

Thorne and Hatfield Moors Oral History Project

Interview with: Shirley Squires (part 2)

Date: 1 December 2006

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But, I mean, all, all t'workforce were good you know. Management of Fisons were brilliant they were like a, it weren't while there were one or two started coming in from when t'other firm took over, Levingtons took over and that and they'd no loyalty to, to, Mr Carr, I remember him saying he knew what he owed 'em all, cause his success would be due to t'results of t'moors and t'mill, everything and he appreciated it. And Stan Marshall warh t'general foreman over t'moors and Swinefleet and that and they all used to be appreciative you see because they knew that their jobs depended on what you did, you know. It were Mr Carr said I had to have all these.

All?

All these photographs. They were in t'office you see and he, he wanted me to have these, I'd earnt 'em.

How long did you work on the moors for?

Thirty year.

And when did you finish?

Nineteen, let's see, I warh fifty-six, I'm seventy now, twenty-four year, fourteen years since I finished.

So did you, we talked about the cutting machine and the, then this sort of slightly better cutting machine which was what they were all looking at...

Netherthorpe.

Netherthorpe, were there other machines, I tell you what I'm asking you because there's something called a ruttling machine

Yeah.

Do you know what I mean?

Yeah.

Can you tell me what that was?

Well there was a levelling machine and the levelling machine used to have a big roller on and these flats, before the cutting machine cut it, these levelling machines used to level all the flat, you know, take the rubbish off, so that they...

Thorne and Hatfield Moors Oral History Project

Take all vegetation off?

Yeah, so that the cutting machine, it, they were clear, they were like table tops, you know, for t'cutting machines to cut it and then the ruttler could go under walls and ruttle it, you know, so that it dried.

So that that, even though this, the, what did they call it that better cutting machine they had?

HTW.

HTW, the HTW did a good wall but still the ruttler needed to go and rearrange it to...

No the ruttler didn't do it before, they could, they could ruttle any, I mean ruttler didn't come in 'til a good while after you know. That, if they wanted anywhere, you know that were bad, that hadn't dried, they could ruttle it you know.

When did HTW come, can you remember?

[Pause]

About 1945 or something like that.

1945? Oh, so quite a long time ago were it? Had you, were you working then?

Yeah. Er.. My son he's forty-three now, and he were about three year old when I went on t'moors, so that's forty, over forty years since, you know. So.. I'm just trying to think what date it were when I went, sixty three - no, '45 what am I... sixty three, sixty six, it were about sixty nine, it'd be 1969 about when HTW came.

And was that when they changed over from hand graving to mechanised cutting, you know...

Yeah, that was when the first one came, Stiba, when that machine what they've replaced wi' t'HTW. Germans it were a German machine, cutting machine you know what they used on their moors and then...

So until 1969 they'd be hand graving?

Well that ruttler as well, now when I was just leaving they'd started areas where they were trying to do wi'out cutting machines as well and it was, they were just ruttling and laying peat all out loose and drying it, you know.

Without making into seams and sods?

Yeah, we out making it into stacks, or, and then a machine 'ud pick it up, you know.

So they'd level it and then the ruttler would just...

Ruttle it all up.

Ruttle the surface?

Thorne and Hatfield Moors Oral History Project

Yeah, yeah.

To make it loose?

And machine 'ud pick it, pick it up, yeah, they'd lay it out as a, ruttled, you know, so they didn't have to, well they d'int have to pay for walling or anything then you see, anymore. That, that came into force with an Irish manager that came, he took over for t'moors, Donal Egan and in Ireland, he said, when he first came he said 'you wouldn't get nobody in Ireland working like this', he says 'if they can't drive a machine', you know, walling they, they don't, they not done no walling or graving or anything. He said 'surface milling'. So he got the machines brought in and that for surface milling, started surface milling and ruttling and that from an Irish, his father used to be a foreman on t' big moors in Ireland and then he'd gone on as a lad like and knew so much and all that and he got t'managers job at Fisons for t'moors and that and so it all changed. And bit by bit they all started, you know, they d'int want anymore wallers and they d'int want anymore boom lads for loading it, you know, or anything like. They were doing it wi' machine.

Did, and were you still working then?

Yeah.

So what happened to you?

And I worked, well while Donal Egan were there, he said to me 'you've done a service', he said 'you've been brilliant', he said 'you'll always have a job as long as I'm here'. So all Fisons men I used to do all t'ordering and t'spare parts and all the protective clothing and t'boots and I used to, I'd run into Epworth to Harris' for parts you know, for tractors or whatever and then I used to do all men's things, you know, running o' for office like from them, for about.. to fifty one, fifty, for about.. Donal Egan come in about fifty and fifty one, fifty two, he went in about fifty three.

