

Thorne & Hatfield Moors Oral History Project

Interview with: Trevor Sharpe (3 part 2)

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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.

Is that like a waste tip?

TS: No it int. They used to bring it off the moors to store it mill yard.

Right.

TS: 'cause they couldn't get on the moors in winter.

Right.

TS: So they had stacks, in mill yard.

'Cause it looks like blocks.

TS: That's what it is, brought off the moors, and then tipped at the mill yard in a big stack so that they nowt...

And would it start breaking down or is that grass on the top?

TS: No, no it int grass it's er, it's dust. It's breaking down that's all, the er, peat.

And would you still be able to deal with it after it had broken down from the briquette?

TS: Yes, because we used to chuck it into lorry, wagons, to take 'em back into mill. What dust laid on the bottom ready for next year's stack to go on. So it, we had a bed all time.

Oh right.

TS: And it were always off the ground, lifted off the ground so that water couldn't, get to it.

But if these blocks started to come apart in this stack...

TS: You'd still use them.

You'd still use them.

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TS: Yeah. Right, this one's a demonstration of er, the levelling machine shifting all the shrub land.

Oh, okay.

TS: So the cutters can follow him up.

Oh, that's a good picture.

TS: Yeah.

[Noise of scanning machine]

Is it a bit like a rotivator?

TS: It's, no, it's a with 'em.

Oh yeah.

TS: And it worms all the, all the top surface to one side.

Yeah.

TS: And then the cutting machines went into it. Followed him up. That's the worm look. You can see it there.

That's really good of ya.

[Pause]

Who are these two?

TS: Er, Dennis Snell, that's Dennis Snell, retired and Arthur Walker he used to be fitter. He wah fitter. This did away with men filling by hand.

Men filling what by hand?

TS: Wagons.

Right.

TS: It had a bucket on, a grab and it put it into its back.

Right.

TS: And then they took it to mill or wherever they want to take it. It were a big bucket, big bucket on't back o' that.

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Is this what Barry used to drive?

TS: No, Barry's drove Hy-macs. Doing the same thing, he used to fill wagons. But this came out from Ireland and er, it filled it's own, its own truck.

Oh right.

TS: So instead of filling, er locos, these wagons, that used to fill its sen and take it wherever they wanted it.

And it's on...

TS: On tracks.

Tracks, that was on tracks.

TS: Yeah, well. This is a similar thing that only can travel on moors, you can't travel wi' wheels. So you used tracks for moors. All machinery on moors had tracks.

So did that mean that you didn't need the locum anymore, you didn't need the rails anymore?

TS: No what it meant, they could fill the er, fill the piddies and all the loose stuff and take it to one particular point, big stacks. So they had huge stacks on moors and if they had all them little stacks you saw, you had one big un.

Oh.

TS: So they took everything to that stack and then loco only had one point to go to then.

So we're still talking about when they're cutting?

TS: Oh, yeah.

And not milling?

TS: Oh no, this is when they er, when they were cutting.

1988.

TS: Yeah. Me book work int as good as I thought, I should have dated 'em all an...

Well, it's actually at key points, so that makes, it makes sense.

TS: Yeah, now you've come to complete change over now.

Same date though, 1988.

TS: Yeah, just within same period, the change over came then. When there were no more stacks, no

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more walling, no more. They still had the loco, but they filled it loose into loco then.

What made them change. Did something, one thing make them change from cutting to milling 'cause, I mean they just invested here in all this new machinery that, that, was still based on the cutting and the stacks and then in the same year they've completely changed?

TS: They completely changed because that happened on Swinefleet Moor, on Thorne Moor, where I was working on Hatfield Moor, so Hatfield were stationed on the old type, you know, well not old type but the er, stacks. And they changed to that other, a temporary measure to try it out on Swinefleet, on Thorne Moor. So they took it from moors.

So you say, on Hatfield Moor they were still graving as they used to, er cutting it, by machinery, in the same way and then they introduced this on Thorne Moor?

TS: That's right.

This new technology, to try it out. What we're doing is we're looking at the history of the Thorne and Hatfield Moors, a project that we're working on.

Oh right, yes, yes, yeah.

And so we are going through the whole process and we've got right through to the...

Yeah, yeah.

Milling machines now.

TS: You are talking to the main fitter.

Yeah.

Main fitter of?

Down in factory.

In factories.

In factories.

TS: Of the peat works, factories.

What's your name?

Ronscale.

Mr Ronscale, hello. It's, what's that doing?

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TS: What it's doing is blowing the peat up in air to, to line it. It's milling it and it blows it into piles, so all these are rows. It's, an, an, you can see where it's got it from. So they're rows it's doing ready to be picked up. But when it got windy you never saw any of that again.

So that's already been cut off and it so that's just, that's not, that's just a tractor in it?

TS: It's a tractor with a rotivator and it's rotivating and putting in, in heaps.

Oh, I see.

TS: Ready to be picked up. So the Hy-macs came with the grabs and they picked great lumps of it up, knots.

