: No, no, Hatfield as well, possibly Hatfield would maybe even have more 'cause they was doing it more intense than us at that time, but like I say, Swinefleet, we could have owt up to 40, 50, maybe even 60, depending on what work was doing at any one time.
- Q: And as mechanisation was introduced, how was that--, how did that affect that?

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- A: Well, in terms of effecting the casual labours for turning the peat, they invented a machine, the Germans actually invented a machine called a Ruttler which would shake the walls dry rather than turn them.
- Q: So these are the walls--, the initial walls that are at the side of the bits that have been dug up or cut--, the peat that had been cut that traditionally would have been rewalled, would have been turned upside down to dry?
- A: Yeah, this is all machine cutting and we've gone past--, we've gone past--, when we're talking of casual labour, we're talking turning walls over that were machine cut, I mean, we've gone past the area of digging peat by hand and working it solely by hand, yes.
- Q: And tell me--, just explain a bit more about how that machine worked?
- A: It had what we call feet and the feet used to vibrate up and down and it would lift it off the bottom of the floor and just sort of shake it, or as they called it, ruttler it, and it used to just shake the walls about a bit and just allow them to settle again and they would dry, and they'd do that two or three times. Of course, they could go up and down a row in ten minutes where it would take one man a full day maybe on some walls.
- Q: And did that take over completely from the casuals?
- A: Not completely because if it were--, we had a really wet summer, it's all tied in with surface milling really, that they did that and as they were coming of surface milling, and they didn't need the peat as dry, it all sort of just dwindled out casual labour, up to about 1984, where they did still use one or two to drive the machinery and the tractors, but not of course, 50, 60.
- Q: Now, you mentioned having a wet summer? There was--,

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A: Well, yeah, there were a particular summer in '73, I think it were '73, I'm almost sure it were '73 or '72, in June that year, it absolutely flooded the moors out, likes I've not seen since, or up to October 2000 when we got all that rain, and it absolutely flooded the peat out altogether and a fortnight after we were still catching fish, pike that had come out, you know, they'd flooded out of the main drain and had come down the main--, our drains on the moor.

Q: So the drains had sort of backed up, had they, and--?

A: The drains had backed up and over spilled from the land because it were that wet, the pumping system weren't taking the water away quick enough.

Q: And the fish were actually in the dykes on the moor?

A: The fish was in the dykes on the moor but of course, the dykes were flooded and the fish were sort of dissipating out of the dykes along the flats and as they were drying out, we were picking fish up.

Q: [laughs] Oh dear. You got--, I mean, fishing, fishing off the peat bog, it sounds--,

A: Well, it don't happen, does it, 'cause it's acid water, in't it, so it was a really unusual event, but it was a very wet time.

Q: Yeah. You were going to tell me a story also about--, I mean, we've done the water bit, about actually setting fire to the er, er...

A: Oh, the gases?

Q: The gases, yeah.

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- A: Yeah, we're talking the virgin peat then, which there isn't as much now, there are some areas but when I say virgin peat, there were like acres and acres and acres of untouched peat, and when I first started, being a lad, they told me the story about shoving a staff into peat, pulling it out and lighting it very quickly and it would set fire, set alight, like a gas flame and of course, I'm thinking, I'm a bit green here, they're having me on here, but it actually-- , it actually did work, I've seen it work.
- Q: So you'd actually push-- , push a stick down into the peat to make a hole, pull it out and light the gas coming out of the hole?
- A: You'd pull it out steady wi'out, wi'out waggling the stick so it sort of come out solid, and the gas would come up with the-- , the methane I would imagine that's what it were, and they would light it for a couple of seconds sometimes.
- Q: Yeah. Well, there was that big fire on Hatfield Moor, wasn't there, where it was gas?
- A: Yeah, that's just, gas was a gas reserve under t'moor though, in't it. That's not the same sort of thing.
- Q: Oh, is it not?
- A: No, no.
- Q: Oh right. So did that ever give you any trouble, this gas that was in the peat?
- A: I've heard stories about some of the lads when they've been on the cutting machines, saying it's made them poorly, not everybody, but one or two said, "No, that's making me badly that," and they've come off the machine because they were feeling sick with the gas.

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Q: Oh right, that's interesting.

A: I'll tell you a name in a minute if I can think of him, but... he's still alive, I saw him other day.

Q: It'll come to you. And there was this thing you wanted to tell me about the, um, the car, from the car on rails?