1953?

Yeah, Donal Egan went, he left.

Now you saying, if you've been telling me that the cutter came in 1969 and he came after the cutter...

Oh wait a minute, I'm thinking of mi' age.

You're thinking of your age, I know you are.

No, eighty-seven, I'm thinking of me age me! Eighty seven, Donal Egan left about eighty eighty or eighty nine and then I worked on till ninety two till Levington, not Levington, no it warh Levington weren't it. Levingtons were taking over from Fisons and then they were redunding loads of people.

Why was that, why did the jobs change?

Well, new firm comes, want new, you're no good to 'em any longer like, you're...

Did the work change, did the way they did things change or was it just...

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Well they started surface milling you see instead of walling and all such as that. Then they were asking for redundancies, you know. They asked me if I wanted redundancy and I thought, well, after all them years. And I mean, sometimes we used to have to work seven days a week and when mills used to get on fire, I mean, they used to get on fire wi' bird watchers and that, you know, them that used to come in, sneak in at weekends, and all such as that and they used, and t'men, Fisons men used to have to be on twenty four hours, dowsing and putting it out and all that and I've gone and got fish and chips at night and all that, and took it in to them and, and when you think what you've done, you know. I mean, they don't know what you've done, cause they weren't there, so. And there were two of their blokes come and I learnt 'em their job. Cause they'd never been on t'peat moors or anything and they weren't getting much help from t'foreman that were on there then and he says 'I'm not learning 'em me job or I won't have one', you know, and 'I'm not doing this, and I'm not doing that'. Well they used to come and ask me, 'what, what do we do in this situation and what do we do in that', and all that and I think, well, they soon forget don't they.

And was your husband still working the moors?

Yeah.

So what did he do?

He finished in, he's seventy one now, so fifty nine, sixty, seventy, thirteen year he's been finished. And he was, he were doing mechanicing for t'machinery, you know, he knew all t'machines and t'tractors and all such as that, you know. So he were doing all t'jobs like that and then they asked, he had a, he'd got arthritis in his lumber spine and he started having bad do's on t'moors, you know, he'd be doing something and then he'd get locked, in his, they had to take him off on a stretcher, on a stretcher once and take him to hospital and that and he were getting like, it were a bit of liability, so, for him to be out on t'moors, cause he were embarrassed at shouting over t'radio, you know, something like that so they asked him if he wanted to redundancy so he left at the same time.

What's his name?

Dave Squires.

And you had another member of, some other members of...

Mi' son Dean he worked on moors.

What did he do?

He were first on t'filling gang, you know wi' his dad and he were only seventeen and half, doing a man's job and, cause I mean it warh a man's job, it were hard work. There wasn't a job on the moors that were easy, they were all backbreaking manual, you know, all, but everybody loved it. Mi' son's got t'shoe shop now in Thorne.

Did he carry on working on the moors?

He carried on for a couple of years I think after his dad and then he, he got a job at Dixons at Thorne at, you know, car thing, and that thing.

So he came off the moors as well?

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Yeah.

I'm curious to know how you, how you got involved, you mentioned it a little bit, tell me how you came to get started. You said you worked on the land.

We worked on the land, we used to go out to all different farms, farmers and all that, and do a lot of work for [Durdeys?] at Barnby Dun. And there was a, the manager of Fisons then was Mr Lewis, Geoff Lewis and they weren't getting enough peat for t'factory, you know for t'factory and they didn't know what to do with this walling, cause they'd just got, they'd got the Stiba then but they couldn't, what they... They'd tried it with some of their men and they d'int want it, the job, you know. So they said, you know about, who, what about t'land workers, you know, that's used to doing this kind of thing. So he said, he says 'aye' and he sent for us for interview.

Well I worked for Mrs Steers then and we got on and they wanted so much walling done per gang, you know, cause they used to pay you per gang, and she wasn't doing the, and they'd put me separate on new moor with some gangs and she weren't doing the job right and they were over drawing on flats. Instead of getting fifty six to chain there were some blokes who were doing a right, you know, saying 'I've done so and so and I've done so and so' and she never kept a record you see, so they were just drawing, well they'd nearly drawn double. So Mr Carr had took over then and Mr Marshall and they said to me 'will you take all this over'? You know, I said 'oh, I don't know, I don't like it, it's her job'. So they said 'she hasn't got one, if you don't take it over we'll give it to somebody else'. So, and everybody had, everybody would have lost their jobs, so all them that were on there, that, 'oh keep it Shirley', you know and so they begged me to do it so I says I'd do it and, yeah.

