

Thorne & Hatfield Moors Oral History Project

Interview with: Richard Walker

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Interviewer: Lynne Fox

This is Lynne Fox for the Thorne and Hatfield Moors Oral History Project. It's 10th August 2006 and I'm talking Mr Richard Walker. Good afternoon Mr Walker.

Good Afternoon.

I wonder if you could start by telling me when and where you were born please.

I was born just in, I was born in Doncaster where I've lived all my life since I came out of the, being born here. My family have been associated with the area for around two hundred years, in one shape, or form, or another. My grandfather, he farmed next to the moors at Nun Moors Farm and so we spent our childhood down there together with, and always had free access onto the moors so it's been a very enjoyable part of my life where I realised that I was very privileged to be able to do so and to have the experience of being on the moors.

So your grandfather had a..

Farm, yeah.

What kind of farm was it?

It was a mixed farm, mixed farm, arable, cattle, he had, that was one of his farms that was there, and the type of land with it being from the edge of the moors it was a very light land, it was good for growing various crops, never any good for potatoes though, potatoes became scabby, cause I think it was possibly the acid in the, in the land. But I can remember us each, as it went on in year by year that as the land was cleared from being moor land covered in trees, they used to have to blow up, they cut them so far down the trees in fact some of the large ones, little bit of dynamite just to lift them out. But there was one particular local farmer, he used to put enough dynamite underneath, we used to hide and he made sticks!

[Laughter]

So it was always, it was, as a child I was very lucky that I was able to go onto the moors or any of the surrounding areas and enjoy the green countryside.

Can you tell me what it looked like, can you tell me first of all what your granddads farm looked like?

Very old fashioned farm, bearing in mind that he'd been there since the turn of the century, old equipment and yeah, hard work, did he have any horses then, I don't remember the horses being there but I remember the old tractors that were there and all the, the old binders that would be there that he used rather than combine harvesters and a single furrow or a two furrow plough. Whereas today you've got six and seven furrow ploughs. Very much in a strip system, cause it was in connection with the moor owners association who owned strips of land, so much of it is owned

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down there by, by the church commissioners as well, so there weren't large fields at that time there was just cables of land.

And would each cable be, have a fence round it?

Have a dyke, have a dyke and a hedgerow. They all had dykes and hedgerows and it went all the way down, I'll look if you like and I'll find out, I've got some maps of the old farm workings down there. But it was really going back to the middle ages really I suppose, it's one of the oldest systems that was left, cause a lot of the farmers that were there they were small farmers. Not as they are today having thousands of acres.

And you're giving me an image of it not being sort of a house surrounded by a collection of fields but that they were quite widespread..

Yes the, on the moor edges road, if you go down there today you'll see quite a number of farmsteads that are still there at the side of the road and then you'll see the cables of land that went back from each farmstead, round the farmstead you would have the fold yard, the farm buildings and the stack yard and everything around it and then there was the cables of land behind. But I remember during, as a youngster, at potato picking time yes it was always, it was very much a manual thing, it employed a lot of local people. There used to be gangs of women used to come round potato picking or pea pulling, but certainly potato picking down there. It was a hard, it was a very backbreaking job really, bending down, putting it in baskets and then making potato pies, which you don't see today.

What's a potato pie?

A potato pie is where at the end of the field they would excavate so much out, put some bales of straw around, they would then fill it with the potatoes and then they'd used the backs of straw, which had come from threshing and then that would form the roof of the potato pie with a vent in, usually made out of straw as well, and then you would dig around by hand and take the mud off the field and put that on the pie itself and make it waterproof and frost proof.

And presumably that's for storage?

Yes. Because they'd be a glut of potatoes wouldn't there. If at harvest time in October you're harvesting when all the potatoes came onto the market what are we going to do for spring when there aren't any and that was the way. Then in the spring then you'd be riddling potatoes. You'd open up the pies and the riddle would be there and you'd riddle the potatoes and grade them and send them off for sale.

And did it keep them really fresh?

Oh Yes. Yes. But the idea of the straw and the mud was to keep the frost out.

And did your grandfather come from a line of farmers? Was this the family farm or..?

Right, my grandfather was a farmer and a butcher. And his father was a farmer and he came, mi' grandfather came to Thorne in nineteen hundred and six, nineteen hundred and seven from Fishlake.

What was his name?

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Pinder Walker. He came to Thorne and he was a household name, everyone knew him and he first came to Thorne because, when he first came to Thorne his first ever customer, very strangely on my mothers side her grandfather was a veterinary surgeon and his first ever customer was my grandfather from the other side, never knowing that their children or grandchildren would become united at a later time. It was quite interesting. But he came to Thorne and I think he used to have a motto in the nineteen twenties and thirties for his butchers shop and it used to be 'We buy the best that farmers feed so come to us for all you need'.

[Laughter]

And did he have a butchers shop?

Yes, and a slaughterhouse, that's still there, just round the corner from the traffic light. The slaughterhouse is no longer functioning because of new regulations but it's the third generation now of the family that do the, that are doing the butchering.

And did he used to employ people at the farm permanently it was a large farm?

Yeah he had a, he'd have a foreman and workers cause he had a, then he had land throughout the area, so it wasn't just all there and then he had another farm at the other end of the town called Reedholme Farm on Reedholme Common and that was a different type of land that was very clay land, very, very heavy, whereas Mooredges land was quite land because it had got a mixture of peat amongst it.

And did he farm it all himself or did he have a tenant?

