

## Thorne & Hatfield Moors Oral History Project

### Interview with: John Isle (2)

Date: 12<sup>th</sup> December 2006

Interviewer: Lynne Fox

*This is Lynne Fox for the Thorne and Hatfield Moors Oral History Project. It's Friday the 12<sup>th</sup> December and I'm talking to John Isle.*

*I noticed when I came to look at your farm before in December that it's not quite how you'd imagine it, how people imagine a farm to be. Most people imagine a farm to have sort of the house surrounded by fields and it's not at all like that. Can you just describe how it's laid out?*

Well it's a town farm really. In the town of Crowle and the land is surrounded in all directions but spread out about half a mile away from the farm and we have to travel to it as all farms that was in the village of Crowle, or the town of Crowle had to do in the past years. It's not very convenient as machinery's got bigger, not so bad when it was horse and carts and such like, but wide implements and that keep having scrapes with motorists and one thing and another on the road and...

*Cause they're not very wide roads are they.*

Not very wide roads, no.

*Has it always been the same in Crowle?*

It's allus been the same in Crowle, apart from the bigger farms that's about half a mile away on the outskirts of the village of Crowle, they have the land surrounding 'em.

*Do you know why that came to be?*

Well in the Enclosure Act, eighteen twelve, to eighteen twenty two, small hamlets for farming were set up in the village and all awarded lands in different parts of Crowle and we've had to travel to 'em to work 'em ever since. Similar in Belton and Epworth and Haxey and all such like.

*Did this farm exist before the enclosures?*

I wun't think so. The farm, the original farm house is very old, but, it would exist before the Enclosure Act because there's some, there was some wood in some of the outbuildings that was dated seventeen seventy eight and it was, I should say it'd been up a nice few years before then.

*And that, was that just the house?*

That was just the house and just one or two of the outbuildings that run off the house.

*Do you know who lived here then?*

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Isles' lived here, we've some old deeds going back to seventeen seventy nine to a Joseph Isle living here and before that I think there was a John Isle, that was not, that wasn't married and his nephew Joseph came to him as he was getting into old age to take over the farming.

*So at that time the farmhouse was where this house is now, where these buildings are now is it?*

It was in the next yard. It's still there, next yard.

*And do you know how their land was laid out, was it done...*

It was laid out and awarded in different parts of Crowle, particularly where some of the fields, still today that was awarded to that particular property.

*When you say awarded do you mean in the Enclosure Act?*

In the Enclosure Act.

*Before the Enclosure Act though, do you know how the land would have been?*

It was farmed on Crowle Hill and the other, old enclosures, some grass on lower land and higher land, Crowle Hill were farmable. Where they're finding archaeological sites of roman coins and one thing and another today, it was past down from Romans' settlements into farming because of the water level being high and being able to farm it, able to till the land.

*So they had, the buildings would have been here and then the land was sort of scattered about even then?*

Yes, oh yes, aye, yeah.

*And the farmable land, the arable land would have been just on the higher ground?*

That's right.

*What about the lower ground?*

Well up to Vermuyden draining it in sixteen sixty-six or something like that, it would be all fishing and shooting and wild fowling and such like I expect that's what it would be. And then later of course, some warping took place to improve poorer land to make it farmable.

*Now when we went to visit some of your fields and other land on the moors recently we went up a track way onto, and there was a definite line where there was definite moor land on one side that had been obviously allocated into portions and fields on, your fields in fact, on the other side. And you showed me where some of the levels were different, on, we're talking about the fields side now, some of the land levels were different. Some ground was higher than others some ground was lower than others, how did that come to be?*

When on a flood warping policy it should all be level but I've heard older people say that it was dug off to fill low places up or where warp hadn't done it's job and where they thought it was deepest they would dig some off and cart it and put it in low places to level it up like.

*So those are fields up there are what this farm was allocated in the Enclosure Act?*

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No, none of them, they was fields that me grandfather bought, in nineteen hundred and after nineteen hundred. They're on Crowle Common, that was awarded to this place in t'Enclosure Act and Rainsbutt Road, some fields up there Rainsbutt Road, and other fields, in Crowle Field, they've changed ownership and they're covered with houses now, so, [inaudible].

