

Thorne & Hatfield Moors Oral History Project

Interview with: Jim Dickinson (part 3)

Date: 15 November 2006

Interviewer: Lynne Fox

JD I were sat in t'house in t'rocking chair, mi' dad's rocking chair where I used to sit and retire.

ED How old were you?

JD I were about eight at the time. But I'd, I'd got this two two rifle, I'd bullets to go with it by that time and I could hear this chirruping, and all intents and purposes I thought it were a bird in the house, you know and it were coming from t'corner. We had a, if you can imagine two alcoves either side o' t'fire place. Mi' dad were in his shed and he came back down from t'shed and came in t'house and I said 'Dad', I says 'Listen to this, I don't know what it is' and he listened a minute and, sure enough, it started chirruping, just like a little bird would do, you know. I says 'Do you know what it is Dad?' 'Oh lad,' he says 'It's nowt', he says 'It's a cricket'. I says 'What's a cricket?' He says 'Well you've seen many a grasshopper in t'grass, Aunt Bessie's, they used to get a lot at one point under her hedge. Aye, I remember. 'Aye' I said, 'they make a similar noise to that.' He says 'Aye it's a different part of the grasshopper family', I says 'Is it bi' god'.

Well we had a stool in corner of this alcove and there were all my comics on it you know and we couldn't see up to t'wall and it were t'wall that went, if you'd gone through it, were into mi' Aunt Bessie's next door. So I says, 'Oh I better get this damn thing out then some road or other'. And he never bothered, he knew I were ingenious enough to think of a way o' doing it you see, I certainly was. So anyway, I pulled the stool out with all t'comics on and I put it somewhere round t'corner, out o' way, and I went to t'other alcove where I allus kept, when I had guns, I allus had 'em leant up in corner. So I got this two two rifle out, went in t'drawer, 'cause I had mi' bookcase mi' dad had built me just above, and I got a couple o' shells out like, one in mi' pocket, puts another one down the spout and sat in t'chair we gun across mi' lap, you know. Then it were quiet. We must have disturbed this cricket, to the extent that it stopped chirruping and I thought, oh it's got through a hole in t'wall, it's maybe gone into mi' Aunt Bessie's or somewhere.

Anyway ten minutes elapsed and it started again, chirruping away and I could see right along bottom o' t'skirting board which weren't such in a good fit. And then all of a sudden I saw a little bit of a movement and it were this, this cricket. So I waited, I thought I'm not gonna, I'm gonna have a shot at it, but I'm not gonna do it when it's on the move or I'll maybe miss it, cause it were very small and minute. Anyway, I waited a bit and it were making a move and then stopping and then it'd make another move and stop. Right, next time it makes a move and it stops I'm going for it. So anyway, it made a move and then it stopped and I'm up wi' t'gun, bang! Why you should have seen plaster that come off that wall! Bloody hell! Pardon my French again, and mi' Aunt Bessie come rushing through, there'd been as much plaster if not more drop off her wall at other t'side in her house. There were only her, mi' Uncle Charlie had died by this time, if he hadn't have done he'd have probably bloody died when that happened!

Thorne & Hatfield Moors Oral History Project

Anyway, it, it, removed it, you know. I picked what bits were left of it, cause I were a really, I were a good shot wi' t' little gun in them days and it were literally blown to fragments this cricket you know. And mi' dad heard shot, you know, and he'd gone somewhere, I don't know and he came back and he says 'Have you got it then?' I says 'Aye I've got it.' He says 'I thought you must have' and we just cleaned up, you know and I got a brush, mi' mother's brush, and swept all t'shite up off the floor, and there were some an' all! and I went to mi' Aunt Bessie and I took t'brush and shovel wi' me, you know. I says 'there'd be a bit of a mess i'nt there?' She says 'You're not kidding!' I says 'Well I think it's only fair that, been as I caused it I sweep up for you.' She dint want me to, I says 'No, no, I'll sweep the mess up'.

ED He must have been a horrible child!

[Laughter]

ED When you look back.

