

Arthur Edward Harman

Saturday 27th March, 2004

Interview by Jess Jephcott at Ditchling, Quilters Green, Fordham.
Beryl Harman, Marlene Boyle and Theresa Jephcott in attendance.
A Fordham Local History Society project.

(JJ) Ok, we're going to start. Now, this is Saturday 27th March, 2004 and we're here to talk to Arthur Edward Harman about his life story. With us we have Arthur's wife, Beryl, and Marlene. So thank you Arthur for coming along to talk to us.

You're welcome.

(JJ) I'm going to start to ask you a little bit about your life, so if we start from the beginning, you were Christened Arthur Edward Harman.

That's right.

(JJ) When?

I was Christened when I was nine years old actually at Wormingford church.

(JJ) Oh, my goodness yes, and when were you born?

September 10th, 1914.

(JJ) And where was that?

That was in Clapton, London.

(JJ) And what were your parents doing, or what did your father do?

My father was a tailor and my mother worked as a cashier in a butchers shop at that time, well I suppose, after I was born anyway, you know, after I left, two years old I left London, I think because of me health and also, probably, because of the war and..

(JJ) Were you the only child?

No, I've got two sisters and a brother, or I had.

(JJ) So, where did the Harman's come from, as far as you know, were they a London family?

Yes, yeah, my grandfather, which I never met, had a business, a tailor's business in London and then, I think, it was passed over to me father, but during the war, that was taken over, they had to do things for the government, I don't know what, making, I'm not sure, I don't know really what happened after that because when I went down

to the country, I mean, I lost touch, except for about two occasions when they came down to see me.

(JJ) So, they'd be right in the thick of the First World War, so presumably it would be military.

That's right, so things changed.

(JJ) Clothing or whatever.

Yes, that's right

(JJ) So, you mentioned your grandfather, what was grandfathers name and grandmothers name?

Great grandfather, I never met me grandfather, I only met me great grandfather who lived at Wormingford.

(JJ) Yes, that's the connection, yes.

And he was over 90 when I went to see him, I only saw him once.

(JJ) What was his name?

Spooner.

(JJ) First name?

I don't know, I don't know what his first name was.

(JJ) So, he lived in..

He lived in Wormingford, near the church.

(JJ) And your grandfather, who you never met, presumably because he died, what was his name?

Well, obviously, his name would be Spooner but I don't know what his first name was.

(JJ) So, this is maternal grandfather.

Yes.

(JJ) Ok, so we've got a Wormingford connection there straight away with your great grandfather. So, great grandfather, what did he do for a living?

Well, I don't know, I suppose he was a farm labourer.

(JJ) Yes ok, so, the Spooner's, presumably, were an Essex or a Suffolk family, were they?

Pardon?

(JJ) The Spooner's were Suffolk or Essex family.

Essex family.

(JJ) Yes, from this area?

That's right.

(JJ) Ok, so, your father's name?

Charles.

(JJ) And when was he born?

Well, he was a lot older than me mother, so it's difficult for me to tell you the date of that. You must understand that, you know, being away from them all me early years and only having two years up there after I went back, there's a lot of news and things that I don't know about.

(JJ) So, how old was he when he died, when did he die?

He was 82 when he died.

(JJ) And when was that?

Oh, you've got me now.

(JJ) Approximately.

I can't remember, actually, it was, I can't remember the date.

(JJ) Where was he when he died, as well?

In London.

(JJ) In Clapton.

No, when he died he was, in Clapton, yes that's right yes, he was in Clapton, yes and me mother moved after that.

(MB) When you come to Wormingford, when you were two, did your parents come with you?

No, well they probably come down with me, to that, but I lived with an old aunt and uncle, they were me great aunt and uncle actually.

(MB) Oh, right. What was their name?

What me great aunt and uncle?

(MB) Yeah.

Spooner.

(MB) They were Spooners, oh right.

(JJ) So, mother, what was her name?

Nellie.

(JJ) She was Nellie and, again, do you know when she was born or.?

No, no I don't

(JJ) Or, how old was she when she died?