*So it wasn't all in one big block?*

Oh no, it were just little fields, four acre fields or less even like, down to three quarters of an acre and, everybody got a bit, got a bit o' poor land and were awarded a bit o' good land and, to try to make t'job equal. But then, the carr land on the edge of the moors it was warped and improved and some of that had been, well it had all been awarded and it was warped after the Enclosure Act, it was all sort of carr land, I think it would be rough grass looking back at old deeds and getting information off old deeds. It would be just carr land, wet and maybe getting hay off it or something like that, and then it would be warped and that would bring it into good quality agricultural land, and drained like.

*Can you tell me a bit about warping and how they would have been warped in that area?*

Well a compartment that was going to be get ready for warping would be embanked to stop the flood waters going any further than what was proposed to be warped and then a drain would be cut from either the Trent or the Ouse and two tides a day let down it to flood it and deposit its soil that was suspended in the water and let, the water would go back and then another tide would come and, over a, maybe a period of six to eight years to get the level built up. About some tides, quarter of an inch, some tides just an eighth of an inch, they would leave a deposit. When you plough land a little bit deeper than normal you can still see these tides, layers turned up in the ploughing, you can still identify it. Some parts of the fields are very heavy warp and that's where, where the old people, old farmers said that the water never went back and it suspended there and let heavy particles drop and make an heavier bodied warp.

*How thick's the warp layer, in general?*

It's from two, it's from twelve inches to two foot. Some places, maybe where t'warping drain's been and been filled in let warp up it, it could be up to maybe six foot deep. Deeper it is then better it is.

*And how long would you leave a field to be warped?*

I think about six to eight years depending on t'tide, spring tide I think carried more silt than any other tide, time of the year.

*And what could you do with it while it was being warped?*

You couldn't do anything only watch it grow and thickening up and then it was sown with a grass to knit it together and to dry it out and for a, three or four years and let it solidify down and then it was brought into cultivation or left for grass, whichever it was wanted for.

*And what kind, is it good quality land?*

It's good quality land, yeah, grade one and two warp land.

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*And some of the different levels you say were because people carted...*

Moved, yeah moved it about.

*Top soil off, but did everybody have to agree to warp in an area?*

Oh yeah, it had to be an agreed thing, all paid so much per acre, as I've been given to understand and if, there's a certain instance on Moors Top Road there was a ten acre that they wouldn't agree to have it warped, wouldn't pay to have it warped, so they warped round it. All the other lands warped and that ten acres's still peat. Belonged the lord of the manor, Earl Manvers, that should have been, most richest person I should think at that time.

*Where is the nearest warping drain, where would it, where would the warp have come from?*

It would have come from Swinefleet, by t'look o' the layout of the warping drains at Swinefleet Warping Drain. I think it was dug in eighteen twenty one or eighteen twenty two, something about the same time as Crowle Enclosure Act, but it didn't come into the Crowle area while eighteen forty six, around about that time. I think Ralph Creyke from Rawcliffe instigated it, and set the scheme up.

*We also saw some big black tree trunks when we were up there, now can you tell me what that is?*

Well them would be what was buried in the warp or in the moors from these prehistoric forests that existed in t'ice age that was destroyed and one thing and another, that's been preserved in the peat and as the peat dries out under the warp they get nearer the surface and cause quite a few problems in the farming process by causing damage to deep cultivating implements and also are expensive to remove and leave a big hole when you've got 'em out.

*What kind of problems does it cause you on a daily basis?*

Well you never know when you go to, go to do something how you might hit one and the implement 'ull jump over it and you'll get away with it or next time you hit one you'll hit it and cause quite a bit o' damage through twisting the implement or breaking bolts off, or. Anything that's worked among wood is never right anymore, you can never get 'em just as they was when they were new.

*Does it not cut through these tree trunks?*

No, impossible to cut through 'em, they're too hard. They're mainly fir roots, there is a few bog oak but they're mainly big old fir trees. But, keeps coming up, well they, they say they come up but I don't think they do, I think t'land sinks and they're all laid on a sand bottom is the roots, when you get 'em out, a white sand bottom, has been a sea bed at sometime I would think and then peat formed at top of it and trapped this wood in it and I think as it dries out and they sink warp goes down and bang you've hit one!

[Laughter]

*Do you come across a lot of 'em?*

We do, yeah.

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*And do you take, you take them out or you go round [inaudible].*

We have machines that, they break what we call a shear bolt off, rather than do any damage to machine it'll break, break these bolts off, so no, we don't dig as many out as what we used to do, but if we ploughed a field and hit one we used to mark it and then dig it out with a JCB in winter time. We did, we do get a number, maybe twenty a year out that's really got close to the top, but otherwise we try to manage because, if you get a root out and water next to hole, you've a bog hole for about two years while it gets solidified again. Very awkward with having machinery.