And so, so you got the, you went for an interview and then got the job.

Yeah.

And then was it up to you, how did you choose the gang leaders?

Well there were, what I'd had in my gangs off, agricultural you know.

What so you'd been in charge o' gangs on...

Yeah, on moors, on't agriculture, on t'farms and everything, yeah. So, they were all, I knew who were capable of doing it, you know, so.

How did you come to do that then on the land, how did you come to be in charge?

What on t'land? Because farmers used to employ you and they used to have to have a ganger looking after 'em, to make sure that they did the work and did what you told them and everything you see, so. And if you were in, if they were picking, screwing carrots, they used to, you used to have to weigh 'em you see, or load 'em and so gangers they used to get paid so much a bag you see for doing 'em. Well then I used to have to go with t'loaders to load 'em to make sure that we've done that amount of carrots or that amount of sprouts or whatever and when we were on, when we're in potatoes, you used to get, if you were on contract, you used to get so much an acre you see, so you had to make sure that you'd done an acre and all that, so I mean I were used to all that.

Have you always lived in Thorne, Stainforth?

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Stainforth, yeah.

So were you born here?

Yeah, about, nearly where Post Office is.

So what, about a couple of hundred yards down the road?

Yeah, yeah.

And was it a big family?

No, I only had one sister. Mi' dad were chairman o' t' council here and mi' mam were t' first lady councillor of Stainforth.

So how did you start doing what you did, how did you come to do that?

Well when I first left school I worked in Pilkington's offices.

Pilkingtons? Where are they?

Glass factory at Kirk Sandal and I worked in their offices and I found that a bit boring. It were mixing, you know, for, anything like that. So then I went into shops and then I got made manageress of Northern Dairies at Moorends and I worked at the Co-op. And then I thought, after I'd had mi' son I didn't, I'd been married seven year, you know, when I had him. So I thought, well I'm not gonna work for a couple o' year, you know. Then mi' mother in law worked on land, so, and they'd no driver, you know, so they'd got me driving 'em to work in t' van like, you know. So that's how I ended up going on t' land. I used to enjoy that.

Did you actually do the work, picking, pulling and picking?

Oh yeah, yeah, I did it all. First when I went on t' moors I used to wall, you know, same as, so I knew what they were, first, when t' manager who's at Fisons now, first came, he'd come for, for Scotts, you know.

Is it Phil Westwood you mean?

Yeah, well when Phil Westwood first come I said to him, when he were on t' moor, I learnt him all about t' moors you know, cause nobody 'ud help him and he said to me when we went on t' moors I said 'don't get involved with the women on the moors, you know, wallers and all that.' He said, so he said 'oh, why?' I said 'because,' I said 'every time you go they'll want more money'. Cause it were a, it were a thing you know, I said and 'I walled and I know when they can make their money and when I'm making their wages up on a Thursday I know by what they're earning whether the jobs alright'. You know, cause you knew it wi' you doing it yourself d'int you and he said, and then he must have thought, I were trying to him keep away from them you see. So he got involved with 'em one day and then when he come back he said 'bloody hell,' he says 'I wished I'd o' took notice o' you', I says 'why', he says 'it were true what you said.' I said 'well, I warned you'. I said, I says 'sometimes in a morning I've had strikes on our lawn outside here, when they've come. We want more money for that or we can't do it.' I've said 'well I'll come and try a chain', I said

Thorne and Hatfield Moors Oral History Project

‘and see how far I can go’ you know and how long it takes me and then they all said ‘oh, waste of time’ and then they’d all go back to work!

[Laughter]

And did you ever? Did you ever go and do a chain?

Yeah, yeah, yeah. There used to be some o’ lads there like, you know and they used to think they could have you wrong you know, used to swear and that. I’d say ‘I can swear better than you when I want to’, you know, but they were, oh, a grand set o’ workers and I had a gang from Bentley on, a gang of women about twelve or fourteen from Bentley, yeah. I enjoyed every minute of it.

Were you the only one, were you the only one who did what you did in Thorne and Hatfield?

Yeah, yeah, and if ever they’d any grievance in t’factory or t’bosses, you know, they’d say ‘send for Shirley’, you know, they’d say ‘can you go sort this out, go sort that out’, and I used to say ‘yeah, no trouble’.