No he farmed it all himself together with my uncle, he worked for, in fact the whole family, it was a family business, you all, at harvest time you were all working together at, on an evening, whereas normal schoolchildren would be coming doing out of school activities, my brother more than, my brother used to always spend his after school hours at Mooredges Farm. But we all had a job to do. We all had a job to do.

And what was your job then?

Everything. I used to work in the butchers with my cousins, we'd work in the slaughter house at sort of five o' clock on a Sunday morning, cause when you'd got all your work done you could have the day off.

And what age were you when you were doing that?

Twelve, fourteen. I used to take orders out on a bike, at that point we used to deliver meat, we used to go out delivering meat. But I used to mix that with a, also I thought I was quite an entrepreneur at the time, I thought, right, a little grocery shop on the corner, I'll deliver their meat as well. So I used to be delivering meat and groceries out on a bicycle for miles.

And did you actually live on that farm?

No, no we didn't. My grandfather never lived there, my grandfather lived above, next to the butchers shop and my uncle Raymond he'd didn't live on the farm, he lives on the Reedholme Farm now, but Mooredges Farm it was a foreman that lived on there.

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And is this your father's father that you're talking about?

Yes.

And so how many children were there in the family, how many brothers and sisters had your dad?

He had, there were three sons and one daughter.

And did they all go into the business?

One went into the farming side, one went into the butchering side, my father was a mas.. he went as an apprentice and became, he was a master builder, joiner and cabinet maker and his sister was a, she was a school mistress in a school down in Maidenhead in Berkshire. But everyone even after then, we all, we've still got hold of our butchering knives or whatever it might be, all had to be able to do the, to do the job and it was very much a family concern, all hands on deck so to speak.

You told me a little bit about what the farm looked like, what did the moors look like?

Very, very warm, I would describe it as being warm because at that time you'd so many trees and you'd all the birds the flowers and everything. I can, when we used to be singling turnips and mangles, I don't know whether you understand what the word singling is.

No.

As the, as the seeds are planted and they grow and there might be two or three plants together, aren't there, you have a term called striking which would have a farm worker going down with a striking hoe, striking out the rubbish from in between. But singling was when you had to go, physically go down on your hands and knees and if there were two or more plants growing together you'd pull the others out and just leave one so one could grow and give a good crop. But that had to be done by hand and you went on your hands and knees just going down the rows and you could be just half a mile long, just going down. It was quite a, quite a job.

And was that one of your jobs?

Yes, yes, you didn't have to have many brains to do that, you just had to, it was the brawn I suppose!

And you were saying there were lots of trees? Are you talking about tall trees?

Yeah there were some silver birch trees and a lot of rhododendrons and a lot of, much silver birch, and there's a couple of woodlands still down there but a lot of bracken, lot of bracken down there. There's been some oak there that's maybe been, an oak tree that's fallen over and it's gone into the bog and it's sunk and we've come across it if we've been ploughing and you pull it out, it's, it was a, at this time of year was absolutely wonderful apart from the snakes. That could be, you were just careful.

And your granddads farm adjoined the moors?

Yeah.

So did you spend a lot of time actually on the moors as children?

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We would go down to there yes we did, but there was nothing there, so you could enjoy if you like the rural area anyway. There was an area down there called New Zealand where there was a pumping station and there was an old paraffin mill down there and it was all, where they'd been extracting the peat there was little moors railway went across but it was all, all outdoor life, you, I always remember when I was school I never had a day off school for the last four, five years that I was at school. We were healthy, because you actually, you weren't sat watching the television you were out there getting the fresh air and I think that's what it's all about, it's getting out there and enjoying it and certainly the moors, which I went across the Thorne Moor a few weeks ago with the Peatlands Walk I did, just set that off and really it's, provided you use common sense then it's most enjoyable to everyone or anyone who wants to come along.

And you say you went there, you know, used to go out there from school, was it just you and your brothers and sisters or did you...

You took your friends as well, you took your friends as well.

And what did you get up to?

Children, you play don't you, you run and you enjoy the fresh air and certainly the animals and the fauna and flora that's down there was wonderful and especially in the first week in June when the rhododendrons were coming out, they were beautiful and it was so peaceful down there. As an adult I used to go down there horse riding, just onto the moor and it was so peaceful, it was quiet, and you've got the, because the crops were nearby there was one chap used to grow a lot of strawberries, so you'd get the butterflies down there and it was very peaceful, very, very, peaceful.

You mentioned it a little bit, can you describe to me what it's, maybe you were too young to know much about it but, actually clearing land out of the moor, can you describe that to me?

I don't remember a great deal about it but certainly if there was an old tree stump from, one might have broken over, and you would have to rip that out and bring it all back into use, because of course you can't grow anything on with the peat, it's got to be mixed and as peat extraction took place, but that was really after I was really on there as a youngster, when it became really commercial. Because before that it belonged to the, the British Peat Moss Litter Company, they had the rights to extract peat from there, but that was more over towards the back of Moorends, rather than towards the A18 and the Crowle Road.

So what did you mix the peat with to make it good for...

You got the soil that was there from the site, as it, you would drag some soil down. On your plough you get a certain amount and it's all harrowing and dragging it and mixing it and it just, yeah, it's just a gradual reclamation of it all and of course once the peat's, the peat's been extracted the water table, then the water table is lower isn't it, it's letting the water, draining the water off and it becomes more useable. Because before hand the peat was very boggy, very soft, and wet, which is no good to anybody, you can't do anything with that cause then it would just rot. But it was all, it was, it was interesting as a youngster to grow up in that environment.

So if they gave you, if you had a piece of land say that was still moor land that attached to your land, say you bought some, you would buy it in an area.

Yeah.

