

Thorne & Hatfield Moors Oral History Project

Interview with: Trevor Sharpe (3 part 1)

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Interviewer: Lynne Fox

NB. This is a recording of an informal meeting to look at and scan photographs and collect associated information.

This is Lynne Fox for the Hatfield and Thorne Moors Oral History Project and it's the 31st August 2006 and I'm talking to Trevor and Barry Sharpe. I wonder if you could tell me about the different layers of peat, you were telling me before about the different layers of peat.

TS: Yeah you've got different layers er, and it goes with the age. You can, you can age peat by, when we were graving and cutting er, and you could see the layers at different ages, different stages. Black peat is the one they used for burning and it's the one that's been compressed over millions of years, obviously squashed. That's dense peat and that's black and no good for cultivation or making compost 'cause it's coarse. The further up the ladder you come the further up the er, peat chain you come, you get lighter peat. And the top peat is the best peat, because it's so branny and all peat is, it acts as a sponge and it holds water. To make a compost you have to mix additives and chemicals.

So at Hatfield you'd take the top vegetation off?

TS: You'd take. When you're graving you have to clear the top vegetation for maybe eight inch, or depends on how big the roots are of the shrubs, the bracken the heathers, which is no good to no man nor beast. So you clear a chain er, we call it a chain, it's the distance that you're gonna cut that day. You clear the rubbish off and put it in the bottom er, of the existing hole that's been cut and then you get the nice branny peat ready to cut. Cut with a knife, er, shovelled out with an heart shaped spade, very sharp and the knives are similar to the hay knives in the olden days, used to cut hay with these knives, er, but not this type, different, different type o' blade. That peat is used for, like I said, going to the factory for compost. The bottom peat, in Yorkshire, I would say er, ninety five percent of it is used for compost or used to be, not anymore because they've stopped cutting now. Scotland theirs is dark peat they used theirs for branning, er for burning er because of the density and it's, it's next to coal, how we call it next to coal. Hard to cut, er, dense black peat.

Is that the same as they use in Ireland for..?

TS: It is the same as Irish peat or within, the different grades but Irish is the best for burning. All Ireland used peat for burning, it even goes to the power stations so I am made to understand. So all the top surface peat that Irish have is no good to 'em.

Won't that burn?

TS: It won't burn so, they sent it across to, we used to accept it in England to mix wi' our compost. And

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they're thankful o' that, I think it's subsidised from the government, Irish government, er, so it were priceless really, just, it means nothing to 'em, they want what's below for burning.

And is that the only bit of peat that'll burn that black one?

TS: The dark peat, the bottom, maybe, maybe four foot. Peat will burn, but in different ways. The black peat will give you same as the coal does and burn furious, the further up the depth you come, then it starts to smoulder and the top peat, which we call branny peat, just smoulders away, you get no heat, you get no flame, it just leaves a white ash and, so that's no good for burning really.

So when you get the, the, moor fires, what's happening there?

TS: Well the moors fires, it smoulders into, wherever you get a tree, you get, you get the fierce fires which wipes this top shrub off, that hasn't touched the peat. The fires that touch the peat it follows roots down, or rabbit holes, or fox holes and starts to heat underneath it but it smoulders away it dunt, you don't get a fierce fire, you don't get the flames like you see in woods and forests and all that lot, it just smoulders away. And it can smoulder, for weeks, months, unless we get severe bad weather to really get into it. Hose pipes, the amount o' water we could put on it were, weren't enough to sometimes put it out, it used to ignite behind you, because it had got into an hole or a tree root and followed it down and started smouldering. So days after, you think it's out, it could come back up again, it could flare up over a period of two or three days like or weeks.

And is that just smouldering in the bran, er, top surface?

TS: The top surface.

Top surface.

TS: Yeah, it won't go down to the bottom, it's er, 'cause, er, you need er, air, to er, keep the flame going. So it, the further down the peat it won't get down there because there's no air, it's like a blanket over it like a blanket of er, shrub land like and peat. So it burns on the top surface which is branny and allows, and can get air in and allows it to run maybe a foot underground maybe more, you know. I've seen it where it's been four foot holes. But it's always where, like I've said, there's been an hole and er, it's got air to it, so it can heat away. But it heats away in a manner where the top surface you can walk, you think you can walk on it and underneath is er, burning peat. Big hole of fire like, you know, red hot ash. And I've seen it done, and person, mesen, in er, 1963 we had a fire on Thorne Moors and we had a chap, er, Harry Clarke, called him Harry Clarke, 'cos I worked with him. He walked on the er, peat surface thinking it was safe and he fell in this red hot ash and I, I personally pulled him out. But he didn't burn 'cause we had him out within, but he wunt have got out on his own because the side were caving in it were eating away you see. But er, yeah.

How did you get him out?

