

Roy Coates, Lillian Coates and Brenda Dawes with Patrick McNeill

16 July 2024

The transcript starts after a few minutes informal conversation that were not recorded.

Roy

They lived in East Lane, the Holloways, didn't they?

Lillian

They lived in East Mount.

Roy

They probably called it East Mount, but we used to call it East Lane. It's a turning off East Lane. We knew it all as East Lane. There was a little wooden house along there opposite the Mead Hall - a wooden structured house. Where the apple tree is. The lady in there kept the key for the Mead Hall. I forget her name now, but they pulled her bungalow down and built the other houses on that side, didn't they?

And the fire brigade was positioned in East Lane, weren't they? In the war. And next door to them was the Westwoods.

Lillian

It's hard to believe there was cottages along there.

Roy

Yes, there was a long row of buildings there. Fire brigade was in one of them and the Westwoods in another one with their forge and all that. And that was it really, what was there. There was the forge for the Westwoods, fire brigade. The engine was kept there. Yeah, and they had sirens on big posts there. And they had a siren up Wheathampstead Hill. Mr. Mitchell. Being high up, they put a siren on his house halfway up The Hill and he was air raid warden. It used to frighten us to death when it went off.

Lillian

East Lane used to have lots of little houses. I remember going to a house. It was literally a sitting room and a kitchen. I don't know what was upstairs, but it was a long line of white houses. But to this day I can't remember exactly where. It must have been where they've built the houses now.

Patrick

The Mead Hall is near there.

Roy

Wasn't that a corrugated tin building that you took the babies to at the clinic? Was it a corrugated tin building in East Lane?

Lillian

It was a WI hut. It was a hall where the babies used to get weighed.

Patrick

So, in those days, when you went into East Lane, there was The Bull on the corner, then the Bull Yard.

Roy

Yes, that's right. Then another building which was a long corrugated building. And Mr Woodley had a shop on the right-hand side. Bill Woodley. As you were walking along, it would be on your right hand. The building is still recognisable, but Titmuss owns it now. Before you get to the telephone building. And then a little bit further on the right there was a house on that side, on the corner with East Mount. There was a big mound there with a bungalow on it. Yeah, she was a Wright. She and her sister was along there. In the bungalow there. But they built a ruddy great house now. They knocked her bungalow down.

Patrick

And then there's the blocks of flats.

Lillian

That's right, I think that must have been where this row of little white cottages were. They were tiny.

Roy

You know where the old people's flats are down East Lane on your right. Opposite that was a big open space and it was an allotment that Murphy's used to test their pesticides, on a big allotment area. You wouldn't take any fruit off because you knew they'd been testing there.

The little wooden houses in East Lane. That's what really stuck in my mind. Odd little place. There was the lady used to keep the key for the Mead Hall there. Yeah, but further along, it was a youth club, wasn't it? The club was on the right, wasn't it? It's still there now, isn't it, the building? But it's a nursery now, isn't it?

That was Mr. Lee, the stationmaster, set up the youth club in the village and he set the first one up where the post office is now. There were two Nissen huts there. Where the post office is. There was a big open field there. And when they vacated them after the war Mr Lee, the stationmaster, set the youth club going in one of those buildings. And then the Council or somebody built that place for them along East Lane. Mr. Lee was the founder of the village youth club. He was the stationmaster.

Lillian

There was a sewerage bed down there as well.

Patrick

OK, but let's go back as far as your memories go. Roy, have you always lived in Wheathampstead?

Roy

I wasn't born in Wheathampstead, but I moved here at about three months, I think. I was born in Harpenden at the Red House in 1933. Not the present Red House. The Red House in those days was with the hospital along the Luton Road. Red brick. Somehow the Red House took the name on. They're in Carlton Road now.

Patrick

Lillian, when did you come to Wheathampstead?

Lillian

I was 16 when I first met Roy. So I've known the village since I was 16. We married when I was 21.

Patrick

And Brenda, when did you come to the village?

Brenda

When I came back from New Zealand, my mother and my stepfather bought the post office. The old one, where Frost's the estate agent is now. I came back in 1964. So I'm a newcomer.

Lillian

No, no, no.

Patrick

So, Roy, you were born in Harpenden, and then you and your family moved to ...?

Roy

Well, my mother and father having no money, they moved into a house just above Batford. They lived there for a short while, and then the house down here must have come on the market. And that's where we lived till I was about 13 until the Swedish houses were built next door. They were built in about 1946 after the war. The Swedish houses.

Lillian

Yeah, that's right. They came over from Sweden.

Roy

Just after the war. That's right. They were the first houses to be put up. Well, because my mother was first on the housing list, luckily she got the first house. And the Herts Advertiser reported what she said, and she said it's lovely to move into the house where there's hot running water, a bath which we never had down the road. The tin bath in the scullery.

Patrick

So, you must have gone to school in the village.

