

Thorne and Hatfield Moors Oral History Project

Interview with: Shirley Squires (part 1)

Date: 1 December 2006

Interviewer: Lynne Fox

This is Lynne Fox for the Thorne and Hatfield Moors Oral History Project. It's Friday 1st December 2006 and I'm talking to Shirley Squires, and we're looking through some photographs initially, of the, of various...

Yeah, procedures.

Procedures.

And how they changed.

Yeah, we've got this photograph of the two men cutting by hand.

This is what they call graving, they used to call it graving this and then that used to be called piddying and when their walls had dried out a bit they used to go behind and piddy it like that to dry it. And then it used to be moved to where they then used to put it all into a stack and they used have men stacking, you know, used to know how to do it on t'outside so that all t' middle din't get wet through. Then they used to load wagons like that from the stacks, that's what them two were doing.

By hand, initially by hand?

Yeah. Them two that was throwing it into, into wagons. Them, there, that's what, that, that was when it had gone into a stack and then they used to load wagons like that, that was in British Moss time, beginning of Fisons. And then when Fisons came they had the first, they got the first cutting machine, which was a Stiba and, so it used to cut it in long flats. About fifty six chain long the flats would be and they'd put it on, in flats and it used to be two turfs, we used to call 'em turfs, you know the brick and two turfs wall. And then two workers used to wall it, one at each side of the wall and they used to do it like building bricks.

So it was two bricks wide, this long wall, and you'd have a worker on each side?

Yeah, yeah, a worker on each side and there used to be about six, six bricks high and they used to get paid by chainage. So much a chain for walling it. And then they, then that's when the boom, the boom came into action.

Before we get onto the boom, when people cut it by hand, like those two men are..

Yeah.

They'd stack it on the side and then the wallers would come, and make this wall?

The women or the men, I mean there were men piddying as well. Sometimes husbands and wives used to work together you know.

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But they'd make a wall first of all at the side, this wall that sits..

The, the piddiers, yeah, would, would, I mean the graving men they'd, one would cut it, then the other one would lay it out in rows. And then the, then to dry it a bit before they started to build it and then the piddiers would come.

So it went straight from- this wall that they built it was two bricks wide, was that a wall and then it was put into the piddies?

Oh that was, that was the, that was after cutting machines.

Oh I see.

This was, this was the first procedure. The man graving it and then they lay it out in long lines, so it could dry a bit and then these women or whatever, would come behind and piddy it up like that.

Straight away while it was still wet?

No, you'd do it, how quickly it dried you know, when, you'd be working different parts of the moors while they were graving somebody 'ud be doing something somewhere else and then when theirs had dried enough, you know, it depends on how weather had been, when it'd dried enough then we would go into that area and piddy it. And then it'd go into stacks then, a big stack along, they'd pile it all into big stacks, put it into a stack and they'd like case it on outside you know, with, with turfs and...

What do you mean case it?

Well they'd, they'd have, they'd used to throw it all into t'middle and then on t'outside they'd do it straight, put, like build it you know. And it used to stop t'rain getting all in t'middle and everything and t'outside would get the wind in that you see to dry it.

So it'd make it like it's smooth?

Yeah, yeah.

Smoother so that it ran off?

Yeah.

Bit like a haystack.

Yeah.

Yeah.

And then, then men would come load into there, you know, like what you've seen them throwing...

What did they call those men?

That is Jack Martin and that is Bill Busby.

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Did they have a name for the job? Did they call 'em loaders or..?

Yeah, yeah and then, I mean both of 'em are dead now.

So it's Jack Martin who, you can just see the top of his head?

Yeah, yeah, and Bill Busby. And then they used to, then they got the cutting machine, the Stiba, that were first cutting machine that, you know, we'd ever had. And it used to cut, and men who worked the cutting machines got paid, they had a basic pay but they used to get bonus, you know, for how many chains they'd cut and that and they used to say how many, they used to measure flat and how many chains they'd cut and then that's how we used to, when t'wallers used to go on after 'em, how much they'd got cut that's what they got paid for walling it. And then when wallers went they used to get, they used to put two, two bricks down like that and two across, two like that, two across, so that there were gaps for em, and they used to do all wall right, length of the flat that they were on.