JD I were telling Andrea this morning about Jack, Jack Jackson the foreman on the moors who lived in Rawcliffe, three or four mile down t'road from t'village. And he used to come down two or three times a week, he were, he was the man in charge of the men on the moors and they called him Jack Jackson. There were two or three brothers that lived at Rawcliffe, this village. Have you heard of Rawcliffe? And he used to come down in t'week, on his bike, halfway across the moors to where they were digging peat out, you know, and mark their card how much they were owed, cause he used to help to decipher how much their wages had to be. And he come this day and he went off as usual. He'd stop and have a word we mi' dad, he'd come in, he'd say 'I'm just gonna have a word wi' Reg', and he'd go in t'joiner's shop and chat on a bit about owt or nowt and off he'd go and he'd ride, take him about half an hour to ride two or three mile into t'middle o' t'moors where t'men were digging peat out and then he'd drive, he'd ride back.

But he seemed a hell of a long time this particular day and about two hours later he come walking down path wi' t'bike, you know. And mi' dad were just crossing t'yard to t'blacksmiths shop and he says, 'What's a matter Jack?' He said 'Oh Reg man,' he says 'you're gonna have to help me.' Mi' dad says 'Why what's a matter?' He says 'The bloody chain's come off mi' bike', and he dint know how to put t'chain back on his bike! I mean, I don't doubt you'd be able to do it, as would most women, but he were as thick as two short planks to coin a phrase, god rest you, John, and he'd walked nearly three mile across t'moors to come back wi' t'bike and get mi' father to put t'chain back on!

ED So the other mills were still operational?

JD They were at that time.

ED So that's how, did you never go to them mills, that's what, that's how Jim doesn't know what went on with..

JD Bill Kirk who were one of the..

ED They'd stopped working when Jim was a toddler.

Thorne & Hatfield Moors Oral History Project

JD He were the main clerk. If he was going, he'd maybe be taking wages and stuff or picking timesheets up and he'd say to mi' dad 'Reg, does your Jim want to have a ride to Swinefleet' or, if it weren't Swinefleet... what they call it?

ED Medge, Medge Hall.

JD Aye Medge Hall. I'm just thinking about bloke's name though. Kempens were at Medge Hall. Jack Oughtibridge, you wunt think I could remember that after all them years, Jack Oughtibridge. He was the equivalent of Joe Kempen. And he were like the, I suppose he'd be like the mill foreman, bit like mi' granddad, you know. But mi' granddad were more reputable than them because ours was the main mill you see and he knew as much if not more about it 'cause he were bright as a button I dare say, mi' granddad.

Is it Jack Oughtibridge?

JD Yeah.

Was it him who made the, put the car on rails?

JD No that warh mi' dad.

Was it?

JD He did that as well.

Do you know, tell me about that.

JD Ah well, it were an Austin Ruby and they brought it down to our mill and it were in t'wagon shed for a month or two and then they must have agreed what were going to happen to it. And mi' dad made a timber chassis for it, and they mounted the car on this timber chassis and then he, he got gear wheels that were incorporated between the drive shaft and the timber chassis with the wagon. You see, the wheels on wagons were an axel and two wheels like that and with mi' dad having t'welding tackle he modified them to take the drive from the prop shaft and he connected the prop shaft with the back pair of those wheels and all the gear lever and the different gears were all incorporated. So whilst they only ran it in about, he'd warned everybody that they mustn't go into anything beyond second gear, because it was still a reasonable speed to go, it's the speed that the wagons used to go at when there were horses pulling them and that's what they did. But it went to Swinefleet 'cause they were still hauling peat off the moors and it was used in place of a horse, or two horses, 'cause there's photographs there with two horses pulling the big, the big wagons absolutely fully laden wi' peat. I mean they'd weigh a bit because a lot of 'em, the peat turves were wet, you know, they were damp or wet and they weighed a hell of an amount.

Did it actually pull, did it pull peat, or was it just used as a run about?

JD No, it pulled, it pulled as much as two horses could pull and...

ED Can you remember it?

Thorne & Hatfield Moors Oral History Project

JD Oh hell aye. I used to get in it before it got made into that stage, and start wrenching up some times. It's a wonder I didn't go riding up road with it, knowing me, cause I were a bugger in them days!

ED So how old were you when that was going on?

JD I would be about, about nine. I would say nine or ten at the most. I don't think I was at the grammar school, it was still in the big wagon shed as we call it. 'Cause there were a turntable, you came in off the moors and you could go through where this turntable was or if you wanted to go into the wagon shed because it was the, it was the facility for putting a wagon on the turntable and turning it and then shoving it rest o' way into t'wagon shed that was undercover.