She was 82 when she died.

(JJ) And, again, can't remember quite when that was?

No, I can give you a rough idea of that, that was, see I was called out from Paxman's, when I worked there, in the '60's I think it would be.

(JJ) Yes, 1960's. So, she was Nellie, Nellie Spooner.

That's right.

(JJ) Yes, ok, and what did she do, she was a housewife?

Yes, a housewife, but also worked, I mean she had to be a housewife when the children were young but then she was cashier in a butchers shop.

(JJ) And that was in Clapton, again?

No, that was in Stoke Newington.

(JJ) Right, so she died in London when you were up here.

That's right, yes.

(MB) Was you here on your own, did you leave your brothers and sisters behind, your brothers and sisters?

Oh, yes they, when I left there, they stayed up there. I think me sister came down but she didn't stay, she was there for a few weeks, but she didn't stay.

(JJ) So, were you born at home or in a hospital, as far as you know?

That I can't tell you.

(JJ) You don't know who delivered you?

It might sound silly but, the thing is, that if you're away, like I was, and then there was four years of the war, wasn't there, that they, that they had to see, well problems with the children weren't there anyway, I mean there's three other children besides me, well not then. Two more were born after me, me sister was older, so there was two more children born after me, so really, living down here, two years when I first came down at two and didn't go back until I was fourteen, then I lived there again when I was sixteen, there's not much I can tell you.

(JJ) So, you came to Wormingford at the age of two.

That's right.

(JJ) And you stayed with your..

Aunt and uncle, they were me great aunt and uncle, actually.

(JJ) And their names, what was their names?

Their name was Spooner.

(JJ) Christian names?

George and Kate.

(JJ) And where about's was the house.

They lived in Church Road, Wormingford.

(JJ) So, what did they do, what was their profession?

Well, me uncle was a farm labourer.

(JJ) For who?

For..

(MB) Tuffnell?

No, Wormingford Grove, Smith, yes Eustace Smith, weren't it?

(JJ) So, earliest memories then for you?

My earliest memories for me was when I was pushed from Wormingford to Penlan Hall in an old fashioned push chair, I remember it, going there. When we got to Fordham, they stopped at a little cottage where me uncle's sister lived and had a cup of tea, I suppose, then we went on to the Penlan Hall surgery where Doctor Worts used to do minor operations and he done me tonsils and adenoids.

(MB) What, in Penlan Hall?

Yeah, and anyway, when me auntie asked him how I was, he said, he touched a gold safety pin, and he said "his life is not worth that." That was the bad news, the good news is I'm still here.

(MB) Yeah.

(JJ) Well, I'll be blowed, quite amazing.

Yeah, and a bit later on, about a week later on, I had a hemorrhage and he came over in his pony and cart or pony and trap as they used to call it.

(JJ) This is Doctor Worts.

That's right and he said it was just a matter of time, that was another bit of good news.

(JJ) What an amazing thing to say. Well, I'll be blowed. So, you went there because that's where Doctor Worts lived.

That's right and he had his surgery there, yeah.

(JJ) So, that was a fair walk, so you can say that that was sort of your first....

First memory of Fordham and going out anywhere because as I say I can't remember, I know me auntie said I had most everything from two 'til six, I started school about seven.

(JJ) What do you remember of the home, your house where you lived with your aunt and uncle.

Well, it was very, they were very poor, very poor indeed.

(JJ) Is it still there?

No, it's been pulled down.

(JJ) What was it, an old timber..

Yes a little old cottage, you see there was three cottages where now there's only one house, very small, two rooms upstairs and one down.

(JJ) And where was this exactly?

It's right, next but one to the shop or post office now in Wormingford and we never had no rugs or carpets, as a matter of fact, I made a poem up about my loneliest day there and it was lonely too and we had no rugs or carpets, just corn sacks.

(JJ) But you had children and that to play with, nearby, I suppose.

Well, at first and then they moved when some council houses were built and actually it was very lonely for me there because me uncle was so strict he wouldn't let me hardly go out until I was about eleven or twelve. So, I never had a lot to play with really. He was a Jekyll and Hyde really, he was very good when he was sober, when he was drunk, which was more often than not, he wasn't very good.