TS: Pulled him out, just reached over and pulled him out. But he did, I think he burnt, bottom half of his legs, you know, but nowt, nowt severe, he want damaged enough to say, you know, he want hospitalised or anything like that 'cause we were there at the time and we reacted in, in swift like you know to get him out. So, it were a saviour for his, but er, there's, I mean bog's a funny thing. People

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walk on bogs and think it's safe, no it isn't. There's that many swamps, er, in swamps, what I say, you know, now and especially now they're flooded it, or flooding it. It's worse still for kids and that to travel unsupervised. Step off the hard paths, er, and there into knee deep in water. And peat 'ill suck you. Peat 'ill, 'ill er, fasten you in, you can't get out of it.

BS: It's like quick sand.

TS: Quick sand, er, yeah, you can say it's like quick sand. But, kids, it's a dangerous place to, unsupervised, I'll stress that again, it's a dangerous place to be for children, to be on moors.

Straying off the paths?

TS: Oh, yeah.

And it's always been the same hasn't it?

TS: It's always been the same, er, but since. When we was cutting and working the moor, we used to drain it, so it were dry, drier than it is now. So it's more dangerous now that it's not managed than it was then. So Thorne Moors, is, is er, fantastic place to walk and see, but the dangers are there waiting.

Can I just go back to these layers of peat?

TS: Yeah.

Are they distinct layers, can you see more or less a line where they get changes?

TS: Oh yes. It's, you, you get every, I don't know every hundred year, you get a line and you can actually see it in layers, how it's laid and how it's died. Because peat will only grow under, if it's deep water it won't grow. Sphagnum moss the plant 'ill only grow in shallow boggy water, maybe no more than a foot, if it's more than a foot it won't grow, it kills it off. And it's the layers upon layers upon layers of, like I said, not only sphagnum moss plant, all the vegetation that grew round it. So every year, or every hundred year, how it is I don't know, you get a layer of peat of a foot difference. So somebody we, you know, somebody can go along and say how old the bottom layer is and how old the second layer is and how old the, and so on. And you know, anybody from these colleges can go and even give it er, a time and date.

So if you were cutting off the top layer for compost you'd know when you got to the bottom of it would you?

TS: Well by law you're not supposed to er, cut to the bottom. You are supposed to leave a foot, or two foot of er, peat at the bottom for conservationists.

And that's at the bottom, not counting the black layer?

TS: No not counting the black layer.

And how would you know when you'd got it down to a foot above?

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[Laughter]

BS: The knife 'ud stop.

TS: Yeah, you'd stick the knife in and it'd throw back at you!

[Laughter]

TS: It'd. You can see the colour, you can feel the er, tension on you're cutting. Everything, it alters, everything's different.

BS: Well I have seen machine knives, cutting knives bend, break, when they've hit it, when they've hit the black peat, it just doubles the metal up.

So it's, it's, it's, the consistency is fairly solid...

TS: Next to coal. It's next, it's the next thing to coal. Hence the, er, the burning.

BS: Well actually it's like, hitting concrete.

TS: It's compressed that hard.

BS: I've seen, honestly, I've seen knives on cutting machines and the uprights, just double, bend up when they've hit it. And it's cost 'em three to four days to repair the machine.

And is that because, they, if, the level is not flat?

TS: No it int nowt to do wi' level.

BS: No it int it's not the level.

TS: It's...

BS: 'Cause peat, it int level, it's up and down. It's where, hollows are, all the, when the ice age come it swilled all the materials out and left the water and it, it's all up and down.

TS: If you, if you look at...

BS: Not dead level.

TS: If you look at the bank of peat, it fascinates me it really does, because you've a layer of different creatures in the bottom layer to the second layer, to the top layer. Creatures as in black beetles, water beetles, er, and you can see 'em in it.

BS: In fact there's some places, and I've known this, and I'll tell you it, if you're cutting 'em up...

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[Paused]

Yep go on.

TS: Right. Showing this photograph explains, exactly what I am talking about. That's, we call it bearing, it's a foot of rubbish peat, growth, when you've took the growth off, chucked it in the bottom as, as he has there, look he's cleared it.

Yeah.

TS: Then you've got neat peat.

Yeah.

TS: So, er, showing this picture shows you the layers over years how it, how it er formed.

Yeah, yeah, and you're moving from side, along sideways aren't ya?

TS: Yes, you're taking a full chain, you cleared a full chain, you, er, so that were a day's work.

Yeah.

TS: Twenty two yards a chain. So you cleared the deck and then you started cutting ya peat.

And you cleared the top off and threw it into the...

TS: Into the bottom.

Maybe the day before?

TS: That's right, or year before, not day before.

Year before, yes.

TS: That's been cut here probably one year, or two year before.

Yeah.

TS: And then you'd take your, you'd take a spit off, we call it.

Yeah.

TS: But you've got to get rid of all this which is roots, that's no good to nothing.

Yeah.

TS: And that, once you've took that foot off then you come to the nice branny peat. The further down

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you go, I've forgot, I've forgot the depth, I'm not sure it's three foot or...

BS: No it were three foot six.