So you see I read that that car was just used as a run about to get people like Jack Oughtibridge, for those runs. But you know, but that's not necessarily true just 'cause it's something I've read. You think that it actually pulled wagons?

JD Oh hell aye.

ED You've seen it?

JD They'd undoubtedly use it for that as well. In fact they maybe decided if they'd got the horses there that they were quite happy to continue using the horses and it were far easier for them to jump on that machine and away to wherever where t'peat were being extracted, than go on the bikes, like Jack Jackson used to do.

ED Sort of to keep a check of what was happening.

JD They'd feel they were in a unique vehicle and there was no other one in the country like it.

ED Is that still around do you know?

No, well, it may be still around but we don't know where..

ED Don't know where it is.

JD It'll probably still be floating around Swinefleet or somewhere in that back end.

Somebody'll know, I expect.

JD I wish I could go over there and have a look for it. Mind Jack Oughtibridge 'ud be long gone now. You knew the name did you? You'd seen the name?

Yeah.

ED And had he any family then or..?

JD Oh aye, there were brothers I think. Mind you, I tell you what, I've surprised myself being able

Thorne & Hatfield Moors Oral History Project

to remember his name, Christian name as well, shows mi' memories not quite as bad as I thought it were.

[Laughter]

And you talked about the Dutch people on the, on the moors.

JD Yeah, aye well they were, they were used as labouring types mainly, but there were some of 'em, pretty astute who were intelligent enough to do things, for which, probably a few o' t'English people couldn't cope we, but they could. Cause you see they were motivated by the fact that they'd been taken under the wing of English people over here and it was at the time when a war was imminent. Well it wasn't then. I think it was after the First World War, and there were a lot of, there were a lot of bridge building. I mean that in the psychological sense between countries including Germany and France and Holland and such. But I mean I weren't old enough to recognise the significance of some of the things that were happening. But there were a lot of Dutch people, I mean Barbara Kempen who were Joe's daughter, he were a Dutch man through and through Joe, big fellow an all.

ED Well you can tell by their names can't you, their surnames.

And he worked, where did he work?

JD Well he was living next door to us and he was going on his bike to, to Medge Hall. And then they said, well this is foolish because the horses are there, although there were stables at our place, and they used to, when there was the blacksmith at our place they used to bring a horse or a couple over and he was the farrier. I think that's about the only job mi' dad never did, he never shod the horses, cause there were always a blacksmith there that used to do 'em. But when he died it all coincided with the, the horses not being brought to our place and they got a local farrier, local to Medge Hall, or Swinefleet for that matter and that would be more convenient than a, well, when there wasn't a person or a farrier at our mill, you know, they had to make other provisions for it.

And so the Kempens moved to Medge Hall?

JD The what?

The Kempens moved to Medge Hall.

JD Yes, they moved to Medge Hall and they were there right up to Joe dying and his wife. And Barbara...

ED And how did Aunt Bessie come to live there?

JD Well there were a house available.

ED Aye but she wasn't, didn't work then for the British Moss.

JD Well she cleaned t'office, that's as near as she got to working for t'British Moss. They wanted a

Thorne & Hatfield Moors Oral History Project

cleaning facility and it'd been discussed and mi' dad had probably said well, my sister married a man from Birmingham who's just retired from the railway, and she's always been anxious to come back here where she were brought up and were born to the mill, and he's not against it. So [inaudible].

ED 'Cause in those days there'd be the loyalty you see. She, Aunt Bessie is on that family photograph, that lived at the mill, so there'd be that loyalty, you know, where nowadays, it doesn't count.

JD I've got a sketchpad, it's somewhere in one o' drawers, and she were having her tea at our house on this Sunday. And something had upset her, and, bye, could she put a face on, it were daggers drawn. And I drew her. I were sat in rocking chair, again, and I drew her, if we see you again I'll dig it out and I'll show you and you can compare it with, some of the photographs where, there's obviously somebody 'ud probably upset her and she's got a bit of that face on her, on the photograph. I don't think she ever saw what I'd done because I, though I say it my self I were pretty good at sketching people. When I were serving mi' time, I did two months in the stores at the pit, and when t'store keeper were serving people, cause I didn't know where stuff were on t'shelves, he used to have to do t'serving and I used to just sit behind, behind his bit of a desk affair, and you know, I used to draw the people standing at the counter. I've got a book there full of all the old guys and the young un's alike that worked, in our fitting shop, people that were mi' friends, you know, and to be honest almost without exception, they're all dead now, every one, man jack of them.