A: Yeah, there was a chap that--, 'cause transport in them days wasn't like it is now, we've a stone road down, we've plenty of access. It was just a moor and it was a battle to get to work if you like, apart from on the trams and they always had the trouble getting people down to do the work, so this chap come up with idea of transforming a car into a part railway truck and put in wheels, railway wheels on it and running it up and down the line for quickness, which he did. Like it was too quick and I suppose the aerodynamics weren't what they should be and it kept coming off the track.

Q: Did he fix it--, did he just fix different wheels to it or did he fix it onto a bit of railway?

A: What I can understand is that he sort of took the wheel off it, didn't put the full rail chassis through it, took the wheel off and attached a single wheel to--, to the chassis somehow but it were all shortened, because of narrow gauge. It's really unclear how he did it, but I know he did do it.

Q: Did you see it?

A: I never saw it, no, because it were like '40s, '50s, must have been '50s, I would say, really, yeah.

Q: Right. Where are we?

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A: I don't know because we've scattered about a bit. Done that, dug peat behind, have you done that one?

Q: Let me, let me--, can I have a look? Oops.

A: That one, sorry. No, what I've scrubbed out is no good to you. [Pause] Last of wooden wagons in--, we still worked them--, we still worked with them in the early '70s, that were that one. I'm just jotting down as ideas just come like, just to remind me.

Q: Right, you've shown me a picture, in fact, I can see it now, of your dad cutting peat, it's actually quite significant, it's not just another picture of a man cutting and walling peat. Tell me a bit about it?

A: Me dad?

Q: Well, this--, yeah, this particular picture and why it's significant?

A: I'm not sure now how significant that--, that picture is, it's just a picture of my dad, stood at side of the machine walls when they first come on. They were probably experimenting how to--, best way to do them, I don't know, but in terms of my dad, my dad were one of the last three people to dig peat on Swinefleet Moor.

Q: Dig peat in what way?

A: By hand. Early '70s, it would be about '72 or '73 again, around about that area, they was called back in, it was doing it by machine at the time, but they was called back in because the banks were too narrow to stand these machines on to cut the last cut, but they didn't want to lose the peat because it were top peat, really good peat. I mean, it wouldn't be like



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working today where they just knocked it down and picked it up with machine, 'cause with our grabs now, but in them days, there were just cutting machines on and they fetched me dad in and two more lads to finish them off, so they didn't get wasted

Q: And you--, you've still got some of your dad's...?

A: Yes, I've got the last knife to cut peat on Swinefleet Moors and I think me dad's still got spade if he could find it.

Q: Right. And you've also shown me some other pictures of, again, a last bit of peat digging, so tell me a bit about that as well? That's these.

A: Oh right, yeah. Yeah, well, we took--, we were doing the restoration work and we still had some old--, outstanding stock on and we took it off in--, it tells you, don't it, what year is it? 21<sup>st</sup> of the 10<sup>th</sup> '05 was the last, and we photographed because we thought it would down, sort of in history if you like, that the last peat to go off Swinefleet Moors for commercial use. And they're the pictures--, what you were wanting more or less.

Q: Right, and that's the very last day?

A: That is the very last wagon to be filled, that photograph you seen there and that's the date on it, so that's sort of in years to come, it's registered, in't it?

Q: Yeah, yeah. Brilliant. [Pause] I'm just--, I know, I'm just thinking about when we went out of for that day, we went to the Paraffin Mill.

A: You've done the garden bit haven't you?

Q: I think we talked about the garden before, but um...

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A: The blasting of the drains we haven't--,

Q: Oh, yes, that's interesting as well. Hmm, there was a lot of stuff--, feeling starting to be arising in the area and among conservationists about--, about peat extraction, particularly the milling process, and I know that it took--, their action, they took the form of direct action basically. Now, you had some experience of that from, shall we say the other side, so can you tell me a bit about that?

A: Yeah, I think, my first recollection of anti-feeling towards the peat moors in terms of commercial use was we've all heard of William Bunting and these sort of people. That was the first encounter, but the first actual physical encounter we had was people starting to block the mill drains up, the big mill drains that we had dug in '60s to really shift water at a great rate if you like and drain the moor very quickly, and they used to block them all up. And they'd start from Medge Hall one weekend, and they'd fill bags full and chuck in the dykes and block pots up that went under railway line and things like that and it become quite a large task for us at times. So the foreman at the time, or I believe, the manager at the time, Stan Marshall came up with the idea to go round blasting them, so they sent us an expert with all this dynamite and I got the job of carrying it round for him and helping him blast these drains up, it was quite entertaining if you like [laughs], and that would be early '70s and that was the really first physical evidence we had of that sort of protest, if you like.