TS: Three foot six deep.

BS: Staff one.

TS: So you had to cut your turves chuck 'em onto bank and then er, carry 'em away. If you were working on your own it were harder work but there's two of 'em here.

The thing, one of the things that made me ask you about this is because I've read, again, a bit about sort of medieval...

TS: Yeah.

Turf industry and one of the things that was said was that they graved it, well this is not...

TS: Graving yes.

This is sort of 1800s wording, that they graved it right down to the bed, to the clay at the bottom.

TS: Never ever, have they graved it right down that I know of, to the bottom. Because it were pointless taking bottom peat er, because it's no good to nothing.

But wunt that be the bit that burnt?

TS: Yeah.

They'd be selling it for fuel, using it for fuel.

TS: Well probably in them days yeah.

BS: See the top part in them days were no good to 'em. They used to discard all the branny peat, they used to discard it all and just take the black, for burning, that's all they were interested in.

Yeah that's what I was thinking you see.

TS: Yeah and maybe...

And that's what made me ask you about that.

[All Talking]

TS: Maybe that in them days I mean, I...

BS: Years later, somebody got the idea, well we could use this for horse bedding and different things,

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so.

Have you ever come across any, you know you said that the top layer was any, it was no good to them, so they must have discarded it. You've never come across anywhere where they might, like piles that they've discarded or anything?

TS: No, no.

BS: You never get piles.

TS: It rots down it breaks down.

BS: Breaks down.

TS: Frost breaks it down more than anything.

BS: Then when, when it does flood you get bogs.

TS: Yeah.

BS: That's when you're bogs start. You can't walk across it then because it's that fine you just sink straight through it.

So I was thinking I've been reading this, these accounts then, when they're saying they take it for fuel and for the building of houses.

TS: Yeah.

Well I presume. Could they build houses with the, with the thinner stuff, with the..?

TS: Nah, it, there's no er, no strength no substance or anything to hold. They've got to get to the bottom to do it, if that's what they're doing with it, building houses or fuel.

BS: Oh they used to do years ago build houses wi' peat.

TS: Yeah, it's, it's....

So when they're saying that, they used to cut it down to the clay, they would be telling, that would be the way they did it...

TS: That's, in them days...

They'd have only thrown away the top bit?

TS: In them days, yeah. Unless they used the top for, er, an insulation because the top is the best for insulation the bottom no good for that. The bottom's good for building or brick houses, if that's what you're saying, briquettes, er, but then I can only imagine using the top for insulation.

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And could they used the top for the roof? Like a thatching?

TS: No.

If they'd got reeds or something?

TS: No, no you can't use any top for a roof, 'cause it's cut in squares and it'd break down.

Yeah.

TS: It'd definitely go to pulp, to er, dust, er, 'cause weather conditions breaks it down, even on moors. We always said in the olden days 'leave it a good winter and you'll get better peat', and you did because the frost got into it and er, it milled better and broke down better.

BS: Same as farmers ploughing. They always plough beginning o' winter, leave it over winter for the frost to break down, break it down.

TS: Yeah.

BS: And that what...

TS: That's what they used to do wi' peat. Leave it a full year, years ago. Leave it a full year. But they brought machinery out to combat that, so it broke, they broke it down on surface like.

The other question I had to ask you was, about the paraffin mill and the paraffin...

TS: Yes.

Bit of it, where did that come from?

TS: Years ago, er, er, the, there is paraffin in peat, and somebody had the bright idea, 'we can squeeze paraffin out of peat, mill, squeeze it out'. But it, there's not that much in peat, it's er, there's more water than paraffin. So the, it want viable to do that so they reversed it back into bedding horses and cattle and cow cake and I've mentioned it before they have tried it in aeroplanes during war to stop traitor bullets going through, you know, dry moss peat, which 'ud be the top stuff. The bottom stuff, the wet, er, they used to swim in it, or bathe in it, for rheumatism, Harrogate baths, right up to 1962. I used to load it on railway wagon at Medge Hall Mill, and it used to go to Harrogate Baths and they, then put it in their baths and people bathed in it. And I'm, I'm nearly sure that it were the paraffin in that, that helped 'em and nothing else.

But there is a paraffin mill int there?

TS: There used to be a paraffin mill. I've got photographs of it here.

BS: Yeah it's all been...

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TS: It's all gone now and...

So they just built the paraffin mill to try this..?

TS: Yeah, to try and squeeze paraffin out of peat.

And then they decided the...

TS: Then they decided there were more water than paraffin. There was traces of paraffin but not enough to do.

So what happened to the paraffin mill?

TS: They turned it into, turned it into a factory for making deep litter, for chickens, horses, bedding, and, and, then they found out that it was in the wrong place. They couldn't build anything there, they couldn't modify it because they couldn't get transport to it, so they er, pushed it down, or it fell into old ruins and...

Now has, I've understood, or I've read somewhere that the firelighters were made at the paraffin mill? Can you tell me about the firelighters?