But there were one or two, old Bill Flatters, he were about seventy. They weren't knocking 'em out, you know they weren't retiring them at seventy in them days, they worked till ... I mean t'foreman's dad, old Arthur Chapman, cause there was a loco used to go past top o' t'rails, and it used to go down t'pit siding and it were one of these chuffy type locos and you know, it were a little chuffy engine. And, I think it were Jim Rainer, he christened it, he says 'Wait till that, that', you know, they called John Dutchman 'Chuffy' Dutchman, not for t'same reason, but it were more or less like that, and he said 'listen when it goes past', and he says, 'it were Arthur Chapman that built that and made it go like it does,' he says 'and it tells you who every time it goes past, cause it says, it says, Arthur Chapman, Arthur Chapman, Arthur Chapman, Arthur Chapman!' When a steam loco going past half a mile up t'road and he were spot on with it, cause it did, it sounded just like he were saying, old Arthur's name.

[Laughter]

You told me of, I'm just going back to the, Dutch people.

JD Yes, aye.

You told me about, a story about your dad helping a Dutch man out, before we had our, our sandwich, so.

JD What wi' teeth job, oh aye.

Yes, tell me that story again.

JD Aye, well he come off the moors after doing a full shift and he called and, they dint need an excuse to pop in and have a bit o' chat we mi' dad, 'cause I think mi' dad were one of the few that

Thorne & Hatfield Moors Oral History Project

talked a bit of sense you know. And they all knew that he were a remarkable craftsmen whether it were in t'fitting shop, blacksmith's shop, or t'joiner's shop you know. Anyway this guy came in and we had this, this big stool that were a chopping block, 'cause he used to chop sticks and bring 'em in as he came out from work. He walked round through t'yard door and go in t'house and he'd put the sticks down, I forget where he used to put 'em now. Ready for mi' mother making t'fire following morning, cause we couldn't boil a kettle till we got a fire going, we'd no gas or electricity you see.

Anyway this day, they called, this guy, I think I told you, Vanlerub, this Dutch man and he came in t'shop and he says 'Oh Reg', he says 'Reg.' Mi' dad says 'What's a matter?' He says 'I've got toothache. He says 'it's killing me!' He says 'Can you do us a favour?' and mi' dad says 'What's that?' He says 'will you pull us it out,' he says 'you've got plenty o' tools in t'rack there, pincers, pliers, you know, you name it'. Mi' dad says 'I can't do that, man,' he says 'I've got no, anaesthetic', he says, 'pain 'ull kill you!' He says 'I don't care, just get a hold of it and hoick it out', you know. So anyway mi' dad says 'Well if you're sure, I'll give it a go'. So as I say, they'd sat him down on t'chopping block and mi' dad had got these, his main pincers out, he says 'Right, lean back', so he leaned back, he says 'open up, let's have a look'.

So he got one of his small hammers, you know, and he were going round, he says and such and such, you know, 'oh I see it' and he says 'is that it?' and he gave it a tug 'oh you know!' he says 'aye you've got t'right one there' he says 'just get hold of it and pull it out.' So dad pulled his mouth a bit further open like and reached in with these pincers, I think it were pincers rather than pliers, cause they've got more alignment for gripping stuff like that, you know, the jaws are more in keeping with what's necessary. So he put 'em inside his mouth and he got hold of his tooth and he were a fairly strong bloke mi' dad, and I like to think I've taken after some of them traits that he had. And he just got a hold of it and give it a nip and then he yanked and out it come. Whey, old Vanlerub, he, I thought he were gonna cry, he was so relieved you know, at this.

[end of minidisc 2. Start of minidisc 3]

This is Jim Dickinson disk number three, 15th November 2006. You're going to describe to me the inside of the blacksmith's shop.