Now this machine, this is the first machine that these people were looking at here..

Yeah.

You said one of these chaps is...

Lord Netherthorpe.

With the stick, Lord Netherthorpe who was?

Chairman of Fisons.

And you were telling me how this worked this machine that, at first it wasn't, it didn't wall it properly.

No, that was the Stiba. When the Stiba, the first cutting machine that they had, and it used to, it used to drop the turfs in, just, it was always leaning like that, which it was supposed to, but there was nowhere for air to get into t'middle, to dry it any.

It was solid, it was dropping it without any gaps.

Yeah it was cut into turfs like, but it were more solid and it didn't wall as good, you know. So when they had wallers going walling it they got this new HTW, that's this one, that's why all the bosses were down.

But the problem, what was the problem with the, with this wall then, the first one?

The first one it didn't, you didn't get it dry enough, it were hard for the wallers to part them and wall it you know, and the bottom turfs, first time I ever went on moors we were given a job and it was, and they'd left the bottom turf in, you know, wallers, workers that they'd had, they'd left bottom turf in and that's part o' peat you see what they've got to get off a wagon and so much to, you know, to t'wagon a time, so much to t'wagon and if they left the bottom turf they weren't getting the, the amount. So the first job we ever had were going with a fork and turning 'em all over so that they'd dry so we could pick 'em up, you know.

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Why did they leave the bottom turf?

Because, they couldn't get, they couldn't make the money, they couldn't work quick enough, you know and it were hard to get at they were really, the bottom turf were really, cause it'd sucked into t'peat again, you know. So they used to try and get away with it. I mean, that's why I had gangers with each ten women, ten or twelve women, you had a ganger who went and inspected it. When they said they'd done ten chains for that day that ganger would walk that length and have a look at all bottoms and everything you know, and...

Now somebody's told me that you turned them over, turned the walls over?

No, what you used to do, you had, it used to be two walls, same with them you see, and it were like that you see your walls and it were...

That's leaning at an angle.

Yeah and there were about six, six o' them on top of one another, six turfs, you know. So you used to take t'top turfs and you used to put 'em like that in bottom, then the next two you'd put 'em that way and leave a gap and then the next two you'd put 'em like that on top of 'em and you'd do 'em like that. All you know, till you got the height and so that they'd got gaps. The wind could get through 'em you see, it used to dry 'em. Well when they got this new one, the HTW cutting machine, it used to make bigger turfs and it used to gap them a bit so that they could dry in t'wall before, you know. Because when they'd first cut 'em you couldn't do 'em, you'd two, they'd be cutting one area while you were walling another area and, so it could dry a bit you see. This big HTW used to cut a bigger turf and it, they weren't as tight, you know, they were more loose for t'women to work with, cause t'wind could get in.

When you, when you first went on how big were the turfs then, like a house brick?

Yeah. Well then they landed up, there were about, they were about that size.

As big as that stool?

No, about half that stool.

So that would be about...

That were the new HTW.

Like a breezeblock then?

Yeah, yeah. Not quite as deep, but, you know, that kind of thing. And you used to get good high walls then you see and so air could get through 'em and dry 'em and everything you know. I mean, I used to have to make sure that the walls was done right because when the loading gang, me husband was in charge of the boom, you know the loading gang, and the mill used to tell you how many wagons they required, you know. So you'd to work while you'd got them amount of wagons, that loading gang had got that amount of wagons and they used to load 'em and take 'em out to t'main track on tractors and then bring t'empty wagons in and, and then t'main wagons would go down tram you know. I mean, it's easy to explain if you're on t'moors you know, you go, you... Because there were a main tram right down t'middle o' t'moors and then all these flats going off from it. And so t'men you used to throw it onto t'boom, fill t'wagons then they used to take all the

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wagons out and onto t'main tram, then t'engine driver from t'factory used to take 'em down to t'actory to that loading shed and tip 'em and then they used to take t'wagons back, while they were filling one load, you know and that's how they used to do.