Q: And how did it go on?

A: How do you mean?

Q: You say it was the first evidence of the protest, what--, did you have continuing problems or experiences with it?

A: We--, they kept doing it to a certain extent but it become less after that because they probably thought they were wasting their time because it would have been hard work filling

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bags up and trying to block a big dyke up. When we come like two days later and just blast them out of way, so they more went to just blocking odd little drains up and they blocked areas up that we didn't really both about, and so we never did 'owt about it if you know what I mean. Areas that we like didn't work and stuff like that, so, they would have seen it as a victory and we would have seen it well, wasn't doing any harm anyway, if you like.

Q: You said he would fill bags up?

A: Yeah, they'd take a load of plastic bags with them. I'd have to say they were our plastic bags an' all [laughs]. They'd just like--, like sand bags if you like. Fill them full of the peat and just stick them in bottom and just build like a natural--, a man-made dam up, just to block the water up so the water would retain its bog level, if you like.

Q: Now, we talked also about some things that have been found on the moor and you've just been telling about a found--, a find you made at Whalley Balk.

A: Oh, about the penny? Yeah, well, I've discussed finding bottles on moors with you before and different things and part of that were--, we're just finding working, the natural working and we found some old tips, that like the farmers used to tip right on the edge of the moor, looking for bottles. Well, this particular tip were New Whaley bridge, was it, area, the old ruins of the old houses that were down there and we were digging for the bottles if you like, the old gobstopper as we used to call them with marble and things like that, and I actually found an old penny. 18 something which I still have somewhere today.

Q: So tell me a bit more about these bottles--, you've shown me the bottles that you've, or some of the bottles that you've found, tell me a bit more about them.

A: Yeah, well, some bottles would come from where the farmers would tip, 'cause there were no tip collection in them days like there were now. They'd tip them at edge of moors and bury them under peat, not right on the edge but between the walk line and the peat, but a lot of what I found were just with using the hy-macs and the machines and there'd be old dyke

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bottom, when were digging dykes out and they've probably come from--, some of old lads, that they used to take cold tea on and the mineral waters and stuff like that and they'd chuck them in old bottoms and stuff like that. Plus also, the eastern edge of the moors, Will Pits area and that area, is sort of, at one time of day they was going to warp it and it stuck but with the like--, through Will Pits and right through to Medge Hall, there's a line of--, of warp, it's about two, three, maybe four inches thick in places and a lot of the bottles would probably come down river as they warped it as well. And as we've took the soil of at Medge Hall to work it, they've been in--, they've been under the soil, so there's two or three ways the bottles have ended up on the moors, if you like.

Q: And there's other things been found, not necessarily by you, that you've heard about?

A: Well, there's Tommy Butt once found a gold sovereign doing hand graving and I did tell you that he had made up into a necklace, just like a pendant sort of thing and put on a pendant and he had it valued in, we think, about '64, '65 at 54 pounds then.

Q: Do you know what coin it was?

A: Just a gold sovereign, I think he said it was. His wife's still alive, Millie, they call her and she still has it to this day.

Q: Oh right. And was it actually in the peat?

A: Yes, he was just digging and cut--, he'd cut his layer out as they used to call it and then he was just digging it out and he sort of saw this shiny thing and cleaned it up and took it and found--, when he found what it was, it--, he had it made for his wife.

Q: Nice. And what about this boat? Tell me about the boat.

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A: Well, it's--, some of the stories I've been passed on by some of old lads, one of them's still alive today, and they found this longboat, or they called it a longboat and it was--, again, it wasn't far off Cassons on Medge Hall side and they found it when they were doing some work one day and was told to burn it very quickly – I don't know if I should say that.

Q: Well, I mean, we're not identifying anybody, are we?

A: No, no, and--, but the story goes that some of the chaps swear blind it was part of an old longboat and they insisted it was, but of course there's no evidence left to prove or disprove it.

Q: Could we have been talking about whether it could have been a barge?

A: They said not, because barges were just long flat-bottomed boats and this--, this had shapes to it and some sort of different shapes to it, or whatever. They said it certainly--, they was convinced it weren't a canal boat and it were--, it would be a mile away from any canal system, best part of a mile away from any canal system.