Roy

Absolutely, Saint Helen's. That's right. The old Flint. Yes. And our teacher, Miss Young lived opposite the school. You could see her house. The first class I was in, I was five. That was Miss Warren, who lived along here just along the road. Miss Warren. That's my first teacher. When we went to school in those days, when we were five, in the afternoon we had to put our head down on the bench desk and go to sleep for a while.

Lillian

I remember doing that.

Brenda

I lived in Ealing before I went to New Zealand and I had the same ... a little nap In the afternoons. After lunch.

Roy

And you weren't allowed to talk, right? Miss Warren had a lovely singing voice, though she didn't sing a lot to us. I don't think she was married at all. There was no man about, but she lived in the house opposite the school. Still there. Dead opposite the classroom, and you could see it.

Yes, and there was the big open bit there. We used to go down there when we were at school, before I moved up to the big school. We used to have lunch in the church hall which was on the corner where the Flint school is. There was a big corrugated building there.

Lillian

Tin hut. Where the garden is now. Wedding receptions, and everything.

Roy

That was the village church hall. And it was corrugated. It was all tin. And we used to have our midday meals in there, when we were at school, and tables all the way down there and Mrs Thornton and Mrs Wetherall from Gustard Wood were the cooks. And another lady who moved up here eventually. There were three cooks and the cooks were ... the meals were marvellous, except broad beans. I didn't like broad beans.

I was at school all through the war, obviously.

When we moved into Miss Young's class, if the sirens went, you went into the cloakroom because the cloakroom had been reinforced with a concrete roof to make it into a shelter. Yeah, and we used to sit in there. One kid was sick one day. It was horrible. She came through with the mop and bucket. I was in this room when I was six or seven. I think you probably went on a little bit more before you moved up. So I'd be between six and seven. And Miss Young's class. And one day in there, they had these tortoise stoves that burnt coke. And that was in the corner of the room and it had a big black fireguard around it. Somebody went by one day and they knocked it over. And it cut me down the leg here. And in those days I just wiped it with my handkerchief; it bled. And eventually a little spike went up and I had an abscess in my groin. And my mother put me in a pram and took me up to Dr Smallwood. I think you know about this one. He was up the little steps, and he had his surgery at the top of the steps. My mother took me there and I wasn't very happy. And I eventually ended in the hospital in Old Welwyn. I was taken there by ambulance, reckon the old ambulance in those days, and they lanced it. I was in there about a week. And you wouldn't believe it. But in that week I lost the sense to walk, being young. I remember they didn't have any children's wards then so I was in with the men, you know, the poor young boy with the men and adults. Not ladies. OK, they lanced it. And then the nurse got me out of bed and then two chaps who were in there, you know, one got one side and one the other and they walked me up to some glass doors up at the end. And eventually I could walk. I remember that.

Lillian

In those days, they didn't have cars. Your parents didn't have cars. But my uncle had a little Austin Seven, I think. And he came to visit with my parents. And there was a lady, Miss Westwood, lived near us down Necton Road. She used to keep some chickens. She gave my mother some eggs to give to me and my mother gave them to the kitchen staff there. But I never saw those eggs.

Patrick

So, Roy, when did you leave St Helen's?

Roy

When we were 11, we moved from the junior school to the school across the road. That was built in 1933, wasn't it? You've heard about the bricks have you?

Patrick

Tell me about the bricks.

Roy

Well, it was when they built Saint Helen's School. In the hall, there was two rows of bricks and they all had initials on, the people who subscribed to the school. And one had WJH. Do you know who that was? William John Housden. The headmaster. They have a road named after him up the estate – Housden Close. Which is in his honour.

Lillian

Didn't you used to know his car number?

Roy

Oh yeah, DAR 383. We all knew his number because if you got grounded you got sent to his room and you'd have to go there after school. But it was all right because after school he used to go down the bank and do his business down there. Most evenings he went down Barclays Bank, which was halfway up the High Street, and you used to wait there and you'd see DAR go out the gate and you went as well. He'd forgotten all about it by the time he got back. He was quite a strict headmaster. I think he was a good headmaster. Quite strict. Yeah, he'd be good with the cane. He caned me a few times. William John Housden, that was his name.

Some of the bricks had WJH on because he was quite a well-off man, I think, because he went to Cambridge or Oxford, I don't know which. And all the bricks had initials on them.

Brenda

Dickie and his sister had theirs.

Roy

I've tried to make out what happened to them. Why didn't they keep some of those bricks?

Patrick

So when did you leave school?

Roy

I left when I was 15 because I had an apprenticeship. In Harpenden. The Electricity Board had a showroom. I think Sainsbury's took it over, not as a shop but as a sort of warehouse, I think. That was the showroom and in the morning I'd have to get there and wash the floor of the showroom. I felt very embarrassed because they left me washing the floor. They'd got all the equipment there. I used to wash the floor. There'd be carpet but there was a white tile walkway up to the counter. In those days people used to pay their electric bills in there. And Jarvis's, the reputable builders, they built most of the houses in West Common Way, they were lovely houses. They had all oak cabinets in the kitchens. Being an electrician, I worked in some of them. But they were quality

houses they built there. But Mr Jarvis, the owner of the building firm, they used to send him bills for things. They sent him the electric bill and he used to send the letter back and written on it was either "the electricity duplicity board" or "the electricity unnecessary board." I remember that.