JD Yeah, well obviously there was a hearth, or fire as most folks refer to it, where pieces of iron or steel were put in where the heat was to forge on the anvil to various shapes, like making hooks for couplings, to attach to the wagons, for towing them over the moors. And in order to fire the bellows up, fire the fire up, the bellows had a big lever that used to compress this leather encasement and squeeze air into the fire to fire it up and make it glow. And I can remember being about three year old or just over, trying to reach the big lever, which was above mi' head and I couldn't and I had to wait till I was nearly four or five year old before I could in fact jump a little and grab a hold of it which would pull it down and I could readjust mi' grip then pull it down and make it blow into the fire.

However, when I left at the age of twenty one it was all intact but on returning some two year later or thereabouts, vandals had been, there was nobody living there, we'd vacated the premises and the house. And vandals had been in and whatever they'd had, they'd used to stick into these leather bellows, which was an enclosed air trap job, and they'd just stabbed it with some big knives or whatever they could lay their hands on and absolutely ruined it all. You know, absolutely no chance of compressing and pushing air out to make the fire glow. And it was, it was done for which made me extremely

Thorne & Hatfield Moors Oral History Project

disappointed to see what I'd looked upon as a real work of art and...

When, when you went, when you weren't firing up the bellows, how, who, how was it done, when you weren't there and your dad was working in the blacksmith's furnace...?

JD Well he'd do it for himself.

Manually?

JD Oh, yes, aye. Just, he'd just pump it with the lever and get the heat glowing all the, it was coke that was the fuel. And he'd stick whatever he wanted to work on underneath the coke level and when he pulled it out it'd be red blood coloured and it would hold that colour for possibly five minutes or more which gave him time to work on it with the hammer and any other tools he needed to apply. If there were a bit o' shaping to be done, he could put one in and hit the item that he was going to make the shape properly to suit him. And that's how it worked it was the regular stance of the blacksmith, who knew how to do it, you know. He'd one hand holding the hammer and he'd have pumped it up and got it to the right red heat before, you know, using the hammer. He'd take it out of the fire onto the anvil, then if it was something that needed to be turned into a circle, you'd go to the, what they called the pike of the anvil, which was the pointed bit on one end. The other end was much the same but instead of being a rounded pike, it was a square shape so he could knock it down into a right angle, where he'd gone over the corner piece and that was it, you know.

Did he make things just for the factory and the, and the trains and things, or did he also make tools for the diggers?

JD For the what?

For the peat diggers?

JD Oh yeah, he did some modifying of some of those, the knives, the peat knives, the handles had to be changed. They weren't as they should have been, I think it was the firm who'd sold them to the British Moss Litter Company who got it wrong and mi' dad had to cut them with his burning tackle and weld them back on at a different angle to be able to be used properly on the moors for cutting the peat. And they used to bring 'em straight from the factory and the first thing mi' dad had to do was carve 'em up and alter them, you know. So...

And you say you left when you were twenty-one?

JD Yeah.

How did that happen, come about?

JD Well mi' dad was retiring age and he wanted to get settled after retiring in a place or area where they felt comfortable. Now the houses we moved into were built by the Smith family who lived, there was two parts of the family lived at one end of these, I think there were eight houses altogether, there were two lived at one end, an old man and it was his brother who was the main builder, lived at the other end. But one of the younger, the younger members of their family called Jack Smith lived two

Thorne & Hatfield Moors Oral History Project

doors from the end and they also lived two doors from us.

ED Where though Jim?

JD Coleman Road, aye Coleman Road in Thorne. It's just near the point halfway between Thorne and Moorends, next, almost near the old relay station that used to produce programmes for the radio, you know, it was a recording station. Well that's what they called it the relay station, and people could have cabling to their properties and they could pick up the Light Programme or the Home Service direct as opposed to their own guts, there was no, they had no radio with their guts in it, as I call it. It was straight forward line communication from the relay station and they paid, I don't know, one and six a week or something like that for it.

So your dad retired to Moorends, away from the moor?

JD They retired to Thorne, it was Thorne where they went. Up the road to the main road from the mill and then turned left to head towards Moorends and Thorne. And then, when you went through Moorends, which was a straight road, straight through, you got to the relay station and it forked, if you went left that was Coleman Road where we eventually went to live. If you went right you went straight into Thorne and ended up at the traffic lights down at the far end.