Q: And was it in the peat?

A: It was half submerged in the peat and half up in air.

Q: Oh, how interesting, and was it common to find things like?

A: Er no, no, it's the only one I've ever heard of, on our moors anyway.

Q: Ah. Oh, that's very interesting. And I know--, somebody's been telling me, or several people have been telling me, about sort of, as--, supernatural experiences or--, or--, or um, how shall I put it? Eerie atmospheres and so on but they've mostly been on Hatfield Moor.

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Now, I've not heard any stories about Thorne or Swinefleet but you--, you say that it's similar there?

A: Well, just the one that I've heard that was--, it was a French chap who lived on edge of the moors, and again I can't think of his name and he used to go out at night to do his graving, for whatever reason. I believe it were because he had other part time jobs as well and he used to just do a bit of graving because it was hard work for some people. I'm not saying it was for him, I'm just saying that's--, that's a possibility and he used to take four Tilley lamps and stick them out end of his block of graving and just dig at night, and story goes that a bloke come up to him, was talking to him, in a great coat sort of thing and he was talking to him. He went to dig another turf out, looked up with con--, to talk to him, the bloke never spoke back, but he was talking to him, you know and that, waiting for a reply, and he just sort of vanished, disappeared like that. People would say normally, "Yeah, yeah, it's one of them--," but he never, ever went back on the moors again at night to do any graving. It finished him.

Q: Have you ever felt uncomfortable?

A: Me personally, no, and I've been all hours of the day, I've never felt uncomfortable, no.

Q: Is it eerie? I mean, I would imagine it's a very--,

A: It's a very, very eerie place especially when fog lingers about two foot from floor at certain times of the year, when it's cold and you can see over the fog and you can see shadows. It really is an eerie place, yeah.

Q: Yeah, I can imagine. And you were saying this morning you went out early?

A: Yes, this morning, I was out just as daylight was breaking and there were stag and seven hinds paddling in water and he was chasing them when he saw me coming tractor and it was

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a really, really good sight to see, and that was a picture if you like, 'cause that was like a bit eerie, a bit mystified, and you could see top of horns first and then you could see them a bit in clearing. Really nice.

Q: Do you see that--, do you see them quite often?

A: See them quite often these days. I mean, the last ten, 15 years, they've just gone from strength to strength, 'cause when I first started people would say, "Oh, I've seen a deer," but it were like, "I've seen the Yeti," you know, it were never happen. But the last ten years, ten to 15 years, have really become quite common.

Q: Is that by natural expansion or--, I mean, you might not know the answer to this or, has it been deliberately put on there and the numbers have been increased?

A: Well, there are a number of deer far--, I mean, my dad said he saw on in '60s, and like I say, odd people saw one but it were a rare event, so there would be some natural one, but through late '70s and '80s, we got deer farming all over place didn't we, and we think things have escaped and things are probably part of it as well.

Q: So they don't belong to anybody?

A: No, they don't belong to anybody, they're roaming wild definitely.

Q: I remember there was something I was going to ask you as well, about the Paraffin Mill which we just touched on a little bit, because you said about visiting the Paraffin Mill and visiting the guy who lived there. Was it when you were little?

A: Yeah, well, me dad worked as you know, I've already said me dad worked on moors and used to do what they call fire watching in the summer time, because risk of fire, I mean, in them days the peat stacks were very, very dry and there was always a risk of fire so there

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was always somebody on at weekends, watching, seven days a week in fact. We used to ride that way round with me dad on pushbike in them days and we used to come from Creykes Sidings right through to Paraffin Mill and there used to be a chap there who used to come at the weekends, at that time of day, just to come at weekends just to do gardening and they had there, I don't know, I guess about an acre and a half of land, a really outstanding garden if you like, full of vegetables and that, and I believe you told me his name, Dixon, which, yeah, it does ring a bell.

Q: Yeah, yeah. And this was when the house had gone?

A: No, the houses were still there, then.

Q: Was he living there then?

A: He used to live there at weekends to do garden and then go back for--, I mean, he maybe lived there at one time of day but--, and that as I recall, he were just living there at the weekends, just come up for weekends and do his gardening. It wouldn't happen today because people would just wreck this place, wouldn't they, but he was just come up at weekends and do his--, do his garden, and he used to make us a cup of tea, and like I think I told you, he used to just dip it in water bucket and boil it and make us a cup of tea. Different times.