So, which moor are we talking about, where did you particularly work?

Hatfield. I were in charge of both moors like, sub contract. I had a ganger at, I had a couple or three gangers at Swinefleet, and, well I were in charge of, I used to set all contract workers on and, if they were, you know disobedient I used to have t'pleasure of going and tell 'em, they, you know, they weren't doing their work right. If, if any of t'gangers had any trouble with any of them they used to come for me, you know, can you go and have a word with so and so they're not doing their work right or something. Cause, we were all responsible, I mean if they went to pick that flat up and it weren't walled right and it hadn't dried through lack, you know, somebody not doing their work right, but they were all really good, you know.

Let me, let me just, I want to be sure that we've got it clear on the recording, what exactly your role was and what you did. So tell me right from the start, tell me about your job.

I was Moors Administrator and I had to, they used to, Fisons used to tell me how many workers they required and then I used to get all, you know, organise all the workers, get all the workers and then I used to be in charge of 'em all. I used to work all the wages out, I used to pay 'em and then I used to have to, you know, DHSS or anybody like that come for any enquiry into any worker or if they thought anybody had been fiddling, or, they'd been working on t'moors and they were drawing benefit or something like that, I used to have a book, and everybody that come for their wages signed for 'em, you know. So, it, I mean they'd got the signature and everything you know, so. And then I used to have to make sure that they didn't claim more chainage than what were on the flats. I could tell, I used to mark it off every week, you know, if they'd drawn twenty chain, I used to put twenty chain at t'side, so I knew then they'd only got another thirty six to come off that flat, you know and that like.

And how many people are you talking about?

And I used to have to transport 'em to work, get 'em all transported to work and home.

And how did you do that?

Well I had buses, I had a bus driver. At first we started wi' vans and then you weren't allowed to, you weren't allowed to have more than a certain amount without a new PSV license. So then Mr Carr said to me, 'do you think you could get buses', you know. So I got buses then.

You say you got them?

I bought buses and got PSV drivers and everything you know, and so that it were legal, where you were going and...

How many people did you have working for you?

Hundred and fifty about. I used to have about, I used to have a whole boom gang, what mi' husband were in charge of, he were ganging it. They were all men. There were about twelve of them and then I had some blokes who'd be on t'stacks, you know, for doing t'stacks, stacking them and everything, and then wallers, women and men. I used to take about two buses, two bus loads to

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Hatfield and then there used to be a bus over to Swinefleet. And I used to have to go every so often to have a look at Swinefleet, go and inspect Swinefleet. I used to do all Swinefleets wages and all Hatfield's wages, I were Marjorie Proops and, t'wages clerk, cause there were only me, Fisons weren't allowed to have much to do wi' contract workers you see, or they became employable, so it all were on me.

But, I mean, t'police used to, if they were looking for anybody you know, they used to come and say 'Can we, would you take us on the moors and show us your workers', you know. I'd say 'yes' and take 'em and they used to say 'bye you've got some right lads on there Shirley' I said 'Not a bit of trouble one of 'em, I says 'I get no lip', I says 'they don't say a wrong thing, they do their work and they do their work well, they're good workers.' I said 'As long as they've got a wage, at end of the week'. He says 'yes, we have no problems'. Police says, they said 'you keep 'em on', and when, they nearly all died when they had to pack up working on there.

Where did they come from these casual workers?

Oh, Thorne, Moorends, Bentley, Hatfield, Stainforth, Dunscroft, Broadway. We used to pick 'em up, you know, t'bus route like, we used to have a bus route and some used to come in their own cars, and, yeah. There were, oh hundreds. And you, you, they used to come you know, I mean I had as much work here, I'm coming to door you know we problems that, 'do you think you could sub me so and so out of my wages, cause I've got something to pay', you know. I used to have subs and...!