And you say you remember the move well?

JD Oh yes, aye. It was a, I think maybe that back end, there was a tremendous gale force wind got up and mi' dad had moved his shed and everything. And the wind got under the shed roof and blew it off. And, you know, he got it back and put it back on, when the wind dropped and you know, everything was okay then after that. He were very lucky really. It was the wind that used to blow down between the two houses which were semis, they were two semi-detached houses and it just caught underneath the roof, 'cause it wasn't built with massively heavy structure or timber. It was a fairly light timber, probably tongue and groove, which wasn't quite suitable for the purpose it was fulfilling but it'd always been well screwed down, fastened, when it was at the old mill and it'd never been a problem previously but it was on that occasion.

And how did you feel about moving?

JD Well, I don't know, it was difficult, I, I didn't think seriously. I mean, I couldn't have stayed, you know, I was still more or less like a junior. I mean, I was twenty one and I was courting and got married when I was twenty two.

ED Aye, but you worked at the Coal Board by then.

JD Oh, well I'd been working at the Coal Board from being sixteen and a half, and I felt a bit, only thing I can say is, I felt sad to be leaving the homestead after all them years you see. Because it was, it was a beautiful place and the house, I relished staying in the house, you couldn't say any better than that. It was so well made and when you see those photographs, I think you've seen most of them ant you? It was a very attractive looking building, both of them, and the other three that were up the moor edges, Smits', Verhees', Bells' and Sharpes', they were all lovely properties.

Thorne & Hatfield Moors Oral History Project

Do you know how your mum and dad felt about moving?

JD Not really, I would imagine mi' dad, whatever he felt he'd keep it to himself. But really down, deep down in the bottom of him he'd have a lot to think about, as regards his time spent there. I mean he went in the army, we lost mi' Uncle Jack, who I never knew of course, and he, mi' dad came back, obviously, I wouldn't be sitting talking to you now. But he must have had a tremendous amount of satisfaction in his own mind for t' things he'd done. He, he never jibbed at tackling any job or any situation or designing or developing marvellous, I think I could call them contraptions and they weren't, they weren't pie in the sky, they were all authentic and they worked exactly as he planned them to.

I mean there were, there were the lawn mower grinding machine, he made that and it were because our lawn mower needed sharpening. And aside from using a file and taking it out to put in the vice, he decided he'd go one better and he made this machine, marvellous machine. And he'd no sooner done it and, it got to the, his boss got to know about it and he said 'Can you sharpen my machine, Jim?' Reg rather. And he said 'I would think so.' He says 'If you get,' he had a man servant type o' bloke who had a son as well, and they came down and brought, his was an Atco, either Atco or a motor driven Qualcast and when he got it to our place it was too big to go between the V blocks. Mi' dad had designed it for a twelve inch Qualcast hand mower and this was about sixteen or eighteen inches. And he thought, my goodness, this is no good, so he cut it up where the offending part was the wrong size and he redesigned that part of it. Took him another two or three weeks, and he made it extendable. It could be opened or closed down to take anything between ten inch mowers and about twenty inch mowers and he sharpened the one for his boss and he did loads of other. And I was straight into it, I could sharpen 'em like a good un and I was only a school boy at the time and I was most impressed. It used to stand in his workshop. I ended up having to sell it when we moved to a bungalow from.

ED No, we sold it when we into the flats when we retired.

JD Warh it? Arh.

ED We could find out where it went, though.

JD I don't wanna know.

ED It's a shame because somebody 'ull have got it and commercialised on it.

JD Hursts had one in town, but it were nowhere near as eloquent as the one mi' dad made and so he wasn't necessarily the first, but his was the best bar none.

And we talked a little bit earlier on about you being headhunted once or twice and I understand you were headhunted by Mr Birtwhistle when you were...

JD Oh aye.

Quite a young chap.

JD Yeah, just on a, a bit of an ad hoc basis, I wasn't signed up officially for anything. He just heard

Thorne & Hatfield Moors Oral History Project

that I was a gunman, to use a better term, and he seemed to think that I'd enough about me to frighten poachers off as well as, you know, if there were any rabbits there that would be eating his corn and stuff like that, or ruining any plants that could have been...

What did he say to you? How did he approach you?