*Have you ever tried to sort of chop them up or saw them up?*

We chopped 'em up, we've blown 'em up, dynamite, all sorts of techniques. But if you blow 'em up wi' dynamite you had a bigger hole than ever to fill in!

*And can they been sawed and chopped?*

You can't chop 'em, it's like, hitting one with an axe it's like electric shock running up your arms, you can't, you can't, they're that hard and solid. Marvellous preserved wood really.

*Can they be used for anything?*

They used to be at one time it was a, a winter times job, poking wi' long irons to find them and dig 'em out and they used to be used for ships masts and, or kindling and fencing and all sorts o' different things at one time. Mainly the market for 'em was if you could take 'em to Doncaster and there used to be a market there, so I've been told that, where they used to sell this sort of wood.

*If they were used for ship's masts they must have been huge pieces.*

There is some huge pieces, yeah. That, a lot of the long trunks has been recovered in the past in t'seventeen hundreds and early eighteen hundreds when this went on and a lot of the long trunks have disappeared, we've more stumps now than what we do, long pieces of wood like, the trunks, I think they've nearly all been, well not 'em all but a lot of em's been found and recovered and used for something or other.

*Have you ever found a big piece?*

Oh yes, we've found some, yes, some twenty yards long some of 'em, not 'em all, top would be missing, as much as a JCB could get, move anyway.

*Crikey, must be a job.*

It is a job.

*And does it have any affect on sort of drainage, I'm thinking in terms of putting drains in and things like that?*

Well them drainage, we've dug roots out that we've hit, hit'n and we've found where, when land would be drained after enclosure and awardment that they've bored holes through these roots and put'n the drainpipes through the roots. They wouldn't have anything at that time to have been able to lift 'em out, only horses and one thing and another, so they'd chopped away while they'd got the drainpipes through the root and maybe go another ten yards and you would hit another root and they

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would have done same thing, so it must have been a demoralising job and took weeks to bore through them big roots and put clay pipes through 'em. But the land that we've had drained over this last fifteen years wi' these modern drainers, if you're draining and the machine hits one, they'll slow the machine nearly to a dead stop and just let it saw it's way through 'em, but some they can't. If they hit t'middle of a big stump, big bole, they can't get through 'em, they've got to jack out and get a machine to remove the root and then fill t'root hole in wi' stones, so t'piping dun't sink in settlement and quite a big operation and time consuming job. But if they just hit on the outsides of a tree root them machines will saw through 'em. Blades keep breaking off 'o t'chain and one thing and another, it's as expensive for them trying to drain your land as it is for us trying to farm it.

*Tell me about this drainage, what's this, what's been happening in the last fifteen years then?*

Well, people that's had it drained wi' machines, that's just it, it's just, if they hit any wood, or to make it more farmable that's all like.

*But do they dig, how do they actually do the drains? Do they dig a trench or?*

The machine digs it's own trench and lays the pipe as it goes along, it's a chain like a, on a chain saw, but with some big cutting blades on, it picks the soil up and feeds it to an auger that brings it either side of the cut and then another, it lays the pipe as it goes, then another machine comes with a blade, mainly just fitted on to an ordinary agricultural tractor and what they call back fill it in, and hopefully that's job done.

*And how deep are those laid?*

They might be four foot deep at the outlet, not so deep in low places but, mainly trying to keep about two foot six cover, to keep the pipe out of the way of subsoilers and heavy machines breaking them, squashing t'pipes.

*Is that because the land is, has always been, despite drainage efforts, still very wet, or is it that the wetness is increasing that you need this new drainage?*

I think with being surrounded wi' t'moors on the warpings as we call it, and the water table wanting to be kept higher on t'moors for peat regeneration we are getting some problems with a higher water table and seepage onto t'agricultural land. Pipes that would normally stop running in a dry spell seem to allus just be running a drop o' water.

*I think it's particularly evident when you, in the area you showed me, how that might happen, because you are separated from the moor just by this narrow track.*

Moors Top Road, yeah.

*Yeah, how wide's that track?*

I think it was, in the Enclosure Act it was awarded about twenty feet or something like that, maybe a bit wider, maybe thirty feet.

*And it's Moors Top Road did you say?*

Moors Top Road yeah.