Q: So water bucket as in straight from dyke or something?

A: No, he used to catch the rain water and just have rain butts in them days, didn't they? I know we do now but we used to have it for use in them days, to wash in and that, and that just sticks with me as a kid, like.

Q: So is the Paraffin Mill building still there?



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A: The Paraffin Mill building were still there--, when I first started, you could have spent a few bob and you could have moved in houses, in 1970, they were in good nick, slate roofs, really good nick and the buildings didn't get knocked down until 1984, and I believe we knocked them down because they were just harbouring kids, encouraging kids to come on and generally make a nuisance of themselves, so I think that's why we knocked them down.

Q: And was the aqueduct still there then?

A: The--, round about the same time, they pulled the aqueduct down because it was rotting, and it--, we saw it as a danger to people, I mean, we must have had a duty of care, I suppose, if you like to put it in a better--, we pulled it down because it were just like metal really, and the two bricks, and they used to just flood it and like I say, it got rotten over years and we pulled it down for safety more than anything.

Q: Did you ever see anything moving on it? Using it, the aqueduct?

A: How do you mean, moving?

Q: Well, I mean, it must have been made for boats and traffic to move up and down on?

A: It was made for--, to get the boats across, yeah, but, I never--, no, I mean, boats must have been '20s, '30s, wasn't it, boats.

Q: And you're not quite that old!

A: No, not quite that old [laughs].

Q: [laughs] Oh dear.

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A: Medge Hall, no, '78, they knocked that down in '78.

Q: Medge Hall?

A: Yeah. The mill.

Q: Yeah. 'Cause that was the headquarters, wasn't it, for a while, for Fisons?

A: It was, a very short while though.

Q: Administrative centre.

A: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, it was, but...

Q: Was it still operating as a mill as well as an admin centre?

A: I believe--, my dad worked in it, so it did operate in '60s, middle '60s, but that would probably be its last like, yeah.

Q: And what happened after it stopped working?

A: Well, it just got run down and derelict. I'm not really sure why we knocked that down 'cause it were--, not even sure if we owned the land at that time, but we hired a machine driver in that--, the first time we ever had a--, like an Hy-mac type machine on the moor, they called him Dave Bickham and he was a contractor and he did come to try and dig--, to fill wagons with this machine for the first time ever, but like I've said to you, we had Smalleys and that before and it were too heavy for us and it just used to wreck all the structure of the peat up. So I guess we had him on hire and we knocked it down rather than just let it go sort of thing, while we had him there.

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Q: You know when we went--, I'm going back--, something I just thought about when you were talking about your dad fire watching. We went to Bank Top and there was--, there was a fire tower was there. Is that where it was?

A: Yes, it were out on Bank Top, yeah.

Q: So did peop--, so how did--, tell me about people fire watching?

A: Well, like I said to you before, I mean, we had thousands of metres of peat dug out by hand and stacked in stacks which were very, very dry and it was--, I mean peat, peat's a fire risk anyway, in't it, but even more so when it's very, very dry and it only wanted a walker to drop a cigarette, bracken get a fire or heather get a fire and it got into stacks and hell of a job to put them out. I mean, it would go through all the walls and just destroy everything, so it was a--, a constant thing was to fire watch from April to September, whenever it were really tinder dry. Part of that as well as we used to burn off in them days, you know, bracken when it got brown we used to burn off so there were no undercurrents of brown bracken under the new growth in summer, which would be like a big fire risk, so we used to burn off, before birds started nesting, I guess February time, and then after that, as the weather picked up, we'd fire watch seven days a week, or the old lads would do in them days.

Q: So you'd burn the bracken off? Would that be a bit risky?

A: Not if burnt it off--, if you burnt it off at right time of year, when it's still wet, the peat's still wet under foot and you burnt it off in controlled areas, it--, you cut the risk down because the risk was leaving it to be tinder dry in middle of summer and it's just an accident waiting to happen.

Q: And you say, it was before the birds started nesting?

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A: Yeah, we used to always--, always burn off before birds started nesting, I mean they weren't that inclined just to disregard things like birds nesting, we used to do it, mainly because it were right time of year to do it in terms of fire prevention, but also with an eye to birds as well, yeah.

Q: So when people were fire watching, did they just go up the tower or were they sort of patrolling?