(MB) Can you remember the poem?

Yes.

(MB) You remember it, can you say it then, is it a long one?

No, not particularly long.

It was August bank holiday Monday in 1924,
I was ten years old and we were very poor.
I lived with an aunt and uncle, who were getting old,
My uncle was very strict, I had to do as I was told.
We lived in a little cottage, two up and one down,
Not far from the river where, once, I nearly drowned.
We had no rugs or carpets, just corn sacks laid on bricks,
We had very little coal, I was forever chopping sticks.
I had saved some pennies to go to Fareham [Fordham] Flower Show,
But my uncle, who'd been drinking, said I could not go.
As I stood by the window, the tears rolled down my cheeks,
My friends were waiting for me to go, but I was choked I could not speak.
For some time I stood there, while my aunt and uncle slept,
And I crept outside to my favourite tree, and I just sat down and wept.
The day was hot and humid, it seemed that nothing stirred,
Just an awful eerie silence, not a sound was heard.
I don't know for how long I sat there or for how long I cried,
But in that awful eerie silence, it seemed the whole village died.
That lonely day still haunts me throughout all these years,
Of a little boy, who'd done no wrong, just sitting there in tears.

(JJ) That's lovely.

(MB) Very good, put that in the Fordham News.

(JJ) My goodness, that's lovely and when did you write that, what age?

(BH) He writes poetry.

Not long ago, when I look back on me life and, it was something struck me about somebody said about a lonely time and I thought about that day, and that was the loneliest day I can ever remember. It's what I wrote down was exactly what happened and how I felt.

(JJ) Well, it's a lovely poem.

(MB) Mm 'tis. Worth publishing, that.

(JJ) Worthy of our news, so getting back to those times, then, you say you went to school at the age of seven, was it?

Seven, yes.

(JJ) And which school was that?

Wormingford down, Wormingford church of England school.

(JJ) And can you remember your teacher or any teachers?

I can remember two teachers, Mrs Clarke was the head teacher, there was only two rooms anyway, in the school, and Mrs Clarke and Mrs Hogg and, I think, for a time, I think there was a Barratt, I'm not sure about that, that was early stages, I think there's a Miss Barratt.

(JJ) And what was your favourite subject, what did you enjoy most?

I think my favourite subject was writing, about compositions that I used to have, you know, and I got told off by the teacher for writing so much, she said I can't get through it all, she said, so don't write so much and now I hate writing.

(BH) You can't do it, can you?

No, I can't do it now, anyway.

(JJ) So, a few basic things about early life as well, water, electricity what was there?

Oh no, all we had was oil lamps and they used to smoke and you could hardly see through it, you know, anything in the room.

(JJ) What about a bath, was there..

Oh no, an old tin bath in front of the fire and there was no sink or anything in the cottage, no running water, of course.

(JJ) No, where did the water come from?

From the pump just outside.

(JJ) So no electricity, no gas.

No.

(JJ) So, cooking with coal, I suppose.

Well, mostly sticks because they couldn't afford coal. It was a treat to have a coal fire.

(MB) You said you nearly drowned Arthur, did you?

Pardon?

(MB) You said, in your poem, you nearly drowned in the river.

I did, yes.

(MB) Who saved you, or did you get out on your own?

It was my friend Bertie Leggett.

(MB) Oh, the Leggetts.

Yes, we used to swim in a little tributary that come off the river that go to what they call the Kye or the Meer, do you remember that?

(MB) Yeah.

And, well, we used to swim in that and then when I learned to swim, soon as I could swim, I thought oh I'm alright, you know, so I went in the deep end in the main river and I kept near the edge and I, laughing and joking along the side, and I started laughing and then I got hysterical, if you know what I mean, over laughing, I got hysterical 'cause I'm laughing so much I couldn't control meself and I grabbed some weeds and Bertie leant down and put his hand out and helped me out. I don't know whether I would have got out, I don't think so, I think he..