JD He said, 'Is your name Jim Dickinson?' I said 'Yeah, that's right, what can I help you with?' He says 'Well, I'm looking for a gun to hire,' he says 'I know that sounds a little bit', what's the word?

ED Cowboyish, it might be.

JD Well, a little bit flamboyant or...

Dramatic.

JD Dramatic, aye, dramatic's probably a nearer word. He says 'But I'll explain what I'm talking about and then you'll probably understand.' He said 'there are poachers coming on my land', he says 'trampling where plants, or corn's growing and they just go anywhere, walk anywhere they like'. I says 'well,' I said 'I've spoken to John your son,' I said 'and I've been with him on occasions riding shot gun on top of your land rover, or his, I don't know whose it is and been looking for foxes.' He says 'Well that's another thing,' he says. 'That's something I want you to shoot', he says, 'because they're pulling our chickens and killing them.' He says 'so the sooner you can get out there and shoot a fox or two,' he says. 'And what I'll do, I'll hang it on t'end of the barn' and he says 'it'll probably put the wind up the others who'll keep away, certainly from the barn, nearer where the chickens are kept'. 'Aye', I said 'I'll do what I can'.

He didn't say anything about payment, but I think he was implying more or less that there'd be plenty to eat from what you shoot and you can keep it all and we'll work it that way, you know. He says 'and if there's a need to bring police into it, if you get into a bit of a tangle situation with some of the locals who are abusing their right to step on my land', he says 'I'll bring the heavy gang in and sort 'em out without all being well implicating you', he says 'Cause I don't want you to come to any, any undue pressure from the likes of them.' I mean, if I were apt to be on mi' own in the fields and there were three or four of 'em I'd be a fool to start going wading in, you know, feet first in situations like that.

Did you go out on your own?

JD Did I what?

Go out on your own?

JD Into that situation, oh aye I did. But I was always mindful that a situation could crop up and if it looked like that was imminent I wouldn't call it backing off, but I wouldn't go sticking mi' two penneth in if I thought I couldn't handle what could crop up.

And you came across people?

Thorne & Hatfield Moors Oral History Project

JD Yeah, the odd occasion me and Horace, mi' cousin went, there were, and in fact he once went on his own and...

So you took, you took somebody with you, sometimes.

JD No, not all t'time, I'd go on mi' own and, I mean, I had a gun, and I wasn't against threatening, you know. In fact Horace said, this time when he got a mouthful from 'em he says 'Listen', he says 'If I come through this fence and get to t'other field that you're in', he says 'you wanna make a run for it', he says 'or I'll fill your arse full o' shot!' You know, he were a hard man were Horace.

You told me that, the story of how you came across some people with Horace, can you tell me that?

JD Aye, he said, I think he used the vernacular to some degree, and said 'Why don't you lot, I'm telling you lot now, bugger off!' Those were his words and I was with him and I was more in charge of t'situation that him but he were my heavy gang, 'cause he were older than me, he were two or three, four year older than me and he'd always been in, he were mi' mother's sister's son, eldest son. And he'd always been known as somebody that could really handle himself and I don't think I've been exposed to quite the same as him, 'cause I've had that rheumatic fever and that knocked me back hundred and ten percent nearly when I had it, you know. I weren't, I weren't number one hard man in them days, but I weren't frightened of situations which is, which was a big help and things got more awry later in life as Emily knows, but she dunt like me talking about it.

ED Yeah well you, you seem to walk into trouble, into situations...

JD Well, I had, I had another pal called Vern Hitchcock, who I quite liked and still do. And I phone him about every three weeks or more. And I used to think, he'd been a boxer in the army and I used to think, by, I'm alright now. We used to go for a pint, once in t'week probably and, Sunday, maybe a Sunday night, cause we had a pre-cast concrete business and I were, we were both working like two blacks, shovelling cement and...

ED You'll have to cut that out!

JD Oh don't worry. Anyway, I thought I'll be all right if there's any, in the pub and any trouble starts, got an ex boxer for a pal and there were two occasions when it did, and I had it to sort out! A fellow hit him right in his private parts and laid him flat as a pancake, nearly crippled him for life and he was sixteen or seventeen stone this bloke and that's all I'm gonna say. I saw this punch set off and couldn't stop it. So I set one off, from about knee level height, this bloke right at side of his mouth and bust his mouth wide open and three blokes had to come in including t'landlord and cart him out. And Vern can't remember that happening now, it's obliterated from his memory.