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And then you said that they had the, the cables as they already existed had the dykes and the hedges down each side.

Yeah.

Would you have to dig the dykes?

Yes, yes you'd dig the dykes farther down to drain it across.

So it'd just be moving...

Yes.

Moving continuously into the moor.

Yes, that's right yes.

So it must have been very hard work for you to dig the ditches.

Oh yes, it was all by hand, it's like during the, during the summer season you'd be dyking, or sort of really more of a winter time of a job really, but you'd identify during the summer where you had problems and then you, that was a manual job as well, dyking and then even if it was only, clearing the dykes, you would clear it with a scythe, there were no fancy methods of doing it then.

And the dykes were just for drainage?

Yes. There are some, there were some big dykes there though, there was, the, the, is it the Tweenbridge drainage board that goes down to there, yeah they were basically just for drainage but also it identified your boundaries. It identified your boundaries as well. Because normally whichever side the dyke was on then that, if the dyke was yours then you owned it to the middle of the dyke.

Did you see them digging peat?

Mm

Can you describe that to me?

It'd be a large spade, or a knife I should say, I'll call it a knife rather than a spade, I think if I remember rightly it's either twenty, twenty two, twenty four inches wide and it was like the modern.

What was twenty-four inches wide?

The blade. The blade, and you would dig down in a slot and you'd take a strip out that was that width and down to a depth of about, was it about three feet? up to about three feet I think and it'd be dug out in like slices and then they would slice in another way so that you actually had pieces of peat which were approximately twenty two, twenty four inches long and about four or five inches square and then you would slab them and put them out to dry on the side of where you'd just dug.

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And did you ever do that?

Yeah, yeah, quite hard work, quite hard work, but I only did it whilst I was an early teenager I suppose. I used to go and help some of the old hands that'd been doing it for years and actually when you were handling it all your hands would become brown with the stain it would, you'd think oh, and you'd come and try and wash it off and it was still, it was still there a little. I suppose, some of the workers that'd been there for years, it would be a constant stain all the time. But it was a good, I think the people who worked there, it was very hard work but it was an enjoyable working life. It was the fresh air again wasn't it.

And could you see, you know, if you went down to the bottom say of your granddads land, could you see them working?

Not really, no, cause there was a wood, there was a wood beyond there. The easiest place to see them working was really the other side of the warping drain, at the back of Warp Farm, that area down, that was the access down to there, but there was a, there's one or two people, old gentlemen in Moorends that I know and they would have been down there and they used to work down there and the tales what they would tell. They used to live, some of the workers lived in cottages on the moors, there was no electric, there was no water, they had either, they had tilly lamps, their heating would be peat in their fire place, they'd burn peat, and the water they were trying extracted it from the ground. Well it was very difficult, it was brown, it was brown with the peat, but it was all, it was all good. It was all good. I remember having to pump water and my, another one of my relatives they lived a place called Marsh Lane and we used to have to pump the water up, go and get the water and you'd have all sorts of beetles and all sorts coming up!

[Laughter]

You had to filter it through a piece of muslin, but it di'nt do us any, ant done any harm has it!

And what did it taste like?

It was, peaty, there's no other word really. It was, the water was quite soft, like the rainwater is quite soft isn't it and beautiful for, it would, if you were washing with soap the lather would be wonderful, because it liked the soft water. But it's, yeah, very good childhood really.

And where did you go to school?

I went to school, first of all here at this old derelict school at the front, sorry the one behind it, there was a Fieldside Infant School, then I went to the Fieldside Junior School, then I went to the old Brooks Grammar School and then I went to the Senior Boys School.

And that's in Thorne?

It was all here, next door.

So you didn't go far then.

Didn't go very far, because my parents only lived at the other side. I haven't moved above a hundred and fifty yards since I was brought up here and my father lives in, the house my father lives in is only, I suppose the buildings they're adjacent to each other, where he was born to where he lives now.

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So after you left school, tell me about after you left school?

What did I do after I left school, I was an apprentice joiner with my father, but working with parents doesn't always work, doesn't always work. So then I went to work for various other builders as well. Then I had a spell in the ore mines in Scunthorpe.

The what mines?

Ore mines, the iron ore mines and again that's all part of, of life. When I think that how they worked, it was hard work. I used to leave Thorne in a morning at what time would it be, I would catch the six o'clock milk train in a morning to go to Scunthorpe, I'd leave, I'd finish work and then I used to have to walk about two miles from the railway station in Scunthorpe down to the ore mines and then on an evening I'd finish at that at half past four and have to walk back and then I used to get home about twenty past six at night.

What did you do in the mines?

I was with a team of joiners and riggers, we used to go out there and there was one of the world's largest drag lines in one of the mines that I worked, it was what you called a W1800, one of these enormous drag lines for taking the overhang of soil from the iron ore rock. In fact I've got some iron ore rock outside that's got the fossils in, it's quite, actually looking at it, you never think about it at the time, but I did, and I brought some home, pieces of iron ore, and if you split it you'll see the shells of the creatures that have been there thousands of years ago.

And you mean a dragline, is that an overhead line?

A drag line is, what they had there was called a W1800, they'd have a W600 and an 1800 and that would, with a big cubic bucket on it, like a big line that goes out, and brings the spoil out to make it so then you can excavate the, the iron ore from underneath.

And when you say it's a mine is it like a coalmine, does it have a shaft and so on?