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*So it's been there since the enclosure?*

It's been there since enclosure, yes.

*And on the other side of that is the moor proper, but it's actually been allocated into parcels..*

It was awarded at the same time to people that were awarded farmable land, everybody was awarded a strip of moor, on, well it was Yorkshire Moors then, but it was passed over into Lincolnshire. But then everybody was awarded a piece o' moors to go wi' agricultural land some fairly big areas and some not so big.

*Is the difference, at the time of enclosure would it have all been the same and it's just that some area was decided to warp and they decided to leave another area, not warped?*

Well I would think that the warping's had peat extracted from it to lower it, or, something, well it had, it had had peat took off it.

*Now we looked at your parcel of land there and it, you're working with English Nature as we described when we talked last time on just maintaining it in more or less natural form, cause I know that some of the other people along that road way have actually used their moor haven't they?*

It, Lincolnshire Trust, they've been doing small schemes in conjunction with English Nature to remove birch saplings and bigger trees that dry the peat surface out through evaporation of water, mainly in the summertime when t'leaves and that is pulling a lot o' water out o' t'moor.

*And has any body on there actually used the land holding to extract peat?*

It's all been done at some time, either by private, has somebody just come in? [inaudible].

*You were saying that some people have extracted peat from...*

Some people have extracted peat, mainly for litter for bedding for horses in Sheffield and Bradford and that area, that's where it all went to in years gone by. Later it were plastic bags, it's gone into plastic bags and gone to garden centres.

*So is it still being, is peat still being extracted around there?*

No, no, it's been stopped, for t'time being anyway.

*And you talked about a tramway there?*

Well where Moors Top Road is, now, there was a tramway that ran from Swinefleet Mill across parallel with t'Moors Top Road up to what we call the Nellie Tram, and that was heading another tram line that joined the Moors Top tram and headed west and joined the Moors Bottom tram and went to Medge Hall peat mill. Plus there was another, there's another tramway what we call the Northern Tram that was sort of, of an intermediate section of moor. Mainly horses and tubs, trucks loaded with peat, used that tram more than what Nellie Tram was used. Well I don't ever remember any lines being on Nellie Tram, but they could have, they had been before my time but I don't remember 'em.

*So was there a tram going along Moors Top Road then?*

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Moors Top Road, the tram lines ran at the side of the road.

*At the side of the road?*

Yeah, well the road, the road is where, the road that exists today was where the tram line ran and the grass, it was grass road then, a baulk, grass baulk, it was on the east side of the tram up to nineteen fifty five, fifty six when there was a big fire on Crowle Moors and it burnt all the sleepers and wood supports from under the lines and it were left like that for years and that finished all horse traffic or engine traffic on Crowle, Crowle Moors. The lines was recovered for scrap about eight or nine years after that, early sixties.

*And did it then just remain as a roadway?*

It, the road couldn't be used because of fire holes, the fire had burnt big depressions in the road underneath, the bit o' soil that was on the road, burnt all t'peat and let the road drop, and it stayed like that while somebody wanted to extract some peat lower down and led a lot o' stone and made a stone road, a usable road.

*Is that Mrs Revitt?*

That's Mrs Revitt, yeah.

*And you don't remember at all the tram way or the Nellie Tram?*

I don't remember that, no, I can't remember any lines being down there, the Moors Top tram line just lead into Nellie Tram and then just finished, just cut lines off, and that was it.

*And the Nellie Tram is where the Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust...?*

That's right, where their board and little park is, yeah.

*And you told me about an accident on the Nellie Tram.*

I just can't remember the date of it but a young chap was killed with a truck, shunting some trucks on Nellie Tram and I believe his name was Nathaniel, so it got called Nellie Tram, Nellie Corner as they call it, mainly.

*Were they shunting by hand there?*

They would be, have ponies or something yeah, yeah.

*And you talked about this big fire, do you remember that big fire?*

I can remember t'fire yeah. It burnt for weeks and weeks, got into peat banks and under this road that we've been talking about and burnt it in deep depressions. It burnt under t'agricultural land and we had to lead some soil off o' hill tops and fill it, fill these burnt holes up. Fire brigade were up there dowsing holes and that for long enough. It'd been a dry summer, it swept and, well it burnt for weeks anyway.