TS: The firelighters were made in blocks, er, and I had a machine that demonstrated that, but it's gone missing over the, over the years. And they put peat into a press, little press, only a minute thing, and it pressed little square blocks of fire, er, the shape of firelighters.

About four inches weren't it?

TS: That's right. And, er, because they, it contained paraffin as well and that were the firelighters in them days. So they put the, put little lats on, I mean little lats, er and a big o' string round to keep the block into place and compressed them. Yeah, I have seen that er, I have actually seen the firelighters from that age, me sen.

And do you know where they were made?

TS: They were made at paraffin mill. From my belief they were made at paraffin mill. In fact in the ruins I got that press from there. There were a little press and it er, it were a demonstration of firelighter blocks. Somebody had made it before they built the actual press for 'em and it were a demonstration, you know, machine.

Is there a press still there then?

TS: Oh no, there's nothing at all. You can't even tell there's been a factory, it's overgrown, the factory. There's some brickwork still there, the viaduct and er, in fact er, just after 1960s they come and took that away the scrap dealers, cut it all up and, where the boats used to be moored. 'Cause there were barges coming off the moors, flat bottomed barges used to pull off the moors to paraffin mill, and er, all that were cut away and, like everything else, goes in, disrepair and put a torch to it.

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BS: Then they used to call it progress.

TS: Yeah, then they called it progress. But er the history is there. You still can get to it, there's a road to it via Moorends and er, Browns Farm, through Browns Farm. You can see where it's been, er, but it's grown up like everything else, overgrown now.

It's a pity that we've, haven't got that demonstration er, model int it?

TS: Yes, yes, well I did away with it some years ago. And I found it out the paraffin mill actually, er but it was a fantastic piece of machinery.

[Paused]

That's it, recording now. Watch your language!!

[Laughter]

TS: It's done in, er peat's done in, cut in stages and, and it's laid into, freshly cut it's laid into rows.

Ah, so when you've got this picture, Keith...?

TS: Keith Robinson.

Robinson, you can just see...?

TS: Him rolling the fresh cut peat out.

So he's digging it, cutting it?

TS: He's digging and cutting, putting it on top.

Passing it to him?

TS: And he's putting it in rows.

Right.

TS: The next stage is walling, this is, er,

Which is a photograph in front of me.

TS: Photograph showing all wall peat. And then you come to piddying, which er, piddies as in piddies, in er...

Pyramid.

TS: Pyramid, to dry, to further dry the peat, and then from pyramids it's stacked.

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Yeah. So this picture, these are pyramids are they?

TS: These are pyramids, yeah.

Okay.

TS: There's a, there's a better photograph of pyramids some, there, I mean it's...

Oh yeah.

TS: You can see the gentleman doing the pyramids now.

[Noise of scanning machine]

Thank you, bye. And these pictures, that picture that you've just shown me of those two people gravings, is it Thorne Moor or is it Hatfield Moor?

TS: It's Hatfield.

Are these all Hatfield?

TS: No they're a mix.

Mixture.

TS: That's that for you.

[Noise of scanning machine]

TS: What an example this is.

That's better.

TS: Can you see the black peat on the bottom? And then as it goes up?

Oh there look you can see the line there.

TS: Yeah.

Is that a sack?

TS: That's just to cover his tools up.

Yeah, okay.

TS: They leave their tools every night and then just cover 'em up.

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I've got that one, Yeah, I've got that one.

TS: Yeah.

It's er, first picture. And, now that shows the, this one shows the wagons.

TS: It shows they're loading the wagons from the stacks.

Yeah.

TS: So the foreman, the foreman of the day would go round and they'd find out what stacks are dry and if they're dry enough to load, they tell the gang 'that's the row you want to be in'.

Right. That's really good.

TS: But it used to be seasonal, graved, walled, er, stacked, taken away when dried.

So when were, what would be the season, what would be..?

TS: Well they cut all winter. Well they cut in spring as well, but there were a season where they stopped graving and did the walling and then did the pyramiding and then did the stacking. And it were the, it wah the rule, if you cut it you pyramid it and stacked it. It's your dyke, that is yours, unless they finished work and they put somebody else in that er, that dyke.

Now I understood that there were drainage dykes, connected with the bits that were being dug?

TS: There were at the end of each row.

So it would be the far end?

TS: They'd be at far end.

So you'd go down?

TS: You go down, so...

From one dyke to another?

TS: Yeah, at each end, there'd be a drain.

Right.

TS: Main drain, and they'd drained all the water, it run, it runaway all the time. But, you had to cut a spit, they called it, at the side, see that. There were always a spit at the side to drain the water off. You had to keep that clear.

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You mean there's a little, little channel?

TS: There's a little channel down this side of the peat cutting, each side, you can't see it on that one 'cause it's too dark, but that one you can, and they had to keep that clear to drain off.

So at the bottom of each wall..?

TS: Yeah.

And, which was at the side of you, you would clear...