[Laughter]

If they'd any problems they used to come- Marjorie Proops!

And how much of the year did this go on for?

We used to do most of the year, and I'll tell you what we used to do, we used to do spraying for, you know sorrel, on t'moors, well that, they d'int want sorrel on t'peat, so we used to spray the ground. Well, you'd have a session, you know, when it were right time, spraying t'sorrel, like, you know, to kill the sorrel so that it dint harm the peat. So you had all that, you know. You had something different all t'time you know.

Were these workers specialised in certain things, like you had some that were only wallers and some that were only this, and if you got a job say like spraying there was perhaps extra?

Yeah.

How did you organise all that?

Well we used to take so many, they'd work in gangs you see and if we wanted a gang spraying we'd take a, I'd take a gang off of t'spraying, so off of t'walling to go and spray you know. Cause it made it better for everybody, like, when you didn't have a lot of weed and all that. And so you'd take a gang spraying. They used to do it with a spray thing, you know, and you'd keep so many gang, you'd got to have plenty still walling because of being able to keep t'factory going, you know.

And how were sprayers paid then?

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Well, they'd be paid on a daily rate, so much a day them.

And how were the gangs made up?

Well I used to...

How many were there in them and who was in charge?

Well I was in charge of all of 'em, and I were in charge of the gangers, well I used to pick some gangers out, you know, friends what, I mean some of 'em I went to school wi', or, and we'd worked on, before we went to Fisons we'd worked on t'land, you know, potatoes and sprouts and all such as that and then Fisons asked us to go and, so we went to start work on t'moors then you see. Well with you being used to bending it never bothered you, you know, you could wall, they could wall to their hearts content and they loved it.

So the gangs, how many would there be?

There'd be about twelve in a gang, you know, cause that person, would have to inspect their walling you know, make sure they were doing their work alright and everything. And so there'd be about twelve in a gang and then there were t'loading gang wi' t'boom. Well mi' husband used to drive t'boom and see to, make sure that the wagons were getting down to t'mill, you know, cause you couldn't hold t'mill up like, you know and then...

And were they casuals on the boom, or were they working for Fisons?

They were casuals at the time, eventually they got set on, by Fisons, you know. But at first off, it were, contract you know. And I mean, they used to say, it were a good thing because, when, before all this walling and everything came into, what you call, the men in the factory could be laid off on the dole, in winter for so many weeks because they hadn't got anything to grind, you know, they'd got no peat and from walling they never have spent one day on t'dole, the men at factory, they were kept going. Because we used to preserve peat in them stacks you see to run through t'winter and we used to keep t'women going, keep 'em going all time, finding 'em, you know, clearing jobs and...

That's what I was just going to ask you actually, how the year went.

Yeah, we used to have about a fortnight off at, Christmas, I used to make that me holiday, you know, Christmas, cause, I mean they wanted time off you know. But I mean they dint get paid you see when they were off that fortnight.

So say they started, like, lets start after Christmas in the year, what would they be doing first in the cold weather?

Oh, they'd still be walling, yeah, yeah.

Would the diggers still be working?

Yeah, yeah. Cutting machines and then t'men, men 'ud, on cutting machines they'd still be cutting, you know, to peat, and we'd be walling it because you had to have it up to Spring ready for weather to come and dry it. You, you were always ruled by t'weather, you know, everything, it were a rush to, to beat t'weather. It was, it were a job that, you know, honestly the atmosphere and everything, I mean even all them lads and that, they, what they liked about it, they did as much as they wanted to

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do, as much as they could manage, you know. There were no pressure on 'em, you didn't say you've got to wall ten chain a day or anything like that, you, they used to do it you know, cause they wanted t'money and...

So how, if you, how did the weather affect you?