Can I just talk to you a little bit, I know we’ve been going a long time so we’ll have break in minute, but, about what the moors actually look like, what did it look like?

To tell you the truth I never, ever saw any beauty on the moors whatsoever. The first time we ever went on t’moors, it looked barren and when we saw that boom it looked like a ship and I thought well where’s all t’water, where’s all t’water. Cause it spread across thing and you’d got masts, you know, and I said well where’s that water, cause you could see it in the distance you know. And I never saw any beauty. I saw heather and these rare flowers and all what, I never saw anything and I said, I said ‘what they fighting over, coming walking round here for, I can’t get home quick enough’, and everybody when we first got there says, ‘oh we’re not coming no more’, you know. There was nothing, what they see to go walking on there, I do not know.

Are you just talking about the bits where you were working where it was cut?

No, no. I mean it were all, there was no, no parts, where, Swinefleet there was a bit on, you know, on t’edges, but not where Fisons were working at all. And I used to look round, used to think, where’s these rare orchids what there’s supposed to be, and I mean we’d been on there, I never even saw a beetle. Well B&Q they had a, B&Q’s store they had a load o’ these objectors, you know, wi’ banners outside t’store, so then they said that they wouldn’t be dealing with Fisons peat, scientific peat anymore, they’d go elsewhere for their peat and all this, that and other. So, I said right, and it were gonna be a big loss you know.

So I said right, so I goes and I got a clipboard, paper on it, goes to Doncaster to B&Q. I goes in, I writes all t’pesticides, insect killers, you name it, I wrote it down, brakes wi’ lead linings, you know and all that, then I come back, I wrote a letter and I said ‘You want to preserve a moor for a beetle’, I said ‘and put loads of workers out of work,’ I said ‘for the sake of a beetle.’ I says ‘and I’ve just been in your store,’ and I wrote ‘em all down on a paper and I said ‘fly sprays, pesticide killers,’ I says ‘you name it you’re selling it’, I said ‘how can you object now to Fisons peat because o’ banners that were outside your office’, I said, ‘outside your shop and a lot of your customers are Fisons workers’, and I said ‘I don’t know how you dare’. And I got a letter back from B&Q and it said anybody like me that thought as much of their job as I did was worth employing. They offered me a job!

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[Laughter]

They told me to go for an interview!

[Laughter]

I said, 'I don't want one thank you'. So they offered me a job and said that they were sorry and all that and anyway I think they had Fisons peat but they had it in B&Q bags. And they said I were worth, anybody who looks after their staff and their work like that deserves employing.

Did you, see any difference in the landscape when they changed from sort of, hand graving through to mechanised cutting then onto milling?

When they'd finished in an area they made that area nice. Same as at back o' Tyrham Hall, you know, round that area where that cutting machine first, they were preserving you know, making it all right. So wherever they'd finished wi' t'peat they put it back how it was you know. So I honestly, never saw any, the places what were of any colour or anything were, belonged to farmers, round it, you know, that Fisons didn't touch. So, and you weren't allowed to go on that land you know, but, nothing to do wi' sightseers or anything like that, I honestly could not see what they thought were beautiful.

Have you been on it recently?

No, I ant been on it since I left. No. And it were, it were just all brown and barren when I first went there, and it were like it all time I were there.

Did you ever come across any of these conservationists or objectors?

Yes, we went to t'Grammar School at Thorne, there was a meeting and the man that was doing all the shouting believe it or not, his dad was a charge hand on Swinefleet Moors, Thorne and Swinefleet Moors. Had been and he'd retired and he'd got a good pension from Fisons and his lad was even given a grant from Fisons to go to university. And when he finished at university they give him, Fisons were the first ones to give him a job to find something for, to kill the sorrel, weed that were on there. Anyway he weren't very successful with it. But Fisons paid him for going into all these inventions and all such, you know, and then he got doing something else. Well then he got protesting about t'moors and when he warh a kid he warh one o' them who'd gone on helping his dad, cause his dad were working there and he were at t'grammar school, he were on t'stage. He said, they were on about trying to get it all stopped. Well my two little granddaughters then, I made them a banner and it said, I put on, 'my dad wants work, we don't want free school meals, nor do..', you know, so takes 'em to t'grammar school with us. Well Fisons d'int used to like you to do anything, they used to say 'ignore it all, you know, don't get involved' and all that. Well then this time they said 'we're just about sick to the core of them. Go and do what you want'.