Patrick

Was Rita Cobb at the school the same time as you? Because she's mentioned those bricks.

Roy

Yes. She lived along the Council houses that was here. The Cobbs. And her Dad was quite a celebrity. He invented the Serenaders, didn't he?

And the Bluebirds.

And another one who is not in the village any more is Barbara Penny. Yes. She's in Bristol now. Yeah, she's a good one for memories. Her father was a solicitor in the village. They lived in Gustard Wood and then they moved into one of the council houses. But he had an office down the bottom of the High Street. Mr de Mornay Davies. He was the only solicitor round here and for quite a way I think. Yeah, de Mornay Davies in the High Street.

And then there was all the pubs in the village. There was 32 pubs in the district, I think. Altogether. That's taking in Nomansland, Gustard Wood, the Folly, Marshalls Heath. And The Red Cow at the top of The Hill. The Walnut Tree was by Cunnington's shop and the sign's still there, I think. The bracket's still there. The lady in there, Mrs Wright I think it was, she had a little sweet shop next door. Just a little sweet shop next door to it. The pub's there. And there was a door into the pub, but next door to that was a shop and she sold sweets. So the kids come out of school and of course straight into the sweetshop.

That's right. The Red Cow was up The Hill. The Park Hotel, which is now the Wicked Lady on Nomansland, was named after the lady highwaywoman who lived at Markyate.

Thinking of Nomansland, there was a couple of chaps who had a cafe in the village where Coppertop the ladies' hairdresser is. That was a café and it was very, very popular with the teenagers.

And on a cricket day, on a Sunday or Saturday, they would take a marquee to Nomansland and issue tea and sandwiches and all that. That was every weekend, this marquee went up and it was so popular they put another marquee further over. So they had two marquees there. They did. I don't know what their names were.

There's a driveway there, just on the corner by Coppertop. Did you know there was a petrol pump there? It had a big swinging arm that swung against the wall, you swung it out. Your car was in the road. You swung it round and you filled your car and Mrs Collins, who lived up some steps in the little house next to the pumps, she used to come out and take the money. But you could put your own in, I think. Or she used to.

Lillian

That's where you used to be able to pay your rates, in that house. This chap used to have the front room and you could go down there and pay your rates. You did, paying cash.

Patrick

How often would you have to do that?

Lillian

Well, we did it once a year. Right. I don't think they paid monthly or anything like that in those days. It was once a year.

Roy

And Hall's the baker, at the far end of the mill. He used to do that big corn sheaf bread for the church.

Lillian

Best bread. Best bread ever.

Roy

At the Harvest Festival, he used to do this corn thing for the altar.

Lillian

It was a wonderful baker. Yeah, I've never had bread like it since.

Roy

Everybody used to queue up for the hot cross buns.

Lillian

I know, they were amazing.

Patrick

Let's go back to your work at the Electricity Board. What did that involve?

Roy

I worked as an apprentice at the Electricity Board. We worked at Mackerye End. We rewired it all before the Cory Wrights moved in.

Patrick

Where did the Cory Wrights live before that?

Roy

Would be about 1947, something like that, the Cory Wrights moved from Four Limes to Mackerye End. They had two daughters. I can't remember the girls' names. They had gymkhanas in the field here when the girls were young. In this field here. They had jumps there. They owned the field right to the top here, all the way down.

Patrick

And that later became Graham Dangerfield's?

Roy

Yes, yes, right after Cory Wrights moved out, Dangerfield moved in. That's right. He had the wildlife where the allotments were.

Anyway, the Cory Wrights were moving all their furniture into Mackerye End and the day before they moved in, this little wizened chap was polishing all the oak floors, he polished them all. Beautifully. And Mrs Cory Wright came through and said "Oh, that bloke was wonderful" she said. He made a wonderful job of that. Well, a couple of days later, they were moving all their furniture in and this chap perchanced to help them move the stuff in and he dropped some big vase and she jumped onto her little bench that was there and was kicking her legs and going mad "That man's an idiot." One day he was marvellous and the next day he was a complete idiot ... never forgot that.

Yes, that was when it was all done. They had it all rewired, they had the floors all lovely, sanded and polished. The oak floors and then they put carpet in the middle of it with the oak all round the outside.

Patrick

You were talking about the pubs...

Roy

Yeah, The Swan. Has somebody given you a history of The Swan? And about the farrier's yard at the back? Right on the far side. Mr Beadle was the farrier, he did all the shire horses for the farms around here.