(JJ) And what age would that have been, do you think?

I'd be about eleven or twelve, I suppose, then.

(JJ) Well, one of those experiences of life.

(MB) Yeah.

Pardon?

(JJ) Did you, you didn't have a bicycle or anything or..

Yes, what we used to do, him and I, we used to go round with the threshing machine to earn some money and then we, we got parts actually, we got old parts of bikes

and put them together, you know, even you know, getting the ball bearings, somebody would get them for us and we put them in and make up out of parts and then when I left school I managed to get a better bike.

(JJ) So, you left the same school, as Wormingford school at the age of..

Fourteen.

(JJ) Fourteen and what did you do after that? Did you have a job lined up?

No, no there was no job lined up. The first fortnight we went with the threshing machine like we done before we left school and I earned the biggest wage then, the first week, and we'd been working for a Scotsman, Mr Keedar.

(MB) Oh yeah.

And, at the end of the week, we were doing threshing, and then at the end of the week they paid out and, you know, he came to me, so I held me hand out and he put thirty shillings in me hand. That's the wages those days, thirty shillings, and I looked. He said "what's the matter?" I couldn't believe me eyes, I said "I've got too much" and he looked "no you haven't" so, how's that, 'cause the English people we work for, you got about five shillings..

(MB) Yeah and he was Scotch, he weren't tight.

And he was a Scotsman.

(JJ) Was a man's wage.

Yeah, that's what he said, he said "you've done a man's work, you've worked well," he said, "you have a man's money." And do you remember West at Wormingford, do you remember West?

(MB) No.

He was another Scotsman and he done the same, but we never got that off the English people. And then I worked at the vicarage, the vicar said "come and work for us." So, I went down there.

(MB) What did you do there?

Oh, everything in the housework. First job I had every morning was cleaning the black and white stone hall that went from, right through from back to front. They never give me a kneeling pad, I had housemaids knee's if you believe it, you might not believe it but.

(JJ) So, it was general work for the vicar?

Yeah, cleaning the silver, washing up, making the beds.

(MB) What was his name?

Abbott, yeah.

(JJ) So what about your religious upbringing.

Well I was in the choir from eight 'till I was about, just before I was fourteen and, Church of England.

(JJ) Did you do anything specifically with the church or..

Yes, I was choir boy for six years. When I come to Fordham I was postman for a time.

(JJ) So, you were working for the vicar.

That's right.

(JJ) That would have been around about 1928.

That's right, yes 1928. And then me aunty died and me mother came down for the funeral. In those days they didn't have funerals like they do today. The wheelwright that worked at Wormingford, he had a business at Wormingford, he had a hook on one hand, just an ordinary, no hand, a hook, and he used to make wheels and repair carts and make coffins and he had a four wheeled trolley that him and another man used to come up, when anybody died, and put them in the coffin and then when the buriel take the coffin put them down put them on the trolley and you followed the trolley down to the churchyard, no cars or anything.

(JJ) No hearses.

And while we were waiting for, waiting for, well I laugh, I said I didn't laugh at the time. We sat in this little room downstairs, only one room, apart from the pantry, and we sat there and crack, the leg of the bed come through the ceiling.

(MB) Frightened the life out of you, didn't it?

Yeah.

(BH) You were only fourteen.

Yeah.

(JJ) You can laugh now.

Yeah, laugh now, but yes that did. We see this crack and I looked up and there was the leg of this bed come through the ceiling.

(JJ) So, what did you do for fun, did you go into Colchester at all, or?

No, I don't remember going into Colchester, only about once. What we did have, what we were lucky there really with the school, we had a meadow next to the school and we used to play football a lot, 'cause we had this meadow, we used to play at lunchtimes, breaktimes, we always played football. We used to pick up two teams at the beginning on a Monday and finish on a Friday and then the next week we'd pick up different teams again, so we was lucky that way, so I had plenty of fun that way but at home or with me uncle and aunty. Poor old aunty was stone deaf so I couldn't have a conversation with her.

(MB) Did they never have any children then?

Pardon?