A: No, no, they would ride around, er, the tower didn't come on 'til mid '70s, which were a long time after the vast amount of peat blocks we used to carry at one time of day. In pre-'70s, '50s and '60s, they used to put them in big stacks so it were a case of ongoing all way round, you know, keep riding checking every area. There might be two or three people on watch when it were really dry, because if you got a fire and you could put it out straight away, you had a chance but if it were left for an hour, you'd nearly no chance.

Q: What--, so what would they do if they saw fire? 'Cause they'd be on their own presumably?

A: They would but they'd--, part of it was to--, you see peat walkers don't smoke and things like that, you know, it's prevention rather than, obviously, the cure, as the saying goes, but they would be watching--, they'd know the kids come on at back of pit and be lighting fires and stuff like that, you know, just playing up, not maliciously doing anything, and it'd be to keep an eye on things like that. So, it would save them getting a fire rather than fire watching if you like. Probably wrong word, fire watching, but...

Q: But had they got communications and things?

A: Er no, not really. I mean, early '70s we started getting what we used to call the Bat Phone which were just a two-way radio so you could get in touch with base and base could get in touch with somebody else, but I mean, you couldn't get fire engines on in them days, anyway. But you could have somebody that would be able to get hold of t'loco and bring some sort of pump down, which would cut the time down, you know, but like I say, it were

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more being there if people were on and they were liable to drop cigarettes and things like that.

Q: And at Bank Top, did you say there was big stacks of peat round there?

A: Oh yeah, er, we used to--, they used to fill the peat up in like, I don't know, summer time again, like April onwards and they would fill--, 'course, we weren't selling peat at that time of year, but we had to store it for the right time of year and it used to all go up to the Bank Top, and there would be a good quarter of a mile of peat stacks, you know, 20, 30 paces wide and 20 foot high, well, not 20 foot high, yeah, it could be 20 foot high, big stocks of peat and they used to all go there, the bigger the stock, the drier the peat, obviously, and they used to fill it in winter and send it to the mills.

Q: And did you ever have trouble with sort of big fires at Bank Top?

A: Well, there was one--, one year in, I guess, well, I'm nearly sure it was '73 'cause it were my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, I spent it fighting a--, one of these big stack fires. Somebody had set it on fire in two or three different places and it were a furnace, is best thing you could describe it. You couldn't get anywhere near it if you like. It was that hot, it melted--, it didn't melt the lines but it buckled the lines at side of the stack and bent them 12, 15 yards, stretches.

Q: When you talk about fighting a stack fire, tell me what you do and what it's like?

A: In them days?

Q: Yeah.

A: Er... well, on the Bank Top when we had this big fire, of course, it's the side of a drain, the Bank Top and the main Bank Top drain and we could get pumps in and we could pump straight onto the fire, which weren't a big operation itself but of course by time we got there

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and realised it were a fire, it was well ablaze and we were pumping the water in this particular time and as it were coming out through the stacks and draining back into the dykes, you could barely touch it, it were boiling.

Q: And could you always fight them with water?

A: It's the only other means we've got, is fight them with water.

Q: 'Cause you always think of it being water readily available everywhere, but...?

A: Well, it in't, 'cause we've drained it, see, we've put all the stacks on the driest part, on the highest part of the moors, so it's always a problem. If the little stacks got a fire or the walls got a fire, you could send people down, get people out, you could split the walls and try and contain it like that and take the source away if you like. So we've had a lot of that through us time, like.

Q: And--, and are we talking about it burning mostly sort of cut and stacked peat rather than it burning the moor itself?

A: No, if it got hot and--, I mean, we've had fire--, I think it was '84, or '83, '84 and we had one and Snaithe and Cowick moors were afire at back and it was burning for about three, four months solid, until rains come in winter. Just burn into the banks of the peat and you--, you could nearly not do a lot with it, but at that time we did have Hy-macs on and what we used to do, is go and cover it with fresh peat and bury it, but it would still smoulder, but it's keeping it under wraps until weather turns, if you like. Or we would get a big pump out, some of our big pumps out and if it were feasible with some water on the sides, we could pump water into it, like flooding area, but it weren't always feasible 'cause it was sometimes too high to flood.

Q: And were the fire brigade involved at all?

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A: Yeah, they used to come, they didn't like it 'cause it were just mucky, hard work of a job, like. But they did used to come, specially when we had the stone road, I mean, we had a big fire in '95, that lost a few machines too, and it burnt, I would say, a third of moors nearly, and the only way they put that out is--, they got really big pump and pumped from the Bank Top drain and flooded all the dykes and then we went round the Hy-mac with buckets on and just fed it out of dykes and just drowned it that way. I mean, we also had a--, an helicopter flying about but that didn't do a lot of good. Putting a bit of water on like they do, but that were just virtually pointless.