And it would blow it into piles?

TS: Yeah, that's er...

As long as it wasn't windy?

TS: That's right. And this is a plough, and they ploughed it into heaps. Cleared, you know, scraped it up.

So is that two different ways of doing the same thing?

TS: It's doing, that is blowing it up. That is clearing it up, putting it into heaps.

That would seem to be quite wasteful blowing it.

TS: In my opinion it is. Yes, in my opinion, but, the, the scraper came along and what blew over they scraped it back into heaps.

And you can see the difference in a surrounding scrape.

TS: Oh, without, anything. This is when the people started complaining because they'd, they'd took it down in a big area. They had cleared the whole lot of trees shrub land, so people could see again, 'What's happening now?' But it were too late, it'd been done.

Did they still use the levellers, same thing to take all the stuff off?

TS: That were, that were years, lot o' years ago they used to level when cutting machines came in.

So how did they clear this thing off this..?

TS: Well it were done want it. I mean, the levellers had done it prior to it. These had come along and just er, just clear it off and just mill it.

So you dint actually need to clear top straight off because it wasn't there anymore?

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TS: No, it was, it wasn't there anymore wah it.

And could you, how, how much depth did you take off each?

TS: Inches, two inch, no more than two inch. Inches when they did it this way, but over a big area like a desert and that's just what it looked like when they'd finished, a desert of fine peat. So instead of cutting it er, years ago and cutting in dykes, leaving all the shrubs in between ya, so nobody knew any different, all it wah to them wah shrubland. To this, in my eyes devastation. In Fisons eyes money. More peat, bigger area, let's have it in, in a shorter time. But that's progress, we have to accept progress and that's it.

And, so could you go over the same area year after year?

TS: Oh yes. Or they'd just. They wouldn't go, they can't go too deep with it because the peat 'ud be wet through, so they'd two inches and then scrape it up, clear it off. Next year, depending on summer, if we had a damn good summer they could go back again that summer. Weather, everything wah based on weather er, conditions.

So they'd, they'd scrape it up into piles...

TS: Yeah.

And then they come, or they'd rotivate it and blow it into piles.

TS: Yeah.

And then they'd...

TS: Tractor and trailer, no line, no lines end wi' wagons. Tractor and trailer 'ud come and pick it up and put it into trailers, straight to factory.

How did they get it into trailer?

TS: With an Hy-mac.

Right.

TS: Scooped it up.

And how come they could go, on the bog?

TS: They were blow up. They, well the bog was started drying out the, it'd always been worked years, and years over, ya know a period and er, the bogs were drying out so they could then go on wi' machinery. With these balloon, wi' these balloon tyres.

Right. Someone was telling me about how it felt. I think Brian might talk a bit more about that this afternoon, actually. The, it, it, it was dry but it wasn't like solid ground?

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TS: Oh no, it used to shake. There was an, I was working on moors and there were an explosion at Flixborough and it shook Hatfield Moors, to the extent that we were moving, 'cause it's, it's a basin. You've got er, from two foot to fifteen foot in middle, so it acts as a basin. So peat is not on solid ground, it's on water, all the lot of it underground, it's on water and it vibrates. You could feel a machine travelling for hundreds o' yards away. If you were walking and a machine were travelling you could feel it hundred's o' yards away.

When I went on last year, somebody had just told me that, and then I walked back to me car and I could feel it and it was the loco coming.

TS: Yes, yeah.

So.

TS: These, this is the Swinefleet factory and it were a bungalow where the chap used to live who drove the loco on moors.

Right.

TS: It was in the mill yard.

What's that?

TS: That's the first ever mixing machine when we turned over from selling peat without compost, to compost.

Right, so that's where you added the nutrients to it?

TS: That's where we added everything because we were doing a trial. And that's a cement mixer. So they bought the cement mixer, to mix it all together so we could fill the bags.

And when was that round about?

TS: Mmm, '70 I think.

So before they started the milling?

TS: Oh, yeah, well before that. It's when we first started making plastic bags. Compost into bags.

Into plastic bags?

TS: Yeah.

When did they put it into plastic bags? Can you remember?

TS: I wah there, but, er...

'70s?

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TS: '70s, 70, in '70s yeah, for definite. Yeah, these are the conversions when er, Fisons first took over and started. 'Cause their offices were at Ipswich or Felixstowe and then they come to Thorne and they're the first offices with the management.

At Hatfield Mill?

TS: At Hatfield Mill. That's Hatfield Mill. I've put that, and that's my writing but I don't know what it says.

Oh, we've broken it now!

TS: '64 / 6.

This one says '65 as well.

TS: Yeah, well it were in '65.

That's a series int it?

TS: Yeah, now that..

These are same?

TS: That's the workshop and that is a stables converted into offices and canteen for the lads. Offices, canteen for lads. That's the type o' tree.

Oh, that's what I wanted, yeah.