And just inside the gate. I don't know whether you've been told this. Was the quoits rink. They would get the horseshoe off the farrier, I suppose. Yeah, it was all convenient. And they had little posts, didn't they? I remember my Dad used to play quoits down there, and it was just straight, on the left, this side. And in the middle, I think, there was a sort of a wooden structure and the chap in there used to repair cycles. Yeah, the cycles stopped in there. A little cycle repair. He didn't sell cycles, but he repaired. Everybody cycled in those days. A little cycle shed he had in there and he used to repair your cycle. But yeah, that's The Swan.

And we had the two greengrocers in the village. The Salad Bowl, wasn't it? Yeah, and then opposite was Lorna Rowe. Her father had a horse and cart that he used to bring groceries around house to house on a Saturday round. And he used to call out "Greengrocer". You know, call something out anyway, and people used to buy stuff off the wagon. His horse died and he bought a young horse but it was too frisky. He had to stop his round because he couldn't... The older one would just plod along and wait. And it knew where to go and he bought this new horse and he used to keep it down Necton Road, down at the bottom playing field. And it used to go mad, right? It was a young thing and he couldn't ...it couldn't pull his cart. Go mad. Spread the vegetables all over the place. We used to go out and collect the manure for Dad's allotment. That was good.

Lillian

It was a lovely village many years ago. I mean, the village has changed so much, hasn't it? We knew everybody. Every day you went down the village, there was always someone to talk to. There was always someone. On a Friday, you got dressed, the baby got dressed and you went down the clinic. Nurse Smith. She delivered most of the babies in the village.

You must have heard about Nurse Smith.

Patrick

Tell me about Nurse Smith.

Lillian

Lots of us had our babies at home. And she was wonderful. She used to drive with her car. That little car she drove.

Roy

Austin Seven, I suppose, but that was all they had in those days.

Lillian

Yeah. And she was the most wonderful midwife. She really was. She was strict. Because in them days, you weren't supposed to get up. And I would just have to listen and think "Is she there?" Go back to bed quick. She lived in the village.

Roy

In Helena Cottage. The nurse who was before Nurse Smith, she was a tall lady. The villages all had nurses. They had Helena Cottage, which is still called Helena, that was detailed for those nurses. They call it Inez Cottage now.

Nurse Smith, when she came to the village, she was posted there. But then when the houses were built up Brewhouse Hill, just past the school gates, they moved her into there. They must have bought a house there.

Lillian

And then she moved into the old folks up there when she retired.

Roy

Yeah. When she retired, she moved up there. But before her, in past times, people used to go to Nurse Hawkins.

Patrick

Her gravestone is in the churchyard.

Roy

Absolutely. Well, she lived halfway down Necton Road, just above where we were.

Lillian

Roy's Mum used to talk a lot about Nurse Hawkins.

Roy

My mother, if she had any trouble baby-wise, you would go to Nurse Hawkins. She wasn't a village nurse, but she was a midwife in City Hospital in Saint Albans. That was where she worked. But after she retired ... she had a long garden down there in the war.

They came round, didn't they, they oxy-acetylened all the railings off the walls down there. They all had short little railings, all the walls, and they took them off for the war effort.

And Nurse Hawkins had a long garden all the way right from halfway down up to where Colin is now. Yeah, that house wasn't built on there then. And she had all that as an allotment and she had a long fence and she fought tooth and nail that they wouldn't take the whole fence. They wanted to take the whole fence down and she fought them tooth and nail and they left half of it up. And she said, look, you're just taking that little bit off of them and then you're gonna take all

this off me. She got away with that. They didn't take all her fence but left all her allotment open to the gods, you know, they had taken half the fence away. It was a rail fence.

That's Nurse Hawkins. Where Nurse Hawkins was was what we called the coal yard. Have you heard about the coal yard?

Patrick

No. Tell me more.

Roy

Right. The coal yard. It wasn't a coal yard, but it was where Mr Hawkins the coalman used to leave his wagon and the shire horses down there. They stabled the shire horses overnight in what we used to call the coal yard, and the wagon. But the coal was delivered up near the station, you know, where there was a sidings. Where Kingfisher Close is now. Whole sidings, yeah. There were sidings there and you could hear them. When I was a child you could hear them shunting up and down all night long, so goodness knows what the people near were like.

Well, that was a coal yard. Yeah. Where they used to deliver the coal to. And they'd shunt up and down, and the fish used to come there for the fishmonger. And any other product and that's where they used to take the products from Dyke Nurseries. Into London on the railway. Dyke Nurseries were covered in glass houses one time. That was owned by people called Wright. They had a relation at Gustard Wood with their glass houses where they lived at Gustard Wood as well. The same family, but they weren't brothers. They were related cousins. But they had their greenhouses on the road that you go down to the Cross Keys. On that corner there.

That was the same family, who had the nursery. They grew tomatoes and cucumbers. And there was a vast area there of glass, wasn't there?

Patrick

You've mentioned the railway sidings and the station now and, I think, Brenda, that's where you can come in. Your family had connections with the railway.

Brenda

Well, Dickie left school at 14 and went to Hatfield and worked his way up to be a driver.