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*Anybody any idea what caused it?*

No, usually when there was a fire on t' moors they said it was t' moors men that had caused it, or, or a bottle, wi' sun shining on bottle and causing like a reflection and a burn and get like, like spontaneous combustion from that, but no I don't really know how it started. There was numerous fires a few years ago on it, when it was being worked there was, there really, hasn't been any fires since it's finished being workable.

*And they think that often it might have been the actual workers, that...?*

Well they all smoked, so, I don't know.

*They all smoked pipes?*

Pipes, mainly pipes, yeah.

*And you told me a story about seeing them going to work.*

Well they used to cut a tin lid with some, maybe a dozen holes in t'top o' t'lid to put on their pipes to stop, as they were working and bending about wi' their pipes in their mouth or if it was windy to stop any sparks coming out o' t'pipes as they worked like, and doing, setting fire to moors.

*So they had a little lid on them?*

Like a little lid, like off a bottle top yeah, to fit their pipe.

*Were there quite, were there a lot of people worked on the moor?*

There used to be eight to ten go on bikes, well they went early morning but you could see 'em coming home about half past two in an afternoon after they had a days, put their time in, they all worked on piece work and they got paid for how much they did whether they was digging peat, or whether they was stacking it up or whatever they did. They was all measured up and the depth that they dug and everything like that, it was all done by piecework and if they, if they din't work they didn't earn no money and that's how it was.

*Did they work for one particular company?*

They all worked for the British Moss Litter Company as I remember.

*And was that on Crowle Moor?*

That was on Crowle Moors also on Thorne Moors after the big fire in fifty five, fifty six, what men wanted to still go from Crowle could go and bike across Moors Top tram and go down t'Northern tram and over two big oak planks that spanned the warping drain and go to work on Thorne Moors, which was, which was say an hour and half's bike ride and walk to get to where they wanted to be, both going and coming back.

*So that's an hour and half one way and an hour and half back?*

Yes.

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*Crikey. And did you ever, it think we talked about this before, you didn't ever go, work yourself on the moors did you.*

Oh no.

*I think you'd got enough to do in the farm.*

No, I didn't, I an't worked on moors, no. I can remember ponies pulling peat tubs off when I was young like, going onto t'agricultural land wi' mi' father and men that worked for mi' father and I remember t'ponies being up there like. Whether they ever ran an engine on t'moors I can't really remember, I think Stan Oughtibridge did run an engine on t'moors, on Crowle side but it was too heavy for t'lines, t'lines used to keep splitting and so they mainly kept it on Thorne Moors. But I think it did run on Crowle Moors and they used to have a spraying truck to clean t'lines up and spray something and I think they used to pull that truck around wi' t'engine, to keep t'lines from getting grown up.

*Have you, were there any small independent producers other than British Moss Litter?*

There was before my time, yeah, there'd been a few operate on the edges of Crowle Moors, Mason and Pickett, they was, the ones that I can remember, that were operational when I was young, down at t'bottom of Dole Road and just to the left of Dole Road, just off the Moors Top Road. That's all I remember that, well, Parkin's Peat, he had a bit of a go off of t'Moors Top Road, but they din't do much.

*And this was before you remember [inaudible]*

Well when I was younger, yeah, I can, Parkin was working, he kept having bits o' goes and getting, bagging a bit up and, but it didn't, didn't seem to last long.

*If I can just come back to your own farm and farm land, you talked about how it was split, not split but how the allocations at the enclosure were divided amongst different grades of land, has that enabled you to grow different things or operate in a different way?*

Well no not really, just some fields is maybe more suited to growing a particular crop than others, but, on a farming rotation they all took their turn in a seven year rotation really. From potatoes to wheat and oats and barley and sugar beat, it was all growable land, some did better in some years depending on what rainfall or how dry or if you just happened to have things in right area at right time, proper season, for t'season like.

*And it was divided up to make sure that everybody got a share of what you said was good land and some poor land, is there a great variation or is it all reasonable land?*

There's a big variation from Godner Road to Rainsbutt Road, where Godner, Godner Road was mainly blown sand, to Rainsbutt Road being heavier warp from the over spill of the old River Don, when the old River Don was in flood it created all the land off Rainsbutt Road that ran up to Moors Bottom drain, from where it was, there was a bank and then the warpings, as they're called, it was warped from there on up to Moors Top Road, to improve, which is really the best plot of land in t'area.