[Both talking]

TS: Which were at side of ya, you'd cut a, they called it a spit.

A spit.

TS: So you cut a spit down that side.

Right.

TS: Now you've got a crack in, in this photograph, you've got a crack in this one, but it's where an existing drain used to be or the peat's split during hot weather, or whatever. That's showing you a crack in the, in the actual peat. But there were cross drains and you'd come across 'em. And you'd just cut this spit out, as you're, as you're working, you cut the drainage out at the side, to let the water off all the time. So water were following you. 'Cause it were inevitable you hit water wherever you were working, so you had to cut this spit and it kept it away from you.

And would it be deep?

TS: It'd be, er, six inches.

Six inches worth of channel?

TS: The channel.

How wide?

TS: The width of the spade.

Right. Right got that.

TS: Right, that's another. That were Dutch way o' doing it, they cut a bigger, a bigger area. They cleared a bigger area to work if you see what I mean.

Okay. What's the difference between the English way of doing it and the Dutch way of doing it?

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TS: The depth of, have you got a photograph there?

I've got ones that you've done.

TS: Right, let's have a look. Right, that's the difference. The width, er, I don't think the depth mattered to the Dutch, but the width did. That's the English way, and the Dutch way, have a look.

The one that's deep in steps is the English way?

TS: Yeah, a platform type, a bigger platform. That looks like it's covering maybe ten foot.

Yeah.

[Someone enters room]

Scuse me is it your red car that's...?

Yeah am I blocking you in?

Yes, can you move it so that I can just get out please.

Yes, I'm so sorry.

TS: It will do with anybody.

[Laughs]

TS: Yeah what you've got, you've got your difference in photographs. One's the Dutch way, where they cleared a ten foot, and not as long. And the English way is to, er, do a chain clear a chain, as the photograph shows, and er, cut three foot six across.

Oh I see.

TS: And deeper, that's just taking the surface off.

And so the Dutch way, this photograph's the one with the biro on it, on the top.

TS: That's right.

Did the English used to have barrows like that?

TS: No they dint. They, they altered the barrows for English, which I don't think. The English were a shorter barrow and a big back on. I'll maybe come across it wi' photographs in a minute, but...

Bit like a sack barrow you mean?

TS: A bit like a sack barrow. But made of wood, same, made of wood same but they had sides on and

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a big top.

And so they, the Dutch way you'd take, less depth?

TS: Yeah you'd take...

But you'd take a bigger area?

TS: A wider area, but not as long. Obviously there int a chain there, where here there's a chain and it's three foot six wide.

Okay. And that presumably that step on the English way is a spade deep is it?

TS: Well it's a spade deep and they acted, you used the steps to cut your top turf, and then moved down one step to cut the next turf, as in that.

Yeah.

TS: That's it, you used them as steps to do, 'cause you couldn't cut, stand at bottom and cut the top off could you? So they used it as stepping.

Yeah.

[Noise of scanner]

Who's Les Harper?

TS: Les Harper, he's a friend o' mine.

And was he a, professional digger or...

TS: Oh, yeah.

Just doing to show.

TS: No, it was his job. We all had the job to do at the time and, and his parents, and his parents and that's how they.

[Noise of scanning machine]

So is he actually, is he clearing off the top there, or is he...?

TS: Yeah, he's cut the peat and he's clearing now, putting it into rows.

Okay.

TS: He's cutting it there look.

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On his own.

TS: Now he's working on his own. Some people seemed to get on better with a pair and worked together, and others worked on their own, like I had to work on me own, nobody'd work wi' me!

[Laughter]

The old account, this old account I've read of them digging said that they worked with a boy.

TS: Yes.

And they used to cut it, and then throw it up.

TS: All the, all of the family. The families used to go on holidays and that's how they spent their time. But, like me self, I worked on me own, I had to cut it, then get up the bank and move it and then get back down and cut it, get back up and move it, and that's how you worked.

Slower?

TS: Very slow.

Yeah, mm.

TS: Yeah.

And tiring as well I would have thought?

TS: Oh yeah, I mean, you went early hours in morning because if that, during summer months, if that sun got up you couldn't work because peat, the sun used to bounce back off peat, so you got sun both ways. It were definitely a bounce.

[Noise of scanning machine]

Oh the, that's the erm...?

TS: That's the pyramids that the Dutch have...

Showing these two women.

TS: That's the Dutch way of doing pyramiding.

Oh right, it's bigger int it.

TS: A lot bigger.

So Dutch way of pyramiding is a lot bigger.

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TS: A lot bigger.

Than the English way.

TS: As you can see in the photograph.

So the, the chap that I've got here, on this photograph we've already scanned...

TS: That's English.

That's the English way which is about up to his thigh int it?

TS: Yeah, yeah.

And then, that's pyramiding and then putting the big stacks, that's in the background.

TS: Yeah.

These two women are doing it the Dutch way.

TS: Dutch way.

Which is taller.