Patrick

Was he born in the village?

Brenda

Oh, yes.

Patrick

And his parents?

Brenda

I think his father was in the building trade in St Albans but the grandfather lived on Nomansland Common, so there was quite a few Daweses. I think he must have come from Hitchin way because when Richard cuts the grass out around Codicote, you know, he sees some graves with Dawes but where they were originally from, I don't know.

Dickie was born in the cottage we live in now. So that's second generation, third generation now. Three generations.

He stayed on the railway. He loved the steam trains. And then Mr Titmuss bought Herons and he gave Dickie the choice of doing the farming because his heart was in farming. But he had a big choice to make there. He didn't know whether to stick on the railway or do farming. I said "Don't ask me. It's down to you" and he chose farming.

And there's films, with Dickie getting out of the train up at the station. And photographs of him with three of his mates standing on the engine. And there is a video where the train comes in, he gets out. He must have been a teenager and he gets out of the train at Wheathampstead.

Lillian

I loved the train. I used to come from Garden City, always on the train. It was lovely. Saturday, two o'clock and four o'clock it ran on the Saturday because it was straight to Luton.

Brenda

Dickie used to blow the whistle as he was coming through so his Mum knew he was on his way home.

Lillian

It was a lovely run. In the train, wasn't it? I mean, they called it the Bluebell. I used the train a lot.

From 16, I was on the train backwards and forwards. Watching Roy playing football. That boring thing. I used to come and watch him, being a good girl.

Later, when my twin sister lived in Welwyn Garden City, I used to put my pram on the train, get off at Welwyn Garden City, spend the afternoon with my sister and then come back.

Roy

Oh yes, football. I played for the Folly Athletic before I played for Wheathampstead and our pitch was next door to the Cherry Trees.

Brenda

Really thriving village back then, it was. We'd got Helmets and ...

Lillian

Long time ago, long time ago. Yeah, it was a thriving village. You didn't have to go out of the village to get shopping, did you? You got everything. Stuart's supplied the school uniforms. You never went out of the village to shop.

Roy

Chennells was the dairy in the village. They used to farm where the Swedish houses are. Yeah, we called that Chennells Field because that's where the cows were. And then we took the cows down to milk them. No traffic then. Halfway down the High Street was Chennells dairy. Opposite the lych gate. The drive is still there, isn't it? Chennells had a shop in the village. Like a grocery shop. They sold milk obviously, but they used to deliver it in the churn in those days and you'd put your milk bottle out and put a milk jug on the step, wouldn't you? To get your milk.

Lillian

I knew all about churns, used to help my uncle's business in Scotland doing a round.

Roy

The cows were driven from that field, which we always called Chennells Field because it was Chennells' cows, down to the village and their shop was opposite.

That was before Bury Farm became a dairy. Mr. Hill was the farmer there.

Brenda

He apparently had loads of acreages in the area. He had a load of farms right through to Harpenden, didn't he?

Roy

Yeah, Mr Hill owned quite a bit of ground which eventually Mr Titmuss bought. Bury Farm.

Brenda

Roy, that story you told me once about Rose Lane, where the gravel pits were? Did you ever mention anything about that? Because when I go up there, I try and picture it because obviously you don't see where they had it.

Roy

I don't remember gravel pits up Rose Lane but I remember there was one gravel pit in that area there. There used to be a gravel pit there. A few hundred yards up Lamer Lane, on your left, was the gravel pit.

Rose Lane. More or less. So that was a disused gravel pit. And it used to fill with water and people used to swim in there. But I never knew they used to swim there until a lady sent something from Australia. She lived next door to my grandma in Gustard Wood and she sent ... not to me but I think somebody gave me a copy of what she wrote. And she said she remembered swimming in that gravel pit up there, so it must have been quite deep. The engine company had a lot of excavations around there, looking for gravel, and that was one of them. And there was one by The Wicked Lady. In that field there. There was an excavation in the corner of that. The engine company had a dig in there, but they didn't extract any gravel from it.

Yeah, gravel pit there because I passed it many times. And they left the dredger abandoned there.

Lillian

That's the one Vince Gifford drove all the way up the road.

Roy

He got it going, Gifford from Lamer Farm. At night. And it's still there today. The digger for the quarry. And it's up there now at Lamer Farm. Vince wanted it to keep memories of his father Dave. And there's a couple of big bulldozers up there. It's just a wreck now. Just a big rusty crane. Big jibs on them.

My mother was in service at Lamer when she was 13. My mother was in service with Cherry Garrard.

Lillian

She used to talk about Bernard Shaw coming for dinner. He used to come up the lime avenue from Ayot St Lawrence. All the cottages at the bottom belonged to Lamer. (*Picks up old photo*) That's Roy's great-granddad, the little man there, he was head gardener.

Roy

Yeah, he was head gardener at Lamer.

Lillian

He was head gardener, Lamer, and Roy's Mum was brought up by her Granddad and her aunts.