*Was there anything you could do with this sandy area? Or is that too high?*

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No, it was mainly grass, but it has, as farming techniques improved it was given a lot of lime and, cause it were very acidic and brought into cultivation in a rotation with other land. The biggest drawback to it was when you'd just got a crop drilled, especially in spring and got a lot of wind it used to blow and cover the growing crop wi' sand or blow the seed out, but no, it's good farmable land. But it's mainly now gone all back to grass, one man's nearly bought it all as it's come available and he uses it all for fodder making, for making hay and, so, it has a sward of grass on it all year, so that's done away with the blowing job. It's sealed it up with a grass sod and so we don't get many sandstorms now.

*So it was that sandy that it used to blow away?*

It used to blow like it, like it does round Haxey and Epworth and Belton area, filled t'roads up wi' sand. I've one field that, that, it's grassed down Godner, that we take hay off.

*Thinking about this chap that's buying up land, when the allocations were made at the enclosure, did people just continue to accept that or did they try and consolidate their holdings into one place?*

Well no you had to accept it or I should say if you was given it you had to, there was exchanges, I think it all had to be accepted but you could, if two got in a mind you could do a swap, there was part swaps done before anybody ever went onto the land to farm it or cut grass on it to make hay, I think there was quite a few exchanges to bring land into their locality, nearer to where they want it to be rather than going to Godner Common, they would have some land down Crowle Common that's not so far to travel to wi' t'horses. Maybe swap a bigger field that warn't so good for a field not so big like, sort of that sort of a basis I think.

*And is all the land still now used, I mean you talked about him, this chap laying a lot out to grass.*

Well, it's as profitable to have it grass as it is to grow agricultural crops at this present time. With agriculture being in a bit of a depression it's, it's more profitable to have it grass than it is to grow cereal crops on it.

*And what about things like set aside and that kind of thing?*

Well, set aside is a compulsory thing you, we have to have eight percent set aside of a total area, so that's, that's just a government, well an EU ruling and we tend to put the poorest land that we farm into set aside and farm the better land.

*What does it actually mean when you set something aside like that?*

Well it's resting a piece of land, and hopeful, well it does, if you rest a piece of land for a twelve months and then start to work it again to put a crop in it'll grow a better crop with having rest, but, poorer land that's been put into set aside, some people, including myself we've left it for six to ten years and not disturbed it and it's regenerated itself back with natural grasses and it's growing a native seed crop of grass that's native to the area, that's spread on it's own without sowing it or anything like.

*And is that a good grass?*

Well, yeah, it's a good usable grass yes, yes.

*So set aside, your actually leaving it on one side and doing nothing to it?*

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Doing nothing and the rulings say we can't do anything to it. You have to cut it just to keep it tidy, but now under this new scheme of payment, this single farm payment, you can put land into fallow, take land out of production, good land, any type of land, more than your eight percent that you have to do, compulsory eight percent, you can take more out if you want but you call it fallow land and if you take heavy land out and leave it out for twelve months it will grow a good crop o' wheat without a lot of inputs.

*Right, well thank you very much.*

*[Pause]*

*Go on carry on I'm just recording that, I don't want to miss anything.*

Well it, it's a different warp, is, that was on the River Don bed it's a different type of warp to what seems to be spread on the warp, it's flood warped on the warpings, it's an heavier texture. Where if you were lifting a crop of potatoes on the warpings, a day's rain and you were, you kept away next day, you could go and it would go, you could take potatoes up, but on the River Don warp it wanted to be a week of fine weather before you went back it was different, heavier textured and sticky and made everything clog up, but it grows better corn crops does the River Don warp.

*When you say the River Don warp is it the old, the bed?*

The bed of the River Don and the overflow that's, when the River Don was in flood it would carry water and, and deposit heavier particles.

*Did they ever cart warp then from that?*

There was some cart warping done from the River Don on some land that we have that's called the Lovers Grounds, it was pushed wi' tram, with a tram line, across Moors Bottom road and up onto Crowle Moor Tops, as it's called, and was created, created warp fields up there, which are a different texture altogether to what was flood warped. It's more after t'nature o' River Don, type o' warp.

*And that was, would that be just people pushing...*

Well it would be a planned scheme by somebody that owned the land and wanted to improve it in, you know, years gone by like. That's what I've heard mi' father say that, how it was all created. Some of that land that runs into moors that was dug off at Lovers Grounds it's really heavy land, same texture as what Lovers Grounds land is. It ploughs about twelve inches deep, fourteen inches deep and then you're straight into a layer of peat that turns up if you're just ploughing that little bit deeper. It were just spread on, they must have carted thousands o' tuns to do it, how it was done I don't know really, but, some of them Lovers Grounds fields, one that we have anyway, it's about a foot to a foot and half in some places, lower than t'field next to it, because it had been dug a spit deep as we call it, and took on to t'Moors Tops.