No it's an opencast. There are some, there were two mines at Scunthorpe, Drangonby Underground and Sancton Underground they were like a drift mine. They didn't go down a shaft as such it was a drift mine into the, into the hillside, whereas the pits that I worked at, there was Yarborough North, Yarborough South, Warren, I've forgotten the others now, and that was, they were all opencast, like you'd find opencast coal mining now, but at that time they did it for steel, for iron ore. And I was surrounded with steam engines at that time as well. My uncle was always into steam, and yeah, that was again part of life, it was very interesting.

And how long were you there?

Only twelve, eighteen months. I came back to work for another builder in Thorne and then my apprenticeship was finishing then I decided to do something entirely different, entirely different then. My mum used to run the cinema and bingo hall and I used to, only part time, I used to do a little bit of bingo calling for her, and I used to be Uncle Richard on a Saturday morning for the children's club. I used to do some rewinding as well, it was all part and parcel in the projection suite. Then I went off to, to work for MECCA, I don't know whether you know MECCA or not, I went off, my first job was a trainee assistant manager in Bradford, in Little Houghton Lane, very interesting. Again I was nearly there under false pretences because I, I wasn't really, the

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advertisement had said, twenty three, twenty four or something, I was only twenty one, and then I put on my application form my age and then I had interview and he said 'how old are tha? oh yes, righto, we'll see you a week on Monday', and that was it and I got the job and it was, I was a trainee assistant manager and I worked in bingo halls, I worked in ice rinks, old time music hall, I did that, then I went as a catering manager, I went on a catering course and I was a catering manager at the Theatre Royal in the Potteries.

What did you do, when you say you worked in ice rinks and bingo halls?

In a managerial capacity, it's quite a, it was very interesting. Then I was the first person ever to organise a Miss Doncaster heat, to go to Miss England, to Miss World and I came to Doncaster. Because of my building experience they said 'well we can't do it at Doncaster we haven't got a stage'. I said 'We'll construct one', and we constructed a stage in Doncaster at the old ABC and we had the Miss Doncaster heat there, and I found that very interesting. Then, I went all over the country because I, I wasn't married, I was a relief, I was a relief managerial capacity and if there was a problem they were like, 'can you go to so and so', and I thoroughly enjoyed it. I did the Miss World contest I went to work on that for two, three years.

What did you do on the Miss World contest?

Basically the Albert Hall, you were there to make sure of the smooth running, you were part of MECCA Promotions and if, like, for arguments sake Belinda Green came to, she was Miss Australia, she came to Yorkshire and she'd have to go to ABC, having a visit, all part of MECCA promotions. MECCA was so intertwined with, there were the, MECCA at that time they had bingo halls, they had dance halls, ice rinks, music halls, the motorway cafes, they had travel services at Nottingham, that was part of MECCA, all catering establishments, banqueting suites and it was quite a diverse thing so we used to use, it was all part and parcel with Eric Morley, he was going to have his moneys worth. And he used to use the Miss World or the other entrants there to promote both his own company also MECCA, you could ring MECCA promotions, say like, 'We've got a function, we'd like Miss Doncaster, or Miss England' whatever the case may be, 'to come and promote our product for us', and we used to do that. All very interesting.

Then music hall, I went to the, Gaiety at Grimsby, that was a music hall and I thoroughly enjoyed that it'd been failing for years and I went there and by luck it was that I brought, I used to, other, other establishments where I'd worked, I used to, I went so I, 'can you bring a bus load over to Grimsby for a music hall?' and we filled it, we used to fill it on a regular basis. Which was quite interesting, it was fun, it was fun, I thoroughly enjoyed it and then I came back, came back to Thorne and I ran the taxi business, I ran the ambulance, it was a taxi and ambulance service, because there wasn't the west, there wasn't an ambulance station here, we ran the ambulance. I didn't do it personally myself, one of the drivers did it, he'd been an ambulance driver for years. We ran our own ambulance and we used to do taxis, wedding cars and funerals and that's when I came more involved with the funeral side of the job, because we were making our own coffins and everything else.

Then I supplied vehicles and things to other funeral directors and then it was only this last, three years ago, someone said to me 'are you gonna stand for the council Richard?' I said 'Well I'm not really bothered, I'm not.' 'Well go on stand for the council', and I was elected to the council on the Thursday, I was sworn in on the Friday, they made me Mayor on the Monday and then a year later they made me Mayor again and then they said 'Are you going to stand for Doncaster?' I thought well there int a lot for Doncaster itself, isn't a lot for Doncaster itself, so it was, 'I'll stand', and I got on, and, but it was all about representing the people of Thorne and I think getting the best for

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Thorne. Because for years Thorne's been at the end of the borough. When Thorne had its own rural district council it was in charge of its own ends, but when we came part of Doncaster, sadly, we were at the periphery of the council, and I think it was, it was my contribution to put something, I think, back into Thorne. And in the two years that I was Mayor I organised a couple of royal visits, I really got things, every opportunity that I had I promoted Thorne.

Then at, when I came on Doncaster, I've tried to promote there at Doncaster as well, then last year, or this year, I was re-elected to Doncaster until 2010 and they made me Vice Chair of Council. So it's, now my thing is we've got to promote Thorne. We've seen the mines have closed, the heavy industry's gone and so we've got to look for a new avenue to bring prosperity back into Thorne and that's why I became involved. Initially when I was Mayor with the Hatfield, Thorne Moors and latterly with Ian Harrison and the Peatlands Way. And also where the Ings Wood is, there's eighty thousand trees being planted down there, it's all, if we possibly can this years is to expand that to get youngsters into there, I think we've got to get youngsters back to the countryside. Because they don't, really, they don't know what they're missing and there so much to be seen. People think oh well Thorne is only a little place, but it has a lot of history. There used to be a whaling in station.

