

Thorne & Hatfield Moors Oral History Project

Interview with: Richard Lyon (part 2)

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Interviewer: Lynne Fox

Now your father was at, at Lindholme Hall farming during the wartime?

Yes, yeah.

And I think that there was some prisoner of war camps nearby?

Yes, yes, they, well there were prisoner of war camps all over I think, and of course one of the things that they did was to send the prisoners out to work on the farms and mi' father was no exception, had quite a number of German prisoners came and worked on the farm. Some actually even lodged on the farm, stayed on the farm. They, I think, obviously I don't remember them, but from what my father said they, they were mostly red cross men, or the German equivalent of the red cross men and very, you know, very well liked. A lot of them corresponded for many years after the war and I do remember one or two of them actually coming over it would be in the late fifties, I guess early sixties they came over and visited years after as well.

I know there was, in stories me father told me, that the lorry had come to pick them, the German prisoners up and take them back to the camp, wherever that was and just as they were getting on the lorry there was another lorry came delivering a load of fertiliser, I think it was. So the German prisoners made their lorry driver wait while they unloaded the fertiliser, wouldn't let mi' dad and uncle unload it like. They unloaded it before they let their lorry driver take them back to the camp. So, yes they were well liked, well appreciated and also one of them, when it was a bit, a bit quiet during the, perhaps the winter months and perhaps the weather was a bit bad, much like it is today, this chap in Germany he'd been an illustrator for a wine company, drawing illustrations, their wine catalogue and he asked mi' gran if he could do some painting in the house and what was then the dining room he painted on the frieze, right the way round the room, all the different things that were on the farm at the time. The old tractor, there was the old pig in the corner, there was the badger and the old mill wheel, the cottages that were down the road, a car that my dad had at the time their old Austin, there was even the old Overtime tractor that, even in those days, was in the nettles and that's the one that Mr Smith at Burnham bought at the sale, that I was saying, that we see at the festival of the plough. So yes, he painted just about everything that was on the farm at the time and it's still there to this day. Well another cousin of mine she restored it quite a number of years ago went over it all and retouched it cause it was fading, so it's a nice memento from those days.

And also you talked about Lindholme as well and the plane crashes, but can you remember Lindholme Airfield I'm talking about obviously, can you remember it operating as an airfield?

Oh yes, yes, again when we were going to school and coming home part of the lane went round the end of the, end of the main runway, round the perimeter track and they'd got lights on at each side, the red and green lights. 'Halt if red light shows, low flying aircraft' and quite often when we were either going or coming home from school we had to stop there and, well in the first days it was the Lincoln Bombers, which was the updated Lancaster, they would, they would be in and out taking off and so on, because it was a heavy bomber training school after the war. And of course there weren't, I don't think those planes in those days were particularly responsive as regards getting up

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and away or coming into land and there were quite often, as you went across the end of the perimeter track you'd see two great wheel marks across the road where they'd come down a bit early like and hadn't quite managed to reach the runway before they'd come down. So we didn't, if the red light was on you didn't make a dash for it!

And can you remember it closing down and transferring to the prison?

Yes, yes, that's not, not so long ago really as regards to the prison, but, yes it, well it was quite ironic when it closed down because it wasn't, wasn't long before that they, when Finingley airfield was on the go as an airfield they used to have the air display there and one year, just before Lindholme closed down, the Queen was due to come to Finingley. So they did a lot of, there was a lot of wet paint signs went up round, round Lindholme Airfield, they were painting everything up and cleaning everything up in case the Queen had to, had to visit there, for no other reason than she might, she might come and then it was only a matter of months later, I think when it was closed down.

Yes and then the prison took over and, they, for the first, well, I don't know how long, first several months anyway they kept losing one or two. We had one running down our lane with the, with a bright blue patch on his shoulders, he'd obviously had enough of being in there and was on his way home!

You are quite isolated out at Lindholme, it must be quite a worry sometimes perhaps?