*And the area we're talking about, sea carr?*

Sea carr, yeah.

*That, that was early warping was it?*

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That, that was flood warped in, round about eighteen forty-six, on wi' Crook Moor and what have you.

*And is that the same kind of warping texture as the other flood warping elsewhere?*

Oh yes, aye, yeah, and same as Rainsbutts Farm, proper, it was, some of that Rainsbutt it was warped at the same time.

*So you've got bedding of the River Don in that area, is there any other, because there's a lot of rivers and sort of river channels and things?*

Not really, not, that, where any deposits would have been left, no, what rivers would be shown on maps will still be existing I would think. About the last time the warping drain was used was to create some land at Medge Hall in low peat workings, was at, nineteen eleven or nineteen twenty-two or something like that warn't it. That was the last time the warping drain was used I think from Swinefleet flue that drain.

*Do the drains also act, this is going to sound a really stupid question, now those drains brought water here and flood water to warp, do they also drain off the land as well?*

Yeah, they was used as, specially the Moors Warping drain proper it was used as a drainage channel for the moors so it was workable to get peat off, in later years, Fisons when they took over the moors from British Moss Litter Company in the early sixties they dredged it, deepened it and widened it and that's what dried Thorne Moors out, that, that big artery, that big drain going through t' moors.

*Cause you're on the outside of that big surrounding drain.*

Yeah, cause Crowle Moors splits, runs between the warping drain and the Moors Top Road, five or six hundred acre of Crowle Moors and then this warping starts then, that was Participants land as, that, helped Vermuyden to drain the Isle of Axholme.

*It's quite ironic really isn't it that the bit of land, the land between the warping drain and the land that's warped basically is not warped.*

Yes, it's still moors, well it'd be too high like really, it'll be too high, because peat wouldn't have been extracted then. I think the British Moss Litter Company didn't start taking peat off Crowle Moors while about eighteen nineties, so then all that warping would have been done before then.

*So the land that was warped that's round Moor Top Road is presumably where the peat had been, a lot of peat had been taken off?*

Off that Participants land yeah, yeah lowered.

*That makes sense, thank you very much.*

That was took out to fill wi' peat turfs and they thought that was the best way of, before lines, tram lines and that, that was the best way of getting 'em off, the water.

*The Dutch, the Dutch Company imported, seemed to import everything.*

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Yeah.

*They imported Dutch barges and..*

Yeah well that'll be it then..

*You say that there was an area?*

There's an area of about two hundred and fifty acre I think something like that, that, where we used to do work on Thorne Moors, for Peter, trimming pathways and one thing and another we used to go round this whole area like, it seemed a biggish flat of land to me like, but [inaudible]. I couldn't see how they could get it off we boats, wi'out they took it off in a winter time because they would want it dry, water level was higher than where they was cutting, so I couldn't see how they could have worked among water and kept the water level high to transport it over. T'water level had to be kept high for t'boats to manoeuvre int it like.

*What did you say they called it, the...?*

The Dutch canal system din't they. It was the first reserve that, sort of Fisons gave English Nature that area sort of, to keep them off their back, so they could carry on digging and that sort of pacified English Nature for a few years while opposition towards Fisons digging and that, they, you know, it put an end to job din't it.

*I notice this, I was looking at a list of tools and things like that, there's English graving spades and Dutch graving spades....*

Yeah, the cutting knives and they're like heart shaped aren't they.

*Yeah.*

They was left stuck in t'peat after that big fire where the workings had been down at bottom o' Nellie Tram area there, on Medge Hall tramline side. They were all just stuck in t'peat and t'fire had swept round 'em like, all these tools were left. Well I brought some home that were left and they were left there with shafts burnt off and I brought, you know, bottom bits home sometimes when we was kids walking about on moors.

*You haven't got any still lying about by any chance have you?*

I think I gave Peter Rowarth 'em.

*Oh did you?*

Yeah, I did, I think it, [paused]

And all that lot all them farms there, it would all warp now lovely because it's low it they just did them doors up at Swinefleet! Could flood it all and make some good farm land, flood it right to pit couldn't you, you know, that, what was it, Warming and Development company or something warn't it. They went bankrupt din't they like, that's what finished them off warn't it. Squabbling about among themselves.