A whaling station? Oh tell me that, tell me what that is.

Oh, another relative of mine was a whaling captain. Captain John Gravel of the whaling ship the Dianna. It was the last major whaling ship to sail out of Hull actually, but they used to sail from Waterside at Thorne. The crews would go from Thorne at Waterside and the first ever steam ship that sailed between Hull and London, the Kingstonian, was built at Thorne, so it was quite interesting, and they sailed from waterside. A friend of mine lives in the old quay house and has the old warehouse at the side of the quay.

And you're talking about ocean going, sea-whaling ships at Waterside?

Yeah, or they would go the North Sea, they could, cause you're trouble was with the tides and the narrowness really of the River Don, but they were big enough to go.

So it's the River Don at Waterside it's not the canal?

It's not the canal, it's the oldest part of Thorne. In fact down there also that's where Thomas Crapper was born, do you know Thomas Crapper, he was born at Waterside.

Tell me about Thomas Crapper.

Oh, Thomas Crapper he invented the water closet, the modern, the modern system of, for toilets and he was born at Waterside in a little cottage down there, and he looked I think for further, yes, for someone to take him seriously, so he moved to London and hence that's when the, I'll not call him what he was called, but anyway.

So going back to the whaling station, it was, I've never heard anybody else mention this, so was it actually a common thing that people from this area...

Right, until recently Edwin Pretty at Doncaster has done, he used to work for the Doncaster Council, a lot of places in Thorne had whale bones as archways over the gates. And at Clifton Lodge, which is just this, when it was there, just this side of the railway station there was some whale bones there. Yes it was very much a, quite an industry, it's like as Fishlake was, Fishlake and the eels, they were all bred at Fishlake, before Vermuyden came and drained most of the area,

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then Fishlake had many lakes, hence the name Fishlake and there was a customs house near the church actually, where they would land and bring their goods in and out. But, as Thorne Moors, with, now then, the warping drain was it Makin Durham, I think his name was that formed the warping drain. Well the farm that we had up Selby Road was at the side of the, only maybe a hundred yards from the warping drain where they used to open the, open the flood gates, flood the land, let it settle for the sediment and then let it go out again. Cause that land as I mentioned before at Reedholme was very heavy clay land, and so they need the warp land to make it more viable.

Have you seen them doing that?

No, no, no, it's before my time!

[Laughter]

But the, the whaling station, you see we had a ropery up there as well and the rope walk.

This is at Waterside?

And also across the road there, the little cottages across there, that was called, there's Rope Walk down the side and the foundry was at this end, and my workshop that I have at the moment for making coffins in, they used to make the sails in there for the sailing ships, there was a saw pit in the bottom where they would make the sails. But it was all, Thorne was quite a thriving community from the Middle Ages.

There was a waterway wasn't there as well that ran by, sort of up into the Delves?

That's right, that would be, that was the, what was it officially called, there was a dyke, it came off the moors and it ran to there, it's the Boating Dyke.

So it was quite sizeable?

Mm, yeah, not terrifically wide but it was called the Boating Dyke, because prior also from that, at the other, just over the canal bridge before Cornelius Vermuyden came that was all flooded and they altered the course of the River Don. Initially, or at that time the Don itself had some tributaries coming off the, towards Hatfield and just as you go underneath the Bourncroft bridge there on the left hand side, you can see the bed of the old River Don, it's still there and it went over towards, towards Epworth and it was all drained and then they, if you're going farther up Selby Road, whereas the River Don itself used to continue as you go to Cowick, you go over a little hump back bridge, it used to go underneath there and used to join the Aire. Well as you go up Selby Road you'll find there's two double bridges and then it's called the Dutch River, because the Dutch then cut it, it's as straight as a die, and took it to Goole, rather than going into the Aire further down.

You know the double rivers that are out near Crowle?

Yes.

Do they come over this way. I could look at a map, I'm sorry.

No, no, they would go down to the Torne, I think that's part of the Torne I think. But they, Thorne used to have three railway stations, one that went over to that area, that was from Thorne Central, and you'd got Thorne North and Thorne South,. Yes it was a thriving place and at Waterside there

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was a turntable there for the, for the railway and they'd come to bring their goods to the side of the dock and they would turn round on the turntable to go back.

And what kind of goods would be taken...

Well at Waterside, it's gone now, but there was a cake mill there, where they used to process all, cattle cake and that sort of thing for export. There would be export to other areas, but also at Waterside the corn, they produced a lot of linseed round here, there was linseed there was hemp, they used to produce the hemp round here and also they'd bring the cattle up to the, to the station there as well and they'd bring, it was just part of the normal transport network.

And was peat a big industry or was it just a local industry?

It was quite a big industry, it was quite big industry, as far as I, as far as I know at that time, quite expansive. I think Thorne, the Thorne Moor was, it, I don't think it was exploited as much, I think under the British Peat Moss Litter Company it was done on a small basis I think. Cause actually the gentleman that lived here before me was the secretary to the British Peat Moss Litter Company.

Oh right.

Very interesting, but Waterside itself, it was one of the original parts of the town, the quayside was there, now there's the, down here was the ropewalk, you know what the meaning of a ropewalk is?

Well you can tell me.

They used to have like a long shed, or a long area, where as the twine was being made through a wooden slat, they would actually walk the rope. So the length of the rope was determined by the length of the ropewalk wasn't it, yeah.

And you said there were, you organised some royal visits to Thorne?