So a load of Fisons turned up at t'grammar school at this meeting and I stood outside school wi' two granddaughters wi' t'banners and these blokes started to come to look at it and they said 'Oh will you be going inside the hall?' So I says 'Oh yes we'll be going'. So they said, and then he come up, he were t'organiser of it this protester, so I said 'it's very funny', I said 'Would your dad like to be without his Fisons pension?' I said 'how come,' I says 'you were educated on Fisons money,' I says 'and you've been brought up on Fisons money', I said 'and now you can object to it.' I said 'and t'first job you ever had given was from Fisons'. So he walked off, so when they got inside they were asking who was, anybody would like anything to say so, this bloke had said to me

Thorne and Hatfield Moors Oral History Project

'are you going inside love?' I says 'yeah'. So when he got inside and he says 'I think there's one lady here that should have a say'. So, he shouted me to get up and have a word, so when he were in t'thing, I said 'he was brought up on Fisons wages,' I said 'he was educated on Fisons wages, a grant from Fisons for his university,' I said 'and if it were good enough for him it's good enough for my grandkids, why shouldn't they have t'same opportunity?'

Well they were all blooming cheering and doing you know, and, but it were true, I mean I don't know how you've gone on moors and worked and done all that and then you stand there in charge of a protest or... I mean you've had all t'norpins you know what I mean? And I mean they weren't even forced to pay for a grant for his university or anything warh they.

Did you ever see any of them out on the moors, did you know, did you ever meet Mr Bunting?

Not to speak to, saw him, you know, in the distance like, but not to speak to. He, I mean, I'd got his two grandsons and his son on t'moors working, walling and they loved it. And I said, well it's funny I mean, he's objecting to it and they're out and whether they'd gone on there to aggravate, I don't think they ever had anything to do with him you know. But...

And he had a little group of supporters 'dint he? Buntings Beavers they called them I think.

What, what, honestly are they objecting to? I mean, if it's because... I mean onto t'moors, I mean I don't know now how it is but I mean in our days when we were on moors it were all private land right round it. You know, you had to go across bottom o' t'airfield, Lindholme, you know, to get onto it, down Remple Lane and onto there, well then that were Jack Lyon's lane, but Fisons paid to have it tarmaced from one end to the other for him to, for, and that were for their transport down to their own house and everything, but Fisons paid for it all to be tarmaced and everything so that we could just use that entrance onto t'moors and Fisons used to see to it and if it ever wanted anything doing, you know.

So that were all right for that, but I mean, you had to have permission, you know and there were nowhere else you could really go on without going through somebody's land. And I'm not kidding I wouldn't want to, if they stopped draining it, it wunt even be safe. I agree that people that's, there used to be dykes, you know, along t'bottom and that what Fisons used to drain to drain all water off and everything and if you dropped in one of them, you'd got to get somebody to help to get you out. I mean, look at them two at Thorne Moors what went on New Years Eve, about two or three years since, and they were having a short cut or something and if they hadn't have had their portable phone they wunt have been here. They'd got, they'd fell in two o' dykes going across t'moors and they were up to here in water, and they couldn't get out, you can't get out cause it's sucking you down you know and they'd got a phone and t'police and t'fire brigade had to go and get 'em out.

Did you fall, I mean, was it dangerous on that basis when you were working there?

Yeah, yeah, yeah. If you got where it had just been opened you know, or, if you've, you'd sometimes to jump across t'dykes to get onto flats, you know, and if you went in, you'd a job to get out.

I mean, you've showed me that photograph with the, one of the machines and...

Yeah, yeah.

Thorne and Hatfield Moors Oral History Project

Did things like that happen often?

Yeah often, yeah.

So tell me about that machine going in.

Well they went to do some clearing and t'machine just stood there, they had to get, I forgot what they got to get, that's up to there look.

Up to t'cabin.

Yeah, and it was still sinking.

So could you see where it was likely to be dangerous or was it hidden?

No it's hidden. No, if you got a part like that, where, it's never been touched you've had it. I don't know, same as walks and that what they go on, I think 'oh my god', you know, they've only got to put their foot wrong somewhere and, no it were all over.

They've made some footpaths now though.

Yes.

So it's not quite, you know, for walkers, I think it's not quite so..

But it's, it's if it i'nt drained you know, I mean, they used, Fisons used to have Hymac, they'd got a contractor called Bicken, Dave Bicken and he used to be always draining round t'moors and then they got their own blokes and dyking, you know and that, but it warh it were always. Wherever you went if it hadn't been worn much, you know, to be careful.

You'll have to come on, we'll have to make an arrangement to come on and see what it looks like now and see what you think. Thank you very much anyway.

[Recording Ends]