TS: Very tall and wide. Very much bigger altogether, in circumference it's a bigger circle of service.

And then would these be put into stacks the same?

TS: Yes, yes.

I just wondered with 'em being a lot bigger...

TS: No at the end of the day they were all put into stacks. And there's a stacked one.

And did, so did they work side by side, the English way and the Dutch way then on the same moor?

TS: Yeah, no. They brought the Dutch in to show 'em how to grave and the English altered to suit their selves then.

Right.

TS: The English had their own way.

Right.

TS: And they want gonna be shown by, there were a lot of confliction with the Dutch and the English.

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As I've explained why they built the houses separate.

I'm just thinking that that chap building it the English way and these two women stacking it the Dutch way seem to be the same time, the same period of time.

TS: They might have been, I ant come across that one where, you know, I can't give any times. But I would say that were earlier.

The English way?

TS: The Dutch.

The Dutch way?

TS: The Dutch way is definitely earlier.

Right okay.

TS: Right, that's the stacks, and that's how the brought it from the stacks in them days, the Dutch by boat.

So that these, they put the stacks into these flat bottomed large boats...

TS: And brought them to the factories.

And then these would be unloaded into these railway, into these railway, into these wagons?

TS: Reverse.

The other way? The stacks would be loaded into the trucks?

TS: The trucks would be brought off to the nearest point where the canals wah.

Yeah.

TS: And then brought into the canals.

And I can see two horses.

TS: They, they had no other choice. They had no other machinery on moors whatsoever, want allowed any because they were always frightened of fire. So in them, well there were no machines in them days wah they, it were all horse drawn and..

So there'd be, there's, I've read that it's two horse per...

TS: Yeah.

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Set of drays or whatever.

TS: Yeah.

They are drays those?

TS: Wagons.

Wagons, are they?

TS: No they're not drays. Dray is a four wheeled vehicle for carrying hay.

Right.

TS: These are wagons.

Wagons, okay,. And they were specifically for peat in...

TS: Yes, nothing else. They were made on the, at the paraffin mill, there were actually made by a joiner at the paraffin mill for carrying peat.

And were they on rails?

TS: On rails.

And the barges would then go?

TS: They'd go to the nearest point of the mill or, in that case, they used to draw 'em down the, er, River Don, into Thorne. To sell at Thorne market place.

And...

TS: As blocks for burning or whatever, whatever they wanted to use 'em for.

And how would they be packaged?

TS: They wouldn't, they'd be just loaded as blocks and sold as blocks from the boat.

Right.

A lot of 'em used 'em for er, gardening, for walls, building walls for putting plants in. Square, you know, whatever, walling, yeah?

Yeah, it's interesting.

TS: Like they, like they do, we use breeze blocks or, to lift the land, life the garden, they'd use them as a wall, 'cause the shape of 'em and size of 'em they could overlap like bricks, like they lay bricks, to

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make it strong.

And whereabouts in Thorne would they take 'em.

TS: They'd go to Thorne market.

The boats would actually get into that...

TS: They'd get into, they used to. There were a drain run through Thorne, and er, right near the market and they used to deliver to the market place.

In that, the, is it Boating Dyke?

TS: Boating Dyke.

And was it Boating Dyke that went into Thorne.

TS: It was Boating Dyke that went into Thorne.

And that runs at the bottom of your garden, doesn't it?

TS: Yeah, just down at the bottom.

Yeah, right, and they'd buy it from the boats?

TS: They'd buy it from the boats, whatever they wanted to use it for.

And would it be people from Thorne?

TS: People from Thorne and area yeah. Like they'd go to a market, there were peat on sale from the boats.

Mmm, this is, this fits very well with my medieval bit.

TS: Yeah.

'Cause they used to do the same thing there, same as people in Doncaster.

TS: Well this was medieval; this was medieval way o' doing it.

Mmm.

TS: No other way of transport was there? So this goes back to the medieval way o' doing it.

Mmm, excellent. Now these are later wagons aren't they?

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TS: These are later. This shows you the different wagons. The wooden wagons to the steel wagons when they started building steel ones.

Right.

TS: And then obviously to the earliest, they, they are in use today.

So you've got...

TS: Three stages, wood...

The ones that are wooden that are just like we had on the earlier pictures. They've got the metal ones over the top of those.

TS: Short, yeah.

And would they have still been pulled by horses?

TS: No er, they've a little engine at the front.

Right.

TS: But these were made, from er, from the tracks that they laid for landing aeroplanes.

The tracks, what do you mean.

TS: They laid 'em, on boggy peat.

Yeah.

TS: Or on boggy land, they laid steel tracks, for landing aeroplanes on, or, running wagons on to the aeroplanes, and they was collected and made wagons of.

Oh right, so you mean like a road way?

TS: Like a road way.

And these were just recycling?

TS: Recycling material. And they're the up-to-date ones with the loco on it.

Is that an early loco?

TS: No I int. It's not the latest loco's. It's the er, the first loco that they ever got from horses.