Patrick

Was there a family connection with the Samuel Coates who was landlord of the Cross Keys?

Roy

Yes. He might have been my dad's cousin.

They lived down the Dell in Gustard Wood. There were five cottages there in that row, I think. And Mr Hyde was at the back corner. One of the ladies there was killed. She was pushing a child in a pram down from Gustard Wood to Wheathampstead, to the village, and that wall where that cottage is, Titmuss's place is there now, but if you go a bit further there's a cottage on the corner. That lady was killed there on that spot. And she had a young family, I don't know what happened to them. That was when my grandma was living there, my grandma and granddad.

Lillian

We were talking about the railway.

Patrick

You said you used to come here from Welwyn Garden City.

Lillian

Yes, regular.

Patrick

Brenda, did you?

Brenda

No, I was too late really. I didn't go on the train at all. But I did actually see the bridge across until they took that down. No, I didn't have anything to do with the railway, apart from marrying a train driver.

Patrick

That's quite a good line. "I didn't have anything to do with the railway except for marrying a train driver."

Brenda

You're welcome to it.

Roy

Yeah, we remember when the trains used to come down from London with the rubbish and tip them on the dumps. Up there. We called them the dumps.

The dumps in the war. They stored all the timber from London on the dumps during the war. Great heaps of planks and wood up there, all stored from London. The fires, you know?

Brenda

They used to clear out places, I suppose, where they've been bombed. Because I remember Dickie saying about all the carpets. The stuff in that place is unbelievable. The rolls of carpets came up by train and were all dumped up there after the bombing.

Roy

Yeah, they stored the wood up there. Big piles of wood and timber from the bomb damage. We used to go out there and get tadpoles out on the dumps. There used to be little pools of water and we'd go there and get tadpoles.

Brenda

Mr Titmuss used to tell me that the road past the dump, across to Codicote, was called Highways. He always referred to it as Highways. What we now call Sheepcote Lane.

Roy

We always called it River Lane, Sheepcote Lane then River Lane. We never called it Sheepcote Lane when we were young, although that was its name obviously, but we didn't know that then. Next to that was the hill going out towards Hatfield. We've pondered this quite a few times. It was always known – the hill going towards Hatfield from Wheathampstead, the first hill past the Nelson. We always called it St. George's Hill. But we never knew why. We discussed that, it was funny.

Brenda

I've got an envelope from Mr Titmuss, addressed to Hatfield Road. Why did they call it Marford Road?

I'm trying to tell everybody that it's George's Hill. You don't want that to disappear. Even Dickie didn't know why it was called George's Hill.

Lillian

Names fascinate me. How many of the field names do you know, Brenda?

Brenda

I know all the fields in Herons Farm. From Dickie. And I was just saying to Lillian, there used to be part of Marford Fields which was called Bull Field, which I think belonged to or was associated with Bob Simons. Whether he kept his cattle there, I don't know. There used to be different names. I can't remember the others but I always remember that was Bull Field. Four Acres Field is where the surgery is now

I love knowing what the fields were called. We used to take sandwiches up there and have a harvest gathering on completion.

Roy

It's like Long Meadows, years ago. Everybody knew Long Meadows.

Lillian

It wasn't fenced. Half the village picnicked there. And the kids played in the river and we used to sit there and the cows would come down about four o'clock and go down to the river.

Roy

That's right. And that rings a bell with Doctor's Corner, doesn't it? The sharp bend in the river by Long Meadows which was always known locally as Doctor's Corner, but we don't know why. It's where there's a sharp bend in the river. A landmine dropped near there in the war. Where the caravans used to be.

About the war. My dad didn't get into the army but during the war he was in the AFS, Auxiliary Fire Service. And he was in the AFS all through the war. But he also had a job. He worked at John Dale's but he used to work down Helmets before the war. And then they were commissioned to go on military stuff and he was transferred to John Dale's at London Colney where they did aluminium smelting. And he was there all through the war and then after the war finished he went back to Helmets. He was the stoker man down there. They looked after the boilers down there, they used to produce steam for the moulders. The village was well off one time because they had Helmets, didn't they? Helmets had a factory up another place, up Brewhouse Hill. I know they had a place up Brewhouse Hill, because I worked in it once, and they also had a little storeroom along that top road. Halfway along there they had a storeroom.

And then we had Murphy's, didn't we?

Lillian

The village thrived. Absolutely thrived.

Patrick

There were two Murphy's, weren't there?

Lillian

Murphy and Son, and Murphy Chemical.

Roy

Murphy and Son were to do with the alcohol trade. They tested beers. In Wheathampstead House, which has now been totally rebuilt in the same style. They knocked the old one down, the old building was knocked down that Murphy and Son had. They used to test beers for the beer trade there.

Lillian

That's a school now. Murphy Chemical had their offices in the big house at the roundabout. That's where we worked, in Garden House. And there was loads of walnut trees there. I don't know what happened to them.