Well, if it rained we used to get rained off, you know, when they used to, if they d'int want to work in t'rain like, we got rained off, well that were it and then they used to come home you know. Buses used to turn up, I use to phone, you know, 'we require buses' and that and, or t' vans, whatever, minibuses you know, cause they're getting rained off you know. But they weren't, there weren't many days that they, they lost. They used to have to, you see we 'em being self employed contractors, they used to have to pay their own stamp you know and keep their selves right like, they wunt, I used to get 'em to sign a form you know, to say I am responsible for my own tax and insurance, you know. Cause I never used to stop anything out their money whatsoever, they were paid exactly what they'd earned.

So you'd pick 'em up in a morning, did you know in advance how many people there were going to be?

Well they were all that regular, I had, I were there nearly thirty year and I nearly had same people, but they used to phone up and say 'is there any work?' or they used to come to t'door here, you know, 'have you any work on moors?' and, I used to say 'yes', and 'where can I get picked up?' you know, then I used to tell ganger there were another one for her and, and that and they just used to get picked up they knew, where to get picked up and everything and they were all regular, you know, just worked there for years.

And what time did the day start? What time were they picked up?

It, we used to start about eight o' clock in a morning and, we used to go about three o' clock in afternoon. The wallers, because it suited women for children, going home from school you see and that like. So we used to work to suit the workers as well you know.

And so they'd be picked up..

Well the, the filling gangs, them that were filling t'wagons and taking 'em to, they used to work long, they used to work while they'd done enough wagons, you know.

So in the working day, they'd start, they'd get picked up and they'd, would you pick 'em up at eight o'clock or would they start at eight o' clock?

Oh no, they'd be, they'd be starting picking 'em up about seven, you know, and they'd be at t'moors for eight o'clock working.

And what would they take with them?

They'd just take their flasks, flasks of tea and a lunch, and they used to stop, they used to make their own dinnertime and that, they used to usually get on t'flat and say we're doing so many chains before lunch, you know and then they get to where, they'd mark where they were going to and then they'd sit and have their lunch and then they'd say, we're having us dinner when we've done so many chain, you know and then, and that's how they worked. They were their own, they just sat and had their food and their drink when they wanted that's what they liked, they all liked about it

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you see they'd no bullies shouting at 'em, as long as they did their work right there was... One boy once got arrested and he were allowed one phone call and solicitor said 'We've arrested a boy and he works on the moors, he's allowed one phone call and he'd like a word with you'. I says 'Oh'. He says 'Shirley,' he says 'I've been arrested and if I've got a job, if me works alright and I've got a job to go to they'll let me out'. So I said 'You have done nothing wrong here, your work is perfect' I says. You can come, when he come back he says 'Eee, it were better than phoning me mam', he says and he used to call me mam when he come for his wages. He used to say 'Thank you mam.'

[Laughter]

So t'gangs had, they'd arrive on the moors and, if they, they'd be, would they be given different jobs or would they all be say walling, would they all be walling?

No, they'd know what they were gonna do that morning, they'd know that they were walling, you know or if they were gonna be spraying, you know, for, we'd know look, I'd tell 'em day before you know, and then, they knew, because they all used to be working, they weren't forced to be working in t'same, there were Packards North, Packards South, Porters Drain, there were two sides to Porters Drain, there were New Moor, so they could be work, doing, I mean some, they could be spraying on New Moor, you know, while these is walling on Packards and such.

And you talked about these flats, if there were, wallers arrived, gang of wallers and they'd arrive on the flats was it one huge area of flats?

Yeah.

Can you tell me what it looked like?

Yeah, it, well it looked like a massive field, and the flats were about, ooh, from there, about from there to there, the flats 'ud be that width you know.

About five or six feet?

Yeah. Three or four yards I would say and then there'd be a wall of peat down that side of it and a wall of peat down that side of it, so you'd put two wallers on that wall and two wallers on that wall and each 'ud be probably fifty six chain long and it just looked like a big field with rows and rows of walls of peat on it.

For how long?

About say...

Fifty-six chain did you say?

Yeah, fifty-six chain. See there's walls there look and it'd be a complete area like that with walls of peat on like that, all along, well you can see length of that, that were at side o' Lindholme that one.

And so the wallers would start work and what would they be doing?