It's tiny isn't it?

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TS: It wah tiny 'cause I drove 'em!

[Laughter]

And how many, I mean was there a set number of wagons that it would pull, or would it just pull whatever there was?

TS: No, no it would pull whatever they could take. Horses only pull five or four, er, on Thorne Moors they'd only pull four. They wunt pull anymore. Loco pulled a string o' wagons, whatever it 'ud take.

Why do you say on Thorne they wouldn't pull anymore than four?

TS: Because, I drove the horses once, when the loco broke down and you could never get 'em to pull anymore than four.

But did you see 'em pull five somewhere else?

TS: Never, the horses knew how many wagons it had on. And each link, every time it made a jolt like, when it started pulling, one-bang, two-bang, three-bang, four-bang, and the bangs come from the linkage of the. If you put five on the horse 'ud stop. You unhooked that fifth one, it knew and it'd carry on.

[Laughter]

TS: It's just how they were trained that's all, how they wah.

So that, this picture I'm scanning now, of this first locomotive.

TS: First locomotive after the horses.

That's 19, it says 1965 on there.

TS: Yeah.

Would that be when it was, er, started or when..?

TS: '59, the first loco, I think. '59, '58, summat round about that, when the first loco came into use.

And did you drive that first lot?

TS: Yeah.

In the '50s, late '50s?

TS: Er, '61, '62.

Is that you in fact?

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TS: That's me brother.

Barry?

TS: No elder brother.

What's his name?

TS: Ron.

Ron.

TS: Ron Sharpe. It's on there.

It's not er, no it's just got the date on it.

TS: Oh has it?

Yeah.

TS: Oh, I thought it were on there.

[Rustling noises]

TS: Now these are all my photographs, what I took. All of the up to date. See that's the latest wagons there are, that's the new engine there, that's the difference.

I've heard of this, in fact I think I've seen it at work.

TS: Yeah you'd have seen it. Yeah.

So these wagons, that are these colour pictures are..?

TS: They're all up to date.

But when they put, when they were digging and they put these tracks down, did they move them?

TS: They dint move the main tracks they moved the tracks that went into the, onto the stacks.

And did it connect with the mainline?

TS: Yes, via a turntable. They shoved the wagons out o' the, bog we call it, out of the hole were stacks wah, up the gantry onto mainline and then you had a little turntable, you turned it and pushed it onto mainline.

Now by the mainline you mean the mainline to the mill?

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TS: Yes.

You don't mean the main line.

TS: No, mainline to mill, not...

Was it er, then when you got them to the mill, was the mill connected to the main railway? Is that how it were moved out from the mill or did they go out by..?

TS: No by road and rail. You always, wherever there were a mill you had a main railway line running through it, because a lot of peat bales were loaded onto wagons to be taken away, for all over country. So you always had a main line running through a mill. Medge Hall had one, Hatfield had one, Paraffin had one up side, they all had, Swinefleet had one. They all had a main line running through it, or an offshoot from mainline, siding, yeah.

And does it still?

TS: No, the roads are still there. They're used as roads now, lanes to farms or, but there's no lines running through 'em.

What's this?

TS: That's how they made the bales first off. That's how we used to bale 'em, and then we turned into bags and this is the first change over to paper bags.

So...

TS: Went through mill.

Is this, is this before they started surface milling?

TS: Oh yeah, this is...

You're still talking about graving?

TS: You're still talking about graving and milling and that's how it used to be turned out when you had three grades. These, these are the course grade, fine and medium. And they were loading the main railway, er, lorry, railway wagons for the main line, through this hole.

Okay.

TS: So they made the bales, put 'em into this area and then put 'em into wagons.

So we've got pictures of hand graving, you have some pictures of the first...

TS: Cutting machine.

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Cutting machine.

TS: I have. Right, that's the first ever known cutting machine that came on job.

1969 and that did the same job basically?

TS: It did the same job as the men, but did more.

Did you work on the machines?

TS: Not the cutting machines. I did the hand graving, I did the stacking, I did the er, loco driver, then I went into mill and did the baling, er, and did the loading of the lorries, loading of the wagons. I did nearly everything. But me early stages were driving, er, loco. That's the pricelist of the first price they got, from changing over from hand cutting to machine cutting.

Right.

TS: Might not be any good, but it's there int it.

It is good I'm just wondering, I was just wondering where to put it in the erm. That's piece work rates?

TS: Yeah it's piece work. When they first brought piece work out.

So it's actually a wage list.

TS: Yeah. That's a cutting machine, Pete Barnett. You see how it cut, it were fantastic when they first come out, put it into its own rows.

You can see, that's a really good picture actually, 'cause it looks, you can see how it's the same as a hand graver, except that it's a machine doing it.

TS: Yeah.

And Peter Barnett, who's Peter Barnett?

TS: He was one o' workers.

So what's a levelling machine?

TS: The levelling machine did the same work as by hand, taking that depth off the top.