Patrick

And that's now all Garden Court.

Lillian

Yeah. All gone. Where Garden Court is now. That was their office, Murphy Chemicals office. I worked in there.

Patrick

So, just to get that clear. Murphy Chemical in Garden House, Murphy and Son in Wheathampstead House. Thank you.

Roy

Yeah, the worst loss was Murphy's. When Murphy's went, they should have built a decent supermarket there for the village, but Harpenden got that.

Lillian

We didn't fight hard enough.

Roy

It would have been nice to have had a supermarket there rather than Tesco which blocks the village off every day, you know, blocks the village, which is not good. OK, you can get your provisions but...

Roy

What about Wick Avenue? Do you know why it was called Wick Avenue?

Patrick

Tell me why it's called Wick Avenue.

Roy

Because the school playground was called The Wick. And the playing field. The school had two long prefab buildings. One was the girls' sewing centre and all, you know, and the other one was the woodwork and metalwork class. For the boys. The girls were doing ironing and all domestic stuff. The boys did metalwork in two long buildings, which were just in that gate to the right. The school was there and at the back of the school where Wick Avenue is now, the playing field for the school was there. And that was called The Wick.

Patrick

Was that just a big open space or was it marked out? As a football field or something.

Roy

It was just an open playground. And they had a fence round and the pheasants used to nest in the grass at the side and we used to get their eggs.

Lillian

You're not supposed to say that! You're not supposed to tell that one!

Roy

And in that area there they built a bomb shelter for the school. There was a shelter built there and it was underground and it had lights in it and everything. I've been in it a few times. It was a long underground tunnel they built there, all concrete on that site. On The Wick, on the far side.

Patrick

Were there any other shelters in the village?

Roy

There was one by the post office, wasn't there? That's the only one that I know of. Where the post office is, in that area. By the bus stop. There was one there, but there were no others.

Break for tea. The conversation turned to local farms.

Roy

At school, you know, we used to know all the farms. Because we used to go potato picking.

Brenda

Dickie used to go acorn picking with his class. They said let them have a day off school to pick up the acorns for the pigs, and they got so much from the farmer for that.

Patrick

So, there was Bury Farm and there was Place Farm and...

Roy

And there was Nicholls Farm down Dyke Lane. Halfway along. There's a little track going down and ...

Brenda

Was he the farmer that started off the events they had, you know, like funfairs and things? I think I'm right that he came from Scotland.

Roy

They did have a fete in the field there once. At Nicholls Farm. I went to that and he had the Pearly King and Queen, came down from London to that fete. And it must have been quite a to-do. Nicholls were well up in the world, weren't they? They came down, the Pearly King and Queen came down by train to the station and they were picked up by Mr Nicholls and brought to the fete which he held in the field next to the farm down Dyke Lane, Nicholls Farm.

He had a good-looking daughter, somebody said. Who was it who said that? Somebody said that he had a lovely daughter. It's become a business place now.

And then there was Bury Farm before all those houses got built, they were big oak-built buildings. Mr Hill opened the dairy down there and that sort of squashed Chennells. They had a dairy down the farm and they brought milk. Doug Saunders used to drive a horse and cart round.

Lillian

Yeah, those big long buildings, right down the bottom, almost opposite the Godfrey-Evans house, yes. There used to be a big, long building there. Do you remember it, Roy? They had cars in it. Down at Bury Farm.

Roy

Mr Titmuss owned it then. He used to let people store their cars down there. The barns were sort of converted into little garages. Beautiful barn. They were right down the bottom. Yeah, opposite the Godfrey-Evans. There were barns there. There were two tracks down. There was one track down, which is now a road. That was one track. But there was another track further over that went down to the farm. The farm building, the actual farmhouse, was further up the hill. Yeah, it was on the far side. There's some trees there and it was on the far side. Now, Titmuss bought Bury Farm wholesale and he had the farmhouse knocked down. And he then pleaded to the Council that he had a farm but no house, and that's how he got to build the house on Green Belt land. Top Road, Harpenden. High Pastures. Yes, Titmuss had that house built on the assumption that he had a farm but no house.

Lillian

I remember going to the fetes there. At Bury Farm before the house was demolished. I remember going to fetes there. I remember because a goat bit my sister-in-law.

Roy

Mr. Hill used to have fetes there.

Mr Hill from Lamer was the farmer. He was the chap, he somehow managed to get houses built up the top of Brewhouse Hill on the left-hand side. You know, the sharp corner, some houses there. Mr Hill had those built for his farm workers.

He had a licence because he had farm workers who needed accommodation after the war. He was allowed to build. He owned that land there, right up to there, right up to that road. I think there were two pairs there that he had built. When he owned the farm. And the V1 went over his house.

We did have a bomb drop just over here, in the field over here where Garrard Way is now, just above Garrard Way. I don't know about the one at Bury Farm but there was definitely one over here because I saw the crater. It wasn't a doodlebug. Bury Farm was a doodlebug. That was a V1. Yeah, I remember that. I remember it going over because we heard it going over and my mother said it's going to land any moment because the engine had cut out.