Well, I don't know, I think, touch wood, we haven't been broken into here or down at the Hall, but, my wife's mother in the middle of Doncaster has been broken into twice, so..

The other thing I wanted to ask you about was when they were drilling for oil and struck gas, didn't they, on Hatfield Moor? Did you see any of that happen?

Oh absolutely, yes!

[Laughter]

Tell me about it.

Yes we were, well we were actually in the barn here sorting potatoes on that day and obviously it was before I was married, so, went home for my dinner and when I got past the end of the trees here and you could see across there and could see the big flame going off. So I wondered what had gone off and when we got back home it was quite obvious like, they'd had a bit of an upset. Apparently they were drilling for oil and it was, only about quarter of a mile away from Lindholme Hall, where I lived at the time, and they, they'd hit this unexpected pocket of, of gas, comparatively near the surface for, anyhow in their terms, and because it was so near the surface they hadn't sort of got all the, they'd only just got started with the drilling, so they hadn't got all the safety gear in place. So of course this gas came up and it only needed a spark to ignite it and it did. So, up it went and for a while the, the fire brigade were there just sort of playing the hose on it, just to, hoping it would go out.

Well, I don't know how many days or weeks it'd been burning, it obviously wasn't going down at all and they ended up having to send for Boots Hansen, he was a Texan oilrig fire fighter and blow-out specialist. He had been, he had worked for Red Adair, the sort of famous, well known, fire fighter, oil fire fighter and he came along oversaw the operations to get it under control and it, it

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was just over five weeks it was burning altogether before they actually managed to get it put out. And once they'd done all the bits and pieces as regards making it safe and pulled all the wreckage away of the old rig, they had to, while it was still burning they had to put another valve over the top of it so they could turn it off and then weld it in place so that, they put this valve over and, the gas was still roaring out of the top but it wasn't lit. So they had to relight it and after various attempts of one thing and another mi' father went down and using the old sort of cowboy western type way, he used a bow and arrow with a flaming bit of rag tied to the end of it, shot it through the flame and that, that lit it. So once that was done they could weld the valve in place and then turn it off.

So, yes it was quite exciting, it made the, well it made the world headlines for, quite a while. Some, some friends had relatives in Australia and they'd heard about it in their, either newspaper or TV, so yes it, it got us noticed a bit and it was, that would be nineteen eighty one and it was a very cold winter. It was just before, just before Christmas when it, when it went off and then it was a very cold spell of weather that we were having, I believe at night time it got down to minus twenty on some nights, but because of the heat from the flame, round and about the oil rig itself all the trees, all the bushes had come out in bud, the birds were singing and the firemen that were obviously on duty twenty four hours a day, had even seen the snakes, adders, come out of hibernation, even though it, hundred feet away it was minus twenty there the, it was like a spring day like!

[Laughter]

And it was, it was like having, in the house it was like having, Concord or whatever sat in the back yard at full throttle, with the, you know, the noise, rapping all the windows and everything it was real, a real roar.

Crikey, you don't think of the noise, you think of the heat and flames and that sort of thing.

Yeah, yeah, well we went to, out with the young farmers over the Christmas period and as we came back, I think we went to Bradford to, to one of the pantomimes or something and as we're coming back on the bus, coming off the M62 onto the M18, which is a good eight, nine miles away I would think, as you come over the motorway bridge and get that bit higher you could see the flame from there, and 'oh yes, we can see where we are'.

And did you ever know whether they actually hit any oil in that, at Hatfield?

Well they didn't, they didn't go any further than that. Up until this day it's been producing gas, well, it's been producing gas for quite a while, now they've actually changed the use of it and they now actually use it as a gas storage facility and they're pumping, well they sort of buy gas from the national grid and pump it down during summer when it's cheap, then sell it back to the grid in winter, when the price goes up. But they're using the reservoir that was there, what obviously once it had, it was empty, using it as a storage facility, so they di'nt actually get to the oil that they were drilling for, whether it's still down there or not I don't know!

Okay. Thank you very much indeed.

[Recording Ends]

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