Yes, first one I did was the, the war memorial was getting into a, it hadn't been refurbished it'd been there since the, since the nineteen twenties in the Memorial Park and it was starting to tilt and a lot of the lettering was becoming illegible and when the old gentlemen used to parade there they would be up to the eyes in mud and we thought, that when I came to the council, right we've got to do something with this, we'll refurbish it and so as a council, we decided to refurbish the war memorial and I thought right, who can we have to open it for it's rededication? So I organised for the Duke of Kent to come to re, to do that, I got the Bishop of Sheffield here, and it was, it was very well attended and at the same time I thought rather than just be focussed on one thing, what can we do to promote Thorne at the same time and so I organised a Trade Exhibition in the park and we did it so there was, we didn't want to make any money out of it, so all the stalls were free of charge and I think the, the people, Helios Properties who have got the new industrial development at Thorne at the moment they're doing, they came to that and they were excellent. They said it was one of the most worthwhile exhibitions that they'd been to and also at the same time the Trinity Academy was just being formed and they came and they did a presentation, we all had the tents there and I think time allowed for the Duke of Kent was about twelve or fifteen minutes and he was in the trade exhibition well over half an hour. But we got him because I thought he was, because he'd been President of the British Legion and also he'd been the Overseas Development Officer hadn't he? So he did that one and it was very well received, all the veterans that came they came from all over.

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Then, oh, sort of just over a year later, Thorne has wanted a new swing bridge for years, they'd been waiting for forty years, cause they'd taken the old bridge off and the new bridge was put over the canal and I thought right, what can we do to promote this bridge. So I wrote to Buckingham Palace and asked first of all, and told them we were going to build a new bridge and could we call it the Princess Royal Bridge. So we had to submit designs for it, the reasons why we thought it ought to be called this and was it worthy or not and yes they decided it was and that being the case then I said right can we now have the Princess Royal to open it and yes, no problem. The Lord Lieutenant and his officers in Sheffield, as far as I'm concerned, to Thorne have been absolutely marvellous, they really have, they've, they've seen that as a town, as a Town Council, the town's people, we've really tried our best to drag ourselves up. I think when all you, all the industries that we had at Thorne at the time, we had the Darleys Brewery, we had Richard Dunston's ship yards, we had the AEI factory, the lace factory, the mohair factory, we lost all those, so we were down in the dumps and it was all part of the regeneration of Thorne as is now the regeneration of the moors and the, I've really got to say, the, David Fisher the Lieutenancy Officer and David Moody the Lord Lieutenant and Peter [inaudible] the Vice Lord Lieutenant have been absolutely marvellous to Thorne. They really have, if we've wanted to do something they've listened to us sympathetically, yes all right, and I think, because the first, we did a good job with the first one that I think that again they think well this is worth supporting.

So what happened when Princess Anne came?

She was brilliant, she was brilliant and she knows so much. Well she's been to Thorne on two or three occasions, but she flew in and she asked about, she passed over some reed beds, what were they? And luckily I was able to explain exactly what they were and how they'd come to be there, because my father, he'd built the dry dock for Richard Dunston's shipyard and the reed beds are on the site of the old dry dock. So I was able to fully explain what they all were and that was very interesting and she was interesting too, she took a, and then I organised, I'm a great one for trying to involve the youngsters and I said, right on this, normally this doesn't happen and I said 'right, we've got the Princess Royal coming can we have the Sea Cadets to do a guard of honour?' 'Yep, alright you get on with it Richard and we'll look at what you're proposing', and the Sea Cadets came they provided a guard of honour and they were marvellous and she appreciated them and the Trinity Academy they'd just opened so all the children there in their new school uniforms they came and it was thoroughly enjoyable and I got a lovely letter back from her lady in waiting saying how much she'd enjoyed the visit to Thorne and wished us well. Yeah, that was, it was excellent, but it was good for the people of Thorne, we've actually got Thorne on the map again.

Also during when the Duke of Kent, I said right, the Ghurkhas are in, the Ghurkha Regiment are in quite a plight aren't they, so I said 'right, can we adopt the Ghurkha Regiment?' and so on a number of occasions we've brought them here, they've taken part in the town's civic things. When the Duke of Kent was here we got them to form part of the guard of honour and they were marvellous. They came only a month ago to play football, so they come here to play football. But it's all part of making things worthwhile in a little town isn't it? It really is, I get so enthusiastic, I get so enthusiastic about it all, it's, yeah.

You were saying about the reeds beds are in Dunston's dry dock?

Yes.

Is that just because they've come back or have they been...

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They've been planted, they've been planted there. Right, what do we do with a dry dock, so it was filled in within about six feet of the top and then it's been planted with reeds.

How long's, when did Dunston's close?

Nineteen ninety, nineteen ninety, I think ninety-two, about nineteen ninety. Somewhere about there, maybe a little bit, yes, about, and there was Darley's Brewery of course that was the main brewery here. That closed, they all, everything seemed to close at the same time. The brewery was taken over by Vaux, who'd given an undertaking that it would remain open and they said it would have been open for at least five years and five years to the day it closed and Thorne had it's own well and it's beer was, actually, the farther away you got from Thorne the better it was, it used to travel very well, yeah.

And you mentioned a lace factory.

Yes, laces as in..

Oh shoe laces?