(MB) Did your aunt and uncle have any children?

No, actually she came from Boxford, she was, she'd already been married before. Her husband had a business, he was a butcher and I think me uncle caught her on the rebound, there was, they were, they were worlds apart, really.

(JJ) But he was a drinking man.

Yes.

(JJ) Did that put you off the drink, did you enjoy a pint?

No, that put me off. I worked at, when I came back from London, I had a gardeners job and I worked on a farm for about a year, then I worked at Bergholt brewery and they were allowed two pints a day there, the workers, I didn't, I used to give mine away.

(JJ) That was Daniells?

Yeah, I used to give mine away. They had cider but I didn't like cider, but I wasn't a, I wasn't a beer drinker. I mean, other people can drink what they like. I do like a glass of wine now and then, but I could tell you a tale about the brewery but I don't think you want to publish that.

(JJ) When, let's move on to girls, your first wife, when did you meet her?

Well, my next visit to Fordham, after the threshing machine business, you know, I went to a fair there, coming back to the, well I couldn't go to the other fair that I wanted to go to, but anyway, I was about seventeen, I think, seventeen or, yeah about seventeen and I went over to Fordham one Saturday night and, where this fair was, and as I was walking in the gate there was a young lady walking in front of me and she'd got the most beautiful hair, and I thought, cor, you know, what lovely hair and on the Monday, when I was at the brewery, I was on a machine, and there was a chap working next to me and that happened to be Major Rideout, that was Cavells nephew.

(MB) He wasn't a major, that was what his name was, wasn't it?

(BH) Yeah.

And, no that was his name, and anyway, I said to him, "I was over yours, your way Saturday night," I said, "and do you know," I said, "I saw a girl there," I said, "beautiful hair." He said "I bet that was my aunty." The reason for saying aunt and nephew is because my wife was the youngest of the family and he was the son of the oldest girl of the family, that's how you got the, and he said "oh, I bet that's my aunty" and I said "cor I'd like to meet her" and after a while he arranged it and I did meet her and we married.

(JJ) And her name?

Pardon?

(JJ) What was her name?

Her name was Edith Cavell Osborne.

(JJ) Edith Cavell Osborne.

Yes, that's what you've got down there and lucky I had my golden wedding with her.

(MB) Where did she live, before you married her?

In Quilters Green, 'cause when we married, Mrs Pettican, who you knew.

(MB) Yeah.

Shelagh's mother, she was living with Mrs Osborne, Cavell's mother, and they moved into, next to the parish room and her mother was ill so when we married we went and lived with her mother.

(MB) So the house that they, the house that Cavell lived in..

Is down isn't it?

(MB) It's the one down here, isn't it?

Pardon?

(MB) When they were children.

Yeah, up the end here, yes.

(MB) Who lives there now?

Where Mack Daniells used to live?

(MB) Yes, where..

(JJ) Cobb Cottage

They've altered it now, haven't they?

(JJ) Oh, Cobb Cottage.

Cobb Cottage, yes.

(JJ) 'Cause the Rayner's lived there at one time, I think.

Pardon?

(JJ) The Rayner family, lived there at one time, as well. Yes we call it Cobb Cottage.

That's right.

(JJ) With the well in the front.

Yes, that's right.

(JJ) Yes, nice little place. So, you married, when was that?

1936.

(JJ) And you were how old?

Twenty two.

(JJ) Twenty two. So, where did you live after you were married?

After we were married, well I was working on the buses at the time and I had the chance of a house in Kelvedon, that the governor of the buses, Moors buses, wanted me to go and live there but, as Cavell's mother was ill, we went and moved there.

(MB) Which is in the council house.

Pardon?

(MB) Where, where was that?

In Quilters Green.

(MB) In Quilters Green.

That's right, then where those houses were built in Sunnyside Road, I got one of those.

(MB) Yeah, the first one.

That's right.

(JJ) Yes, in the 1960's, I suppose that would have been, wouldn't it?

No, '47.

(JJ) Oh, they were that early.

(MB) Right on the corner.