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*It is a big investment though this warping. I mean if you've to leave your land without producing anything for all that time.*

Well it wun't grow nowt before would it, it was either peat or just unlevelled grassland, it warn't productive at all was it, so, you know if they're gonna.

\* It'd be the on start wouldn't it?

It said, I read somewhere, or somebody told me where it was worthless before warping and worth hundred pound an acre when they got it warped. So it warn't a bad thing in them days was it.

\* Be a lot o' money.

It would wunt it.

\* Hundred pound an acre 'ud be a lot o' money in them days.

I've heard 'em say when they did Top Moor, warped Top Moor, they did t'grass and then they grew red 'taties and they barged 'em off, took 'em back down th'old warping drain, when t'water was running back, they used, then go out through t'Swinefleet doors into t'Ouse and these 'taties they used to take 'em there, maybe unload 'em there or let 'em go through into t'Ouse on same boat, I don't know. But I've heard 'em say they used to take 'em, they called 'em Yorkshire Reds I think, or summat like that. I've heard mi' dad talk about it.

*And if you're a warping company I suppose also there's the digging of the drains and all that it must have been a big job.*

Well I did, I did know how much that warping drain cost, including buying t'land and doing it, I mean it'd all be done be hand wun't it, there were no Hy-macs warh there? How did they do it like, I mean, if you was to undertake a job like that today what would it cost? And setting up and banking and being sure that t'tide didn't get away and flood what din't want flooding and, you know, bye, it'd be a big undertaking wouldn't it.

*I've not come across any, well I mean, I've not necessarily gone into it in detail, but talking about who dug it and the amount of labour, whether they imported it, whether people came, you know like navvies and things came to dig them. You'd have thought that somewhere in the records they would appear wouldn't you?*

You'd have think so yeah. This Makin Durham, he, he did more in Goolefields and Cowick and that area din't he, I don't know whether he was in conjunction with Creyke when they did this little scheme here at Crowle warpings but [inaudible], I mean them drains, a friend of mine has a six hundred acre farm on Goolefields, Frank Jacklin and he has that Durhams Warping drain that runs through their farm like and it acts as a drain back to river now. But, they warped it, all Goolefields and that's warped deeper than all this area here, it was took off too soon same as Rainsbutt, it warn't warped, left on long enough. You know, I've heard 'em say, heard old men say about it, it wanted another two years on it, but the, with horses and where they din't plough very deep, the little bit of warp had improved it that they though was good enough, you know, a bit of growable soil and peat keeping moisture underneath would feed moisture through to t'warp and keep crops going, which it did, but cause it's got worn out a bit and mixed up with deeper ploughing and one thing and another wi' t'machinery and tractors and that it, it would have been better wi' more warp on it,

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you wouldn't have hit wood so bad then. You see there's just as much wood under Goolefields and that but it's deeper, they don't hit it.

*Makin Durham was also a commissioner.*

Yeah.

*So, I'm not, that was his role in the thing that I read about, the other day.*

Yeah.

*But it was a, I mean a huge...*

It was a huge operation warn't it, to use that river like that warn't it, I think at Blacktoft was it where they did some of last warping int it, in there, somewhere in there and so many acres in there they did, at other side o' t'river.

*When would it be t'last warping?*

I think it was in thirties or summat like that, that side o' t'river at Blacktoft area, I've heard about it or I've read about it, but it was about nineteen, eleven, or nineteen twenty or summat when they did this at, what they call, Rhubarb Farm here warn't it what Barkers has at Medge Hall here.

*And it's a rhubarb farm?*

It was a rhubarb farm when they, when they got it warped somebody called Gillings come from away to, and I think they sew it wi' rhubarb, planted it wi' rhubarb to dry it out, sort of thing, and to use it like, well it's a good farm, Barker's is it now, Robin Barker, it's all in, up and down in waves, depressions like, where it's, I don't know whether the [?] sunk letting it go unlevel but it seemed to be very unlevel. I an't been on it in years, but I have been on like, it's on Causeway Road, Causeway Road goes through it, what comes out at farm Moorends there. Birtwhistle has it hasn't he, John Birtwhistle. But there's some big gates up, at one time you could drive through, but you can't now there's some big locked up gates.

*Right I better let you get back to your business.*

[Recording Ends]