Okay.

TS: It levelled all the moors and levelled all the...

Oh, I see.

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TS: Levelling machine went through any hedges and trees, shrubs.

So that's the first thing you put on really.

TS: Yeah, when that...

Did it actually take off the top?

TS: No it dint, what it did it took er, it took all the shrub life, all the, bracken, cleared the moors for 'em to work.

Is it to cut that, all the top vegetation?

TS: Yeah, yeah.

'Cause presumably, a machine would need this flat surface to work on?

TS: Yes it would, yeah.

Oh that's the bags you were talking about.

TS: That's the baling machine, that's making the bales, when it converted from open bails to covered-in bails.

Right.

TS: Have you got that?

I've got that.

TS: You've got a picture of the er, bales but not the machine.

So that, baled, those are the open bales and they would be transported like that?

TS: Yes, so, a lot of it...

The picture I've already got of the men loading?

TS: Yeah, a lot of it is er, were wasted 'cause it fell apart, the bales fell apart, so...

You can see that in the picture.

TS: So by time they'd got to where they wanted to go there were a ten percent loss, so they, they er, did it that way.

They decided to put it into paper sacks.

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TS: Into paper sacks and they had to sew the sacks up.

Right. Now you can see, I don't know whether it will come out on the scanning but certainly I can see there's three separate...

TS: Yes there is.

Sort of consistencies of bale here.

TS: Yeah.

There's, as you've said there's...

TS: That's a coarse.

The one that, the lighter colour near to us is the coarse?

TS: Yeah, yeah and the darker one's is a wetter peat and er, er, darker, but different grades.

But all used for the same thing?

TS: No. Deep litter, that were for horse stables, that were for chickens...

So the lighter one would be used for chickens and...

TS: Very much so, just deep litter we called it, er, for bedding. This 'ud be used for gardening at this stage.

Right.

TS: They'd turn round and say we want some fine peat for gardening. So that's when it all started to turn over to put, there were no fertilizers, chemicals put in this at all. It were straight peat.

But even though there were two lots o' dark peat they'd both be used for the same thing?

TS: Well...

And, this picture shows this man sewing up the black, the paper sack.

TS: It's a turn, change over from open bales to covered-in bails, so there were no loss of peat when loading or travelling or.

And you can see the guy in the background's...

TS: Filling it.

Filling it, yeah. Right, and what date would that be? Any ideas?

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Yes, '63, '64. Round about '63, '64 or '65. I'll put '65 down then it'll cover it.

1965?

TS: I would say so, yeah.

Possibly '63.

TS: I mean, me and dates I'm, I'm just er...

No, it gives me an idea.

TS: Thank you.

[Voice] You're welcome.

TS: She's just baked these as well.

Mmmm, marvellous.

I can still smell it.

Are they you're pictures?

TS: They're all mine. This is filling wagons from stack.

From the stack, and he certainly is int he.

TS: Yeah.

Bill Busby and Jack Martin, I can only see one person?

TS: Yeah, he's down at the bottom.

Oh, yeah.

TS: He'll be there somewhere.

And this was, was it still people working, for piece work as a family or had it changed by that time?

TS: No, it'd changed by that time. Just you in er, it was still piece work, so much a wagon or so much a load. And they never took their families because machinery come in and it become more dangerous, so they never took their families wi' 'em. I mean, I used to take the wife, when we were courting, she used to come and help me, you know.

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You know how to show a girl a good time, don't you!

TS: Aye? Yeah.

[Laughter]

TS: In them days, you took your families. When it become mechanical they stopped taking their families because it become dangerous. So the companies said, 'Whoa', you know, no need anyway 'cause it become one man job.

So these two chaps, would they be working as a team?

TS: There were sometimes four in a team, filling these wagons.

And they'd be working on piece work?

TS: Yeah.

That makes sense.

TS: This is another new machine when it came in, to save men touching the bale, er, touching the turf, they brought in, called a Ruttler and that's a Ruttler. And the Germans who built it, come to have a look how it's working. And all it did, can you see the row in front of it?

Yeah.

TS: The machines graded it, put it on top.

So you've got a wall o' turf?

TS: Yeah, this breaks it down to let air through. So you've got a wall o' turf, and then, this machine picks it up and shakes it, to part each turf and make holes through so that the air can get through. That's er, filling the wagons, the change over from...

From man doing it.

TS: From hand doing it to a machine doing it.

Okay.

TS: I actually did well dint I to keep my eye on everything that were going off and take photographs of the changes and, all them years.

You did.

TS: When people dint matter. People dint care about photographs or anything else. Right, then they went from paper bales. We might be changing subject off a moors here, I don't wanna do that. They

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went from paper bales to plastic bags, and this is when it all come that one man could do every job. He just pressed a button, the bag went on, it filled it, it sealed it, it palletized it. So this is the limit, this is the actual limit of, of the bags. It wrapped it. This is the maximum and this is how it is today.

[Recording Ends]