These people that were poaching, were they poaching actually things that were on Mr Birtwhistle's property, like, I'm thinking...

JD Oh aye, cause there were rabbits and hares, would appear and the odd fox, so they were out for anything they could get. And if there were a few veg of any description that they could pinch by pulling the stuff out of the soil they'd do that as well. And it were a case of frightening 'em off and telling 'em to get off, get on t'main road and bugger off, to t'South Common Estate if that's where you come from.

Thorne & Hatfield Moors Oral History Project

Cause there were an estate just further up the road from where they'd have gone onto t'main road and our houses were right on the main road, where I lived.

And which Mr Birtwhistle is this?

JD This were old Harry. The old man. I got on well with him, he were a funny old devil mind, from all accounts. You know, nobody, I don't say it wasn't trusted in, but, no we're were a bit frightened of him because, well unless he knew who they were and that they were doing no harm, he played a hard man and a heavy man you know.

ED Well you can't blame him, because...

JD Oh, absolutely. You know, I mean he were defending his, his business. And John were a fairly big healthy looking sort of lad. Cause he used to drive, he used to drive t'tractor, or it were t'land rover, and me and John Collins used to sit on t'top and I used to, it had a canopy type top on it and I used to sit with one leg under mi' bum, tucked under and jammed between the canvas top of the land rover and the hard aluminium top behind it. Otherwise I'd have fell off. And we'd drive then on and you'd see a fox run across and, cause I remember firing at one of 'em and I were following it wi' gun and I were just about right and I pulled t'trigger and fired, and as I fired it went behind a flipping' bale of...

ED Hay.

JD Bale o' hay basically. The bailer had been down after they'd, you know, taken whatever they wanted from the crop and I blew all t'sides o' this, bale o' straw out and t'fox just ran round back of it and disappeared. Mind, I've got another one, only one I ever did shoot. And I shot it and I remember John had his kid with him, John Birtwhistle. And I were stood there, I stood up on the, on the land rover and he was inside with his youngster and he jumped out and the youngster jumped out with him and I shouted 'cause this fox was pushing itself up on its front feet, I'd hit it and, hit it pretty badly, I says, 'don't go near it!' I thought John would have had more sense than to even think about doing that. And by this time I got down and I just walked a few yards up towards it and put the gun up and I gave it one right in it's chest you know, it seemed a cruel thing to do.

ED No, because you were putting it out of its misery then.

JD Well, that's right, and I just shot it dead at that, you know. That were the only one, John took it and hung it on end o' t'barn like his dad had said.

ED Warning.

JD And they weren't too bothered with 'em after that.

Now, I'm going to come to a close in a minute, because we've been talking a long time.

JD Well don't worry, I'm not fussed.

One of the things that's always, I've found curious is that the mill that you've called the peat mill and I

Thorne & Hatfield Moors Oral History Project

know the Verhees they call it the peat mill, but everybody seems to know it as the paraffin mill.

JD Yeah, well they're about fifty year out of date actually.

Do you know anything about the paraffin mill?

JD No, and that's what I'm saying. I know it was within the 1800s when things were being established, or had been established and the mill and the houses were built around about that time. But to what extent the paraffin mill made an impact on the industrial side, round about that era, I wouldn't know. It were long before my time and I've got nobody I can ask you see now. Had it have been, had you have come to me, maybe twenty or thirty year ago.

ED Can you hand me that magnifying glass?

JD Yeah, I could have said, well I've got one relation or some other or whatever that could tell us more, and I could have contacted 'em. They're all dead.

Well I'm sure this, you know, we can find this out from the written resources. I just wondered whether you could, you know, there were any things left when you were there that gave you an indication.

JD No, not at all. And I think what they had done was modify the peat mill as I know it, it would have been modified after being the paraffin mill. I mean, they would have had to change all the tackle if there was tackle inside, as part of the process. I don't even know what the process of producing paraffin is. I'm not, I mean I'm an engineer but I don't know anything about that process you see.

Well thank you very much indeed.

JD It's a pleasure.

Had a long session, thank you very much.

[Recording Ends]