Q: And there's been some big fires at Swinefleet, actually at Swinefleet Mill, haven't there? Have you had any experience of actually fires at the Mill?

A: No, not personally, I've not experienced any fires at Swinefleet Mill no. I have heard that they have had a fire but, no, not personally, no.

Q: It's something that just come--, crops up in all--, lots of conversations with people is, you know, the fires seem to be a very regular...?

A: Yeah, one of the biggest since I was on--, I know there were a big on in '60s, because I remember me dad going out to it as a kid and you could see it from where we lived at Sidings, you could see it glowing, but I didn't experience it myself so I couldn't really see how big that were, but the two biggest in my time were 1970, the first--, the year I started, which were massive. I mean, again it burned two thirds of the moors. I know a lot of railway lines had to be replaced and stuff like that, and again the one I've just touched on in '95, really caused us a lot of problems.

Q: Whereabouts was the one in '70?

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A: It started at back of pit in 1970, and just went right through, back of Moorends and towards Goole Fields and burned a lot of that out. In fact, one of my first jobs when I started were clearing the debris of the fire up.

Q: And what kind of thing does it leave behind?

A: It just leaves black, just a black ash, it's horrible smell, just black ash and it just burns the top completely off and it's just raw peat under the black ash.

Q: And can you still cut what it's left behind? You know, once you've cleared that...?

A: No, what we used to do then, is we used to have a machine called leveller what we were in and we used to just worm it to one side and start again.

Q: So you take all burnt stuff away?

A: Yeah, we just put it in a--, just worm it to side, like you was opening it up from bracken and heather and stuff, and just worm out of way and get your cutting machine back in and start again.

Q: So you could cut what was underneath?

A: Oh yeah.

Q: So it didn't destroy it--, just destroyed the top?

A: Yeah, if there were high bankings like I said, it would get set into bankings, it would just keep smouldering away, I mean, it's not like a fire like you would imagine, flames and that. It just smoulders and smoulders. But once you've got that out of way, in fact, part of



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controlling some of fires were you could worm, worm onto the fire, like the damp fresh peat just to--, to slack it down while it--, bought you some time if you like, and of course underneath it's just peat again, you start again. You've--, you might have lost an inch of peat or two inches or whatever it were at that time.

Q: That was interesting, thank you. Have we come to the end of our...?

A: I don't know.

Q: [laughs]

A: I've got--, I've just jotted things down but I've put gated off in '84. We gated all moors off in '84, 'cause we were getting problems from kids coming on motorbikes and wrecking machinery and things like that, but that was one of the big bugbear to a lot of the people in Moorends, I would have said, they didn't like the idea of us shutting them out if you like.

Q: Was this at the time--, I can't think at the moment now, when Mr Bunting was doing a lot of his work. Was that in the '80s? So would that have been--?

A: No, Mr Bunting were the early '70s, mid '70s, I would have said. This--, I don't think--, I might be wrong but I don't think he was still about in '84 when we gated the moor off.

Q: So people were already aware of some of the issues that were there, by the '80s?

A: Yeah, there were, a lot of people had different issues. Some people didn't like us taking peat off. Some people didn't like it for a genuine reason, if you like, because they had a genuine concern that it were affecting the peat bog and the environment, especially surface milling. But I do think a lot of people in Moorends, 'cause I have had people say to me, "I don't care what you do on there, but you're not keeping me off. I don't care what you take

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off but I want to be able to walk on.” And access, I think, were one of the biggest things for the majority of people, I would have said.

Q: Yeah, and by the ‘80s, then, had people got a lot more access?

A: No, you could walk on all over, at one time you could just walk on, but as we got more and more machinery, we got more and more problems with kids coming on motorbikes, up and down, nicking batteries, smashing windows, setting them on fire, so our company at the time, drain--, put a big dyke all the way round it and just put gates on the access points, so it really stopped people getting on really, getting on at a comfort--, I mean, they could swim across dyke if they want, but it stopped them, you know, to walk to Paraffin and get on at Paraffin or walk to Medge Hall and get on at Medge Hall, so a lot of people had a problem with that. Cause a lot of people in Moorends see it as Common land don’t they?