Wallerers, they'd start walling it after t'machines had cut it. Machines might have cut it three month before, cause they'd be working on another part of t'moors, t'wallers, you know and then t'cutting

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machines were always in a different area, cutting while you were walling what they'd already cut you know and it'd dried a bit.

And they'd be building these walls with these bricks, like bricks of turfs?

Yeah.

Like you said, two bricks and then two bricks.

You know how you can do wi' dominoes like that, well it were just like that but with turfs you know. It'd be, there'd be that, size of a breezeblock, but not quite as deep, you know, about half as deep like.

And so they'd make these, you'd have a wall, when you arrived you'd have the wall that the machine had left which was a little bit dry.

Yeah, yeah.

And then you'd wall it into these taller..

Taller walls, wi' gaps in like dominoes you know, like building like that so that the wind could go right through it you see and dry it.

And then what?

And then the boom 'ud come behind, when that walling was dry the boom 'ud come then, with about ten men and they'd be in each flat you know, one man for each wall and they'd be throwing it onto t'boom.

And boom was like a conveyer belt?

And t'boom were like a conveyer belt and t'wagons used to run under end of it and they used to fill it, it used to fill into t'wagons and it used to fill it into wagons. That used to be what you call, you see that's walling and they've been, and there's walling at this side of it and they've been, they've put the rail in, and they used to have to, the boom 'ud go across about six, throughout the six or eight flats and there'd be a man on each wall throwing, throwing peat what were on that wall onto boom and then this, this track here, the boom 'ud come just over t'top o' that wagon and then t'tractor driver, that's what he's been doing you see we tractor on side, he keeps moving up for t'wagons as they fill he, he moves 'em so that t'booms filling 'em you know.

And was the boom on rails? The actual boom?

Yeah, on, like big tracks you know.

Like a, ooh what do they call 'em, like tank tracks?

Yeah, yeah.

I see. Oh so it weren't, , the boom thing itself wasn't actually confined to the rails, it was on a, on tracks?

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No the boom were on it's own, yeah, yeah and the men that were loading peat they used to have to lay this rail down for the, for the wagons to run on, you know and then when they'd finished on that they'd take all that rail up to go onto the next, where they were going next you know. So they'd, they'd have all that to do as well.

So Fisons would tell you how much the factory needed and it was your job to make sure that they got that, for that day was it?

Yeah, yeah.

So did you know how much peat there would be then, how did you estimate how much peat you'd need to fill their order?

Well they knew by t'orders you know, tonnage they'd be using and they used to estimate just over a ton to t'wagon, you know when it were ground and such. So t'foreman, who were t'foreman then, Keith Robinson, he, he used to say, tell my husband how many wagons that they'd be requiring you know and if they d'int use as many it used to go into a stack near t'factory. They used to, they used to tip it into a stack near t'factory and then, when, when it were wet or something and they couldn't get any they could use that you see.

So you knew how many wagons you needed to fill?

Yeah, and we, we used to be, for each gang we had to do so many, so many chains of walling, they used to average it you know, to, on a year. They used to want so many chain of walling doing, you know, and so they used to ask you to try and reach your budget you know, and I've never failed, cause there were that many. I mean, sometimes you could take all what we wanted to come you know, to work.

So Fisons were responsible for the cutting machine?

Yeah.

Then they'd, they'd set out the, they'd cut it...

Well they'd have, I think they'd have about six cutting machines and, him that was, t'bloke who you said, who were them two[in photo], yeah, him, he was the mechanic for the cutting machines.

What's his name?

Jack Martin. He was the cutting machine mechanic.

And did he also load the..

And there was husband and wife worked on there, Kath and Harry Jackson and they used to do a load of different jobs, you know, for, because she'd been on from t'piddying stage and all such as that you know.

When you say husband and wife, did they used to work as a team?

Mm.

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How did that work?

Well they, they'd probably do a job graving. They used to grave, you know, work like them two men were doing, and it was so much a chain, so they worked together, one 'ud, Harry 'ud cut it, and then Kath 'ud stand it out like a wall, you know to dry. And they'd do piddying and stacking and everything for, you know, just any job.