Yes as in shoes. Hercules Laces. At Thorne we used to have, there was Hercules Laces which employed a lot of people, there was the AEI factory/ GEC, which originally had been the BTH factory, they made up to quarter horse power motors. That employed a lot of people, on North Eastern Road there were the British Mohair Spinners, they'd spin the mohair up there. There was the Auto component factory, they made all sorts of small engineering items, you'd, Darley's Brewery, you'd Dunston's Ship Yard, you'd Staniland and Company Boat Builders, which they're still there. Other engineering firms, you'd Dowse the Bakers, which seemed to supply everybody within, oh, oh they would have maybe thirty, forty vans going out, big lorries going out with bread. So it was quite busy, it was a busy town it really was, it had it's own Rural District Council, one of the finest in the country I understand and it was thriving town and then we became part of Doncaster, I'm not decrying Doncaster, but it was just part of local government reorganisation. But it's all, now we've got to bring, with the regeneration of the industry in the area we've got to regenerate the outer areas as well, i.e. with the Ings Wood we're trying to promote that at the moment, bring that up to, into use and the Friends of the wood, they're very prominent in trying to promote it. Cause Thorne isn't, it's so near everything, the new houses that are going up in Thorne now, since the Academy was built people want to come and live here cause they've got an entrance to the school. So there's new houses going up all over and also it's a good connection, you can work in Sheffield and you're only twenty minutes away from here with the M18, the M62 and now the airport, it's, and there aren't many small towns with two railway stations.

And is industry coming back?

It seems to be coming back, but it's a different type of industry that's coming now. It's like the, the, Helios Properties must have great faith in Thorne, they're building that enormous building at the end there, a million square feet.

Is that the one at the traffic lights here?

No that's going down that way.

The other way?

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Just underneath the motorway.

Okay.

If you see it there it's an, BMW are here, all the BMW's that come into the country come to Thorne, this is their distribution depot. It's just the good motorway connections.

The one thing you didn't mention was the pit.

Right, the colliery itself, you see, it was closed, when I was six and I, my uncle used to work with a firm that transported all the miners. When it closed in nineteen fifty six through allegedly water problems all the miners at that time were bussed to all surrounding collieries, i.e. possibly Hatfield, Bullcroft, Brodsworth, Bentley, they dispersed all the work force to keep them in employment and for years and years it was always the, the dream that the colliery would reopen. In fact in the late eighties it won an award for it's new head gear, which was a landmark for miles and miles around and that still left people with 'oh well it will open one day', because it was one of the deepest mines in the country, and the coal reserves at Thorne were there for years and years to come. I think there was one seam never been touched yet and it goes right out nearly into the North Sea. But sadly they kept saying, it's in mothballs, it's in mothballs, but they just decided that it wasn't economically viable, UK Coal could do anything with. Which is a shame really why in some respects cause it, if they'd just capped it, but they said, I think it was costing about five million pounds a year to keep it in a care and maintenance basis. So that's why I think they closed it. But I think if they'd left up the pit head gear, a lot of people thought that shouldn't have come down, A it was a land mark for everyone, if you're coming off the, 'oh we're nearly home', or whatever the case maybe. But also with it I think that, it'd won an award.

And was it new headgear?

Yeah.

So even though it closed in nineteen fifty-six?

Yes they won an award cause they were going to reopen it all and they won a design award, a European Design Award for the headgear and then it all came crashing down. I forget the date now, I forget the date.

So the miner's families in Moorends that have talked to me about the strike and so on, it's not that pit at Moorends they're talking about?

No it's Stainforth.

But it's called Hatfield?

Yes, Hatfield Colliery.

Hatfield Colliery which is at Stainforth!

[Laughter]

Yeah, that's right, it's like, that was Thorne Colliery at Moorends. But it's all very, it was sad that, cause, the old miner's families were very hard working people, they were, they really were. It was a

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generation that will never work the same again and some of the condition that they had to endure you wouldn't want anyone to have to do that. But also there were a lot of skilled men, not just miners, there were a lot of skilled men came out of the colliery as well, lot of skilled electricians, engineers. Luckily they were able to find further work but the, some of the colliers themselves, the coalface workers of course couldn't. But a lot didn't want to go back down the mine, I've some of the people that have been injured through roof falls and things and that's not good at all, it's not good at all.

But now, hopefully, in some ways, by taking the headgear down and drawing a line under it all, it does actually represent a new beginning. Now that people know that it's never going to open again, or allegedly never going to open again, cause the shafts have only been filled with slurry, they can sort of like draw a line under that. I call it the book of life, we've now reached the end of chapter twenty three and we're turning over and we're now into chapter four with a new beginning and if at the colliery there, hopefully that could be a new site for industry, then they're wanting to put some housing down there, and it's going to be the, it's the entrance to the moors and if we can possibly get a visitor centre on there through UK Coal and English Nature that's all to the good.

But the, sadly the colliery, it was a landmark and when they, were they, the Germans came to sink it, oh, is it nineteen eleven or something. They came before the First World War initially I think and then because of the First World War, they completed about nineteen nineteen I think. But a lot of the houses that were built there they were built out of the brickyards down there, out of the Thorne brick yard, from there, so all the, it was all self, self help and self materials.

Now the council you were initially elected to, that's Thorne Moorends Council?

Yes Thorne Moorends Town Council.

So Moorends is actually considered to be part of Thorne in that respect?

Yes, yeah. Originally Moorends was only a number of farms, but prior to the colliery being sunk there were just some farms down there. It was the, I've got photographs of it looking like a wilderness really. But Moorends itself is a little, was a little community on it's own, as were all the mining communities and they were all very hard working people.

Now there was a, there was a bit of a mixed community up at Moorends, wasn't it, a lot of Dutch people...

Yes.

In particular with the peat digging.

Yes.

What about Thorne, did that have the same kind of mix?