Q: I’ve got a photograph that you--, I think you actually gave me of two locos, little ones, that had--, one had been restored and one had been burnt. Was that--, that kind of incident, was that the kind of damage that you were getting?

A: That particular photograph I couldn’t say that’s what that was, that might have just been electrical fault, I don’t really know, but that were just one they had restored from that had been burnt out, but it’s not forced to have been for that reason, but we have had that reason.

Q: Is that the kind of thing you’re talking about?

A: Yes, yeah, you know, they just set it afire or the biggest thing we used to get is they just come and smash all windows and it cost you three, four hundred pound to replace windows and stuff, like that.

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Q: And is that--, when you leave machinery, when you're working on the moor and you leave machinery, do you just leave it where it is working or do you put it all in a compound or do you put it all together or what?

A: Well, at first we used to do. We used to just, if there were--, like the cutting machines, they didn't have glass or 'owt like that and they couldn't really do a lot to them, they were just metal, but as you got, you know, as we got on and people demanded air conditioned cabs, if you like, and stuff like that and radios in it, the more modern machine, the kids--, some kids would just go on and smash them all, shoot through windows and things like that. And we did used to just leave them, like an Hy-mac's a really slow travelling machine, so we used to just leave the Hy-mac where it were working and go back on your bike next day to your job. And of course, you'd come after weekend, they'd be smashed, and that was the reason to gate it, a lot--, biggest part of it to gate it off.

Q: And what happened then, after it had been gated?

A: Used to get complaints, people, and I think that, coupled with surface milling at the time, stoked people up more than anything, I would have said.

Q: Was it the same on Hatfield? You've told me about Thorne, you might not know about Hatfield.

A: Well, Hatfield's slightly different because it's not built round Thorne Moorends and you know what I mean? It's Moorends, the kids get bored, they're two minutes off of moors, it's not like that at Hatfield, it's miles from anywhere, in't it? It's different if you like, so they didn't have the same problem.

Q: And are the gates gone now then?

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A: No, it was, English Nature still retain the same gates, because again, people could be coming on and breaking into their sheds and pinching stuff and stuff like that. Of course, they can control the gates and they can control where they walk as well, partly for safety, partly for damage.

Q: Do they open them, like during the day or...?

A: Yeah, if there's anybody coming on and ring up and they'll say we're coming, they'll open for them, although there are designated walks where you can walk on, you can't get the machine like at back of Pit Thorne. I guess now we've handed it over to them, there may even be more in future.

Q: So there's some basically very good reasons why people were kept off?

A: Well, it weren't just done for badness, you know. It's never been any middle ground, has there, you know what I mean, but that was the main reason, we was having a lot of--, right, we knocked Paraffin down which is such a great shame, these two houses I've been on about before, great shame knocking them down but it encouraged people to come in and set fire, and again a problem.

Q: I mean, I've been looking this morning at some photographs that Josie and Betty Verhees have shown me of their house at Whaley Balk and there is a sign there, from British Moss Litter Company, on the--, a post by their house saying you can't go any further, because you know, they wanted to keep people off at that, you know, at that day. So it's not necessarily something that just happened in the '70s and '80s, it's been--, people have been kept off for...

A: I think--, I think kept off because there were a fear of fire, you know. You didn't have to be any vandal or anything but people just walking about smoking, and they don't realise that dropping a tab, what it can do. You know, a lighted tab end, of what it could actually do and I think the fear of fire was one of the main reason, yeah.

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Q: Well, thank you ver--,

A: I mean, they do--, they do--, to stop North Yorkshire moor walkers at same time, when it's that tinder dry from walking on it, for that reason.

Q: Well, I live in the Peak Park and you know, you have to be--, certain times when you have to be really careful.

A: Yeah, yeah, I'm sure.

Q: Are we there, do you think?

A: [Pause] I think so.

Q: Yeah. It was really interesting, you know, we went to--, with the two Verhees sisters and Irene Bell and Trev Sharpe and Ray Hodges who used to play with them, when they were--, and we went where you showed me, through that gate and up the side of the thing to the--, to the pond up there and they were showing me...

A: Oh, Sharpe's Pond

Q: Yeah, that's right, where the houses were and so on and there's a big dead tree stump in the--, in the pond there.

A: Oh yes.

Q: And they said they used to use that as a diving board, they used to dive off it.

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A: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. Firewatchers used to go for a swim in there when it were really warm to cool off, yeah.

Q: Yeah.

END