I knew about that, but it was an actual bomb that dropped in the field here and it made a crater. it was a small bomb. Yeah, we blamed the people over on Wheathampstead Hill because they never used to draw their blinds. We blamed them because we thought it was aimed at them and it landed just in the field over here. Just the one bomb.

Patrick

Was that before or after the doodlebug at Bury Farm, would you say?

Roy

Before, I think. It was before. That would be about 1941 or '42, I think, possibly. It was before the V1 because the V1 was later, 1944. Yeah, they were bombing everywhere then. Then later they got the idea of sending the V1s over here. Then it was the V2. Yeah, fortunately we didn't get the V2.

My father used to stand at the bedroom window where we lived down there and you could see Hatfield Aerodrome at night when the Germans came over and dropped flares because they had gun emplacements at de Havillands. But they took them away from de Havillands and put them

on the coast because they were short, you know, they thought they were more use on the coast than they were at the aerodrome. So the guns went from the aerodrome up to the coast. They thought they were better positioned on the coast. Try to stop them before they got here. But they used to come over and drop flares, so they lit the area up, so they knew where to drop the bomb. Vauxhall got one, didn't they? They got bombed. The bomb hit them and quite a few casualties there. On one night they got badly bombed. But this one here didn't cause any damage. Just a hole in the field.

No, it shattered a few windows. It was quite a small crater really. But the ARP put a rope around it so you couldn't get too near. I don't know why, it had gone off already. We went and looked to see the crater. I remember seeing the crater. Yeah, it wasn't very big.

At school, you know, we used to know all the farms. Because we used to go potato picking.

Short break

Roy

Mr Wren, he was the one looked after the sewer. He was in charge down there, wasn't he? Before the Italian bloke was with him. Mr Romelli. Yeah. Mr Wren lived halfway up Necton Road on the left-hand side as you go down. And he had a daughter, what was her name? I forget.

Patrick

I think that daughter was Amy Wren and she became Amy Coburn.

Roy

Yeah, she married the Wren at Kimpton. He had a shop there, didn't he? That's right. He had a shop with his old motorbikes and all sorts of bits. And he had petrol pumps at the front. He lived next door to that.

Lillian

That's right, by the petrol station. Didn't he do insurance as well?

Roy

Yeah, he did Norwich Union insurance. I used to go to him to pay my insurance, and I got there once and he said "I've married my cousin" and he married Amy Wren. He showed me this Jaguar that he'd got. He run it out. He had the garage and he showed me this Jaguar car in there. One time I went to renew his insurance. I always used to go to him and my Dad started it off. He bought a James 50cc motorbike off Wren at Kimpton. Used to go to John Dale's. Eventually he bought a motorbike off them, Dad did.

James 50cc motorbike, which I eventually had. He was called Coburn. He owned the shop next door, he told me he'd married Amy. "I married my cousin".

Patrick

Were there actually two families called Wren? and not related?

Roy

Yes, there was another one that used to make carts. He was a wheelwright and made the carts, and they were not related.

His son was Paul Wren and he had a big family. He was a favourite of Mr Housden. He lived opposite the paper shop, which was then at the bottom of the village opposite the wheelwright, the paper shop, Pierce's. He used to bring The Times to Mr Housden every day, so he got "Good boy." He was a good boy. That was Paul Wren. And Paul is on one of those videos, isn't he? Have you seen the videos of making the wheel? Helping him, Paul, who I went to school with.

Short break

Patrick

You mentioned Leslie Goldsmith. What do you remember about Leslie Goldsmith?

Brenda

Oh, he's a good farmer. He used to park in a gateway up George's Hill. Every Friday. His potatoes were fabulous.

Lillian

He'd sell his potatoes by the sack. And you used to get enough for the whole winter. I used to get five sacks when I think about it, and store.

Brenda

Was that Samuel's Farm? He's over at Welwyn now.

I used to work in the strawberry fields at Chalkdell. That was great, that was, that was very good. Coleman Green Lane.

Lillian

And strawberries. And raspberries were good. Gooseberries. Currants.

Brenda

Yeah, we all took turns on the stall. It was great. The Nall Cains. I think they came across and picked. Kim Wilde used to come up with her children.

It was absolutely immaculate up there. All the posts had different crops and they all had to be painted, those posts. And the stalls had to be painted so we had work all the year round. And it was lovely. It was very well run. It was beautifully managed.

I think actually the crops did about 25 years. When you think about it, they could have done with being renewed. Obviously the strawberries were done every other year.

Lillian

I mean, we're so lucky because you got your potatoes from Leslie. He used to have a big trailer and all. You could get a little bag at first because they'll not keep, the new potatoes, they won't keep, so you have to wait until you could get your sack of the ones that kept. Mine used to go underneath the stairs and I used to have five or six bags of potatoes. Big bags. Keep them in the dark, under the stairs.