TS: Right the explanation of this. That's the type o' tree that's on moors that the Irish, Irish used to cut down. But, there is one part o' moors from Swinefleet right across to, Rawcliffe, there's a stretch where all the trees have been felled together for some unexplainable reason. So the top o' the trees were burnt and all the trees fell the same way. So it's been some force, some type o' force in the ice age or whatever has felled all these and it's gone through and tha see all the trees in a row for about the width of maybe hundred yards, the width and for as far as the moors go. It'd took every tree out in the same distance, same, laid in the same way and burned the tops of trees.

Okay. And what depths are these trees at?

TS: These were four foot deep.

Four foot deep into the peat?

TS: Yeah. They were four foot to five foot. We've taken the top layer off over years and years and this is what's showing. Now when the machines hit them, they just smash 'em, 'cause these are, it's called bog oak, and it's dense, solid. You can't saw it, you can't do anything with it.

So when you say they just smash 'em, you mean the trees smash the machines?

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TS: The trees smash the machines and they don't know they're there because they've been laid under peat that long and when the knife goes in it lifts the machines up or smashes the blades.

So these are ancient bog oaks.

TS: They're ancient bog oaks.

You're not talking about the ones that the Irish chopped down?

TS: No, no, no. These are years, thousands o' years before that. But the, I can't explain it 'cause I can't find the answer. But there has been some force, with fire, gone through the moors at such a speed and flattened all these trees and they were all laid in the same direction when they, when we found 'em.

TS: And did you find the other side of them thingied so you know that it's..

[Inaudible]

[Both talking]

TS: Hey, yeah, we know, we know exactly round about. 'Cause, when they're digging they come up with 'em and it wah, 'here's another tree, here's another tree', laid the same way. So I cleared one and I found out that everyone had, had the tops burnt. So whatever force it was I can't explain that.

I'm curious about the other side of it, so that you know exactly how wide it is, I'm wondering whether it was a force of hundred yards wide? Was it hundred yards?

TS: No, well, I don't know, well, I mean, twenty yards, maybe twenty, thirty yards wide.

Right.

TS: But how we know, because, when they're cutting they wasn't there, then you come across the first one, and then for that distance, width, you come across 'em regular and then nothing and for a full stretch.

And is the peat on both sides the same?

TS: Same.

Right.

TS: So, it, it tells me, that some force has gone through that moor, at such a speed, whatever it was, I put it down to a meteor or, thousand o' years ago in ice age you don't know. But it's definitely hit that at the same time and took the whole trees out, the lot and the same distance, the same way. And they've all fell at the same time, you can see that, because of the cutting, the depth and...

And it's not as if it's, sort of, you come to a thing and you've got the trees and then it's something different at the other side, so it could have been, it could have been the trees went on for a long way but then it's been overlaid by something else?

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TS: No, no, its...

It's actually the same on both sides?

TS: The same on both sides

Of this, this stripe of devastated trees.

TS: It's a, yeah, it's a stripe that summats gone down. I don't know, it's hard to say.

[Pause]

TS: But that is the size and that is hell of a size tree.

And they were all fairly similar.

TS: Similar, yeah. Some bigger.

'Cause you think bog oak, I mean you see, I've got a little piece of bog oak...

TS: Oh no, no, no, no.

Little bits and they're huge trees aren't they?

TS: I mean trees, yeah. Can't span round some of 'em.

Who is that on the picture?

TS: It's on the picture actually it's er, Eversham I think it is. Eversham. He actually works as, er, I'm sure, I'm not sure he'd been to. I don't know his title. He's very well up in the colleges and, and Fisons paid for his..

No it's not on there.

TS: Write it on, I think it's Eversham

So somebody has been investigating these trees then?

TS: I don't know.

Ah, interesting?

TS: I don't know. I mean this is my findings when I've worked on moors and seen this problem and studied it and found out, having clearing ya know, the rubbish off the trees that a section of the top, not all way round it, a section of the top's been burnt, so it mesmerised me. So then I went to the next tree. I thought is this summat that just one of them off, they will have had a fire and it's gone over the top. Then I realised we ant ad a fire since so and so, this peat's been taken off it, so it, fire couldn't have got

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to that, and it were a full, full strip.

And were they laid, they were fallen and they were fallen like that, or..?

TS: There were no...

Did it lie across, the..?

TS: They did not, they did not cross at any time, they all fell in line, altogether.

What I'm after is, did they fall, were they laid, er, er, breadth wise or length wise?

TS: Length wise.

Length wise, okay.

TS: If they'd a fell at a criss cross you would have said, an high wind. Not, not so. They were all in line, as though they'd been hit wi' something. 'Cause they're all...

But there not laid...

TS: They were like soldiers.

Breadth wise as if they'd been made a road or something like that?

TS: No, no, because they were too long a distance and if there were width wise you could say a road, but not the length, length wise.

Right.

TS: But it's a story I've telled many a people and oh, no, not, nothing, but it's possible int it?

[Recording Ends]