And were there many like that, husbands and wives that worked together?

Yeah, fathers and sons, I had walling and two of, two of t'wallers I walked down flat to 'em one day and there was, she said 'Oh you'll never guess', I says 'What?' She says 'Oh, we've just seen a ghost'. She said 'we thought it were you coming down flats', she said 'and we looked up and said good morning,' she says 'and it warh airman'. They were working, you know, on t'moors a aeroplane went down, sunk, sunk, they've never ever got it out. And this aeroplane went down and she said 'he were walking like, he'd got goggles on and t'helmet and, everything', she says 'and', she says 'I just said morning, thinking it were you', she said 'and then when we looked up', she says 'he were there', she says 'and then he just went'. Well they were working right where, near where t'plane had gone down you know. She never come no more. Mrs Singleton and her husband worked on there and her son worked on there and her daughter in law worked on there and she, oh it d'int half frighten her. And the women that she was with, it was her sons' mother in law who were with her and she says 'my god', she says. 'seeing that'..

There were loads of men had seen ghosts on there and one, they dug him up you know. Cutting machine were cutting and when he turned round they saw, this man, his hair, he were, cause peat preserves and he were just as he'd gone down, you know. His hair and everything, he'd got gear on and he'd crashed in t'War on t'thing and sunk. And I went to hairdresser, they had to take this man off, this airman off o' moors and they d'int know what he were doing because he'd got t'helmet and everything and knew he'd been a flyer, but they couldn't understand why he hadn't got all his flying uniform on and that. Anyway, they were gonna have to bury him in t'unknown graves, you know and I went to hairdressers, it were up in Stainforth and she said, there were this old women in like and she says to t'hairdresser 'do you think that young lady would mind if I had a word with her?' So she says 'no, I don't think so'. She come over, she says 'I'm a medium' she says 'and the young man who you've found,' she says 'you work on the moors don't you?', I says 'yeah', she says 'the young man who they've found on the moors wants you to thank the man who found him,' she says 'because now he can be laid to rest.' She said 'and you wondered why he hadn't got the flying gear on', she says 'well that was because they was having a social night at the airfield,' and she says 'and the siren started and they had to run and get into t'planes and go up without any notice'. You know, cause of the air raids, and she said 'and they called him, and she told me his name, I can't remember it now, he were Polish and so I went back and told 'em name of this airman and it were him and they'd, he were one that were missing, you know and they put his, they laid him to, in t'cemetery with his name and everything.

Which cemetery?

Somewhere at Finingley weren't it, yes it were, somewhere near Finingley where they buried airmen.

So what had he got on?

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He'd got his ordinary night clothes, you know, he were on, in this dance thing what they were having on t'airfield, you know for pilots and that like, it were, I think it were near Christmas time or something and...

You don't mean his 'jamas do you when you say nightclothes?

Well, no, no, his clothes for going out, you know and he'd just got a flying helmet and glasses and that like, I mean that's how they knew he were a pilot and that, but his hair were on and everything, you know, it hadn't even perished cause o' t'peat.

Did you see him?

No, I dint want to. Cutting machine driver did and he says 'I wondered what it warh at back o' me', you know, he'd cut this piece o' peat out and he never even touched t'body, you know. Anyway he had to have police and everybody like, and they were all wanting to have a look, you know. No I dint want to see him.

And you said a lot of the men had seen ghosts and things.

Yeah, yeah.

What kind of ghosts?

Pilots and, cause there's a plane still there you know, and where they saw that one, them two women and she never come no more that women wi' that. I were talking to her son in t'bank a fortnight since, she's ninety two now, and I said, and her daughter in law, and I says 'can you remember her seeing that ghost?' He says 'seeing that ghost, she never forgets it,' yeah, and then some, walking through to get onto moors, you know, through, there were a little wood and you walked through to get onto t'moors and somebody saw one in there. He says 'I shan't be going that way no more!'