Thorne had a mix of people, really through industry. In a different sort of way, they weren't, a lot weren't manual workers as such as the miners and the peat diggers, but a lot of people actually from the peat works actually did live in Thorne. There were a lot of little yards, little areas where there'd be Reeds Yard or Smiths Yard, where they'd go in and the, quite a number of small cottages that were there. But a lot of the workers in Thorne worked at the ship yards, certainly at Dunston's ship yard, at Stanilands and they'd work in the ropery, which was across the road, they'd work in the

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foundry which was down the road and they were all heavily involved and the railways of course, when the railways first came. They were very much involved with that but down at Moorends it's still called, Moss Terrace is still called Dutch Row to a lot of local people.

I didn't know it was called Moss Terrace till this morning.

Didn't you?

I thought it was called Dutch Row.

Yes, Moss Terrace and I think some of the residents that live there now don't like it called Dutch Row do they.

I don't know.

No, they refer to it as Moss Terrace, yeah. But that Goole Road there, it was only a dirt road really, whereas this road out here, it's the old A614, is it the, Howden to Wilmerpool trunk road it was called, it was a turnpike. Thorne was on a cross roads really, if you were going from London to York and you came via Doncaster and you'd come and stop here the old White Heart, was quite a staging post in the Market Place, the Market Place has, twelve, it's first charter was granted during the period of, of Richard Cromwell and then it had another charter granted during the period of Charles II. It was a thriving market, really a thriving market.

Well it was a thriving place in medieval times.

Yes.

What you're describing is what I'm seeing in the records for twelve hundred, thirteen hundred...

Yeah.

A really thriving place.

Yeah, my great great grandfather, was the local veterinary surgeon. When they built Jubilee Bridge, to celebrate Queen Victoria's Jubilee, they wanted, it was by public subscription, and I think the local, Mr Dunston from the ship yard gave fifty pounds and Mr Servant a local entrepreneur gave fifty pounds, another one gave fifty, and my great grandfather gave a hundred pounds, because it linked his veterinary practice of Sykehouse Fishlake, Wormley Hill, he didn't have to go either all the way round or go across on the ferry. So he was quite a contributor to the bridge.

And where was the Jubilee Bridge?

Just as you go out of Thorne, you'll go under, round the roundabout and go as you're gonna go...

Toward Waterside?

Yes, just carry on up that road and it's about two or three hundred yards up there on the left, it's signposted to Fishlake. But it connected all his veterinary practice.

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There's one of the stories that is very common, is this business of having to carry bodies from one place to another and them being lost.

Oh this is, this refers to, Thorne itself didn't have its own parish church as such, it was only a Chapel of Ease to Hatfield and I understand at the time there were a funeral party going to Hatfield for a funeral and they had to cross by boat across Thorne Mere, and the boat sank and everyone was drowned. So that's why they actually..

And they lost the body.

They lost the body, yes. I don't know how they lost the body, cause it should have floated, but never mind. So then they built the, they gave Thorne a church of its own, but it's a beautiful church. I've done a lot of repairs in that church, we've put, whether it be a part of the new roof, or new doors, or things. It is a wonderful church. Because it was altered, it used to have galleries inside, and it was all altered in about eighteen eighty, took the galleries down, it was when the Victorians became heavily involved. They were very much into stained glass windows and that sort of things and of course prior to that there were no stained glass windows in there, they only really came from the Victorian times. And the rood screen that is in there was donated by the Darley family. Which was quite interesting actually with the Darley, because the, the old Darleys was, William Marsden Darley. My great great grandfather was Jack Marsden and his father had a sister who married William Darley's, William Darley's father and that's why he became William Marsden Darley, to incorporate the Marsden side of the family. I always remember in the old Overseer's minute books that were dated from about eighteen seventy, eighteen seventy-four, it would list, my great grandfather was John Marsden, Veterinary Surgeon, William M Darley, Common Brewer!

[Laughter]

And he was one of the wealthiest men in the area! Yeah, Common Brewer!

And just to finish up, you said you had an involvement in the Pea lands way, with the development of the moors now.

With Ian Harrison, our clerk, we're trying to, I organised a, just after the subsequent opening, we're trying to organise involvement with a charity, to try and get it known nation wide.

This is Peatlands Way?

Yes, and I know the Director of Leukaemia Research, Douglas Osborne very well, because I became involved with walking for leukaemia a number of years ago with Ian [Booth?]. We went across the Alps and all sorts of things. But I tied to get it involved to try and promote it. I thought if we can get national recognition of the Peatlands Way that will help to promote it and the Long Distance Walker's Association they're heavily involved with it now and it's, we're trying to get it as an annual event. It's approximately fifty miles across the Peatlands Way and I know the first time that we did it I was there to see them off at eight in the morning and I was there at two the following morning waiting for them to come back. There were three gentlemen ran it in nine hours, the fifty miles.

The whole thing?

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Yes, they ran the fifty miles in nine hours and then the others, some of them were taking sixteen hours, or seventeen hours to walk it all, but they all made it, no one dropped out basically. But it's all part of bringing the Peatlands Way, because it, I've been to some tourism for Yorkshire and I've been up to Malton, the North Yorkshire Moors and, with the moors being one, I think it's the largest place of scientific interest in Europe isn't it? And trying to promote this, let people know where it is. But it's also, it's not far from the end of the Trans Pennine Way either. It's all trying to link it all together and the more we can approach this and promote it I think it's for the countryside of the people to enjoy it. Cause we don't want it to happen again well, oh I didn't get the opportunity to do that, I think everyone should have the opportunity to go and enjoy what is theirs by right really.

Which is a marvellous place to say thank you very much, cause that's exactly what this project's really about, is for people to get involved and own what's theirs really, so thank you very much.

Yeah, okay.

[Recording Ends]