[Laughter]

And that, you know, and then there were, that, he used to be a school teacher Malc Hobson and he left school teaching to come on t'moors and work, and he were working on t'cutting machines and that and, then he used to do a bit of fire watch. And he'd been on fire watch and he used to work at, you know, he'd probably do some when anybody were on holiday or they were off, he'd do some night security watch, you know and he says 'I were talking away to this bloke,' he says 'and all of a sudden he just disappeared', and that were on Remple Lane going up to Lyons' you know, and he says 'oh,' he says 'it's put me off night,' what you call it, he says 'I were talking away right' and he said 'he just disappeared!'

[Laughter]

We were talking about these sort of family teams and the husbands and wives working and you said some of them, they were originally gravers and then, you know the wives would stack, what...

I mean, they wouldn't, some of the wives they used to say in t'British Moss days, the men 'ud be employed and the women 'ud go to help 'em, to make more money. Yeah, I mean they didn't stop 'em, you know there were a foreman on, but they were allowed to do that, they were allowed to go on, you know, and help 'em.

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Yes like that photograph there's two of 'em int there.

Yeah, yeah.

Bit of teamwork. So what, when the cutter came in what happened to the gravers?

Well they finished graving then when t'cutting machines came in, cause that were hard work they said, whey you can imagine, look how they've got, they're cutting that out wi' a saw, well I mean, he's got one of them, what you call it knives, what there used to be.

Yeah.

And you have to, they used to have to cut it and then they used to have to put it up to him and then they used to have to carry it out and then they'd change over jobs a bit, you know, because it were that back breaking and they couldn't work as fast as a cutting machine could. I mean, a cutting machine could cut a flat in a couple of days you know, fifty six chain, they'd never have got that out, that work.

Do you remember 'em doing that?

Yeah, yeah.

And would there be as many people working on the moor when they were doing as opposed to when they were using...

No, no, not when they were walling. No.

Well what happened to the gravers then when they stopped hand graving?

Well they went on other jobs, they went stacking or, he become t'foreman o' moors, Keith, and he went into t'factory, Bert, they're both dead now. He were, t'moors foreman at time I were there. He used to see to Fisons men, you know, I used to do all contracting. And I used to see to all t'walling and t'boom, they were all my blokes, you know that were doing boom.

And was there, was there times of the year when there was more work than at other times?

Well, when we first went on it was supposed to be seasonal, but then when they got this HTW and walls were drier you used to try and work through t'winter to get it up for spring for weather to dry it you see. The longer you could work the better it warh, they got more dry peat, you know, so they used to want us to work, used to want us to work as long as we could you see so that, and t'women d'int mind, you know.

Was there more working the summer than there was at the other times of the year?

Well there was, well t'mill were doing same all year round you know, so they wanted that same amount of peat all t'time. So I would say we averaged it out. First off, the first, it were like seasonal, till t'cutting machines come and then you could, we still worked wi' peat you see.

Seasonal, you'd mean what time of year?

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Like spring, you know, March to, that's, I mean that's why you could never have no summer holidays you know, I mean I...

March till when?

March till November, October, November time you know, and then they'd keep you walling if, you know, if you could.

So you were saying about your holidays?

So we never had no summer holidays until, we used to shut at Christmas, for, you know for a fortnight, we used to say there's no work for a fortnight, that's, they all used to work for that you see they knew that they were not gonna be working for a fortnight at Christmas. Cause they couldn't work if I weren't there you see, t'contract workers and...

So somebody could actually work full time all year round, as a casual worker?

Yeah.

The reason I asked you about the seasonality because, firstly cause I'd been told it was seasonal and one or two of the chaps I've talked to used to do it when they were at school, in t' school holidays.

Oh I used to, when miners were on strike, 1984 warh it, I had more miners, more miners on there cause they'd got no, no money coming from anywhere you know. I mean they were on for a long time weren't they and they used to say 'bye I'll be glad when pit goes back I've never worked as hard!'

[Laughter]

[End of recording]