And that, funny enough, is the very spot where those cottages were when they stopped for a cup of tea when they were pushing me to Penlan Hall.

(BH) Your wooden bridge cart.

(JJ) So, we're coming up to the beginning of the war, I suppose.

That's right, I left the buses and went to Marconi.

(JJ) What, before the war?

Yeah, before the war, in May 1939, actually.

(JJ) So you were pretty sure that war was coming.

Oh yes.

(JJ) So, you went from the buses to Marconi.

Yes.

(JJ) What sort of job were you doing at Marconi?

On aircraft work.

(JJ) Which you had no training for but they trained you up

Well, when I heard about that they wanted people at Marconi's I went and applied for the job and I, and the foreman came down and met me in the canteen and he asked me, you know, what I wanted, so I said, well, I mean I didn't know war was going to break out but I said I wanted to get into something interesting. I'm afraid I was always an ambitious, too ambitious really, anyway, he said "I'm sorry, you've no experience," he said. So, I said "well take me on for a month and give me a trial." He said, "you'd give up a job would you to take that chance?" I said "yes" and in the end he said "well, alright, if you're that keen, I'll give you" he said "but you must understand that if you can't do it, or there's no hope of you doing it, you'll have to go." Anyway, within a fortnight, he come and told me, he said "forget going" he said "you're alright." And I finished up as charge hand at Chelmsford in our section and

then I went on to Romford where they took over the Green Line bus garage and employed a lot more people and I was made up to foreman until after the war.

(MB) 'Cause you were made up to chargehand because the chargehand got killed, didn't he?

Yeah, he got..

(MB) Tell them about the bombs.

We had, we was bombed three times while we, while I was in Marconi's and one of the, one of the raids they left a thousand pound bomb under the rubble of bricks, a thousand pound bomb dropped and then they dropped some more and all the bricks fell and all this rubbish fell on top of this thousand pound bomb, covered it up, and we were looking for people during the night where seventeen people were killed that night and we were looking to see if we could help anybody and we were walking over this thousand pound bomb and didn't know it, until next morning. When we went next morning, they told us not to go in, they was..

(JJ) So, they diffused it, it didn't go off?

No, they diffused it.

(JJ) But your chargehand was one of the seventeen, was he?

Yes. No, actually, that was before, in a raid they had before, this particular raid was with the thousand pound bomb, but the first raid he got killed. Well, half way up this lane, I should think, away from where the bomb dropped and he was hit by this brick, well, that was the only thing that lay beside him and you see where it hit him on the head. And then they made me up in his place.

(JJ) So, what sort of work were you doing?

We was making what they called a screening harness, it fits on the engine on, got lugs that fit on, where the lugs are on the engine, you fitted this screening harness on there with all the wires going to the plugs and the magneto and that was to stop the interference from the engine to the pilots earphones.

(JJ) What sort of aircraft, do you know?

Oh yes, we done Hurricans, Spitfires.

(BH) Hercules?

No, Hercules was a big one.

(JJ) So mainly on engines.

Yeah, that was a big engine, that was a, I think that was three foot across where we put the harness for that. We didn't fit them they went to the aircraft factory.

(JJ) So, how did you get to Chelmsford every day?

Well, I must tell you this. I had bought an Austin Seven for eight pound, at the beginning of the war and I was the smallest one of four that rode in it up to Chelmsford. When I got to Witham, one morning, I don't know if it was me or whether it was the army but they came out that side turning from Maldon Road, where the traffic lights are, and as I approached the traffic lights, I'm sure they were green, but nevertheless, they came out and I couldn't stop and they scattered. The first lot, I didn't see this cause I was intent on that gap and I went through it, I couldn't pull up, so I went through it. They caught their feet against the kerb and those behind them pushed them so they sprawled all over the pavement that side. This side of the car they pulled up sharp and scattered and knocked each other over that side.

(BH) Like a pack of cards.

(JJ) And you sailed off.

I sailed off, and the voice of the sergeant swearing at me.

(JJ) You heard that.

Yes. I didn't see any of it 'cause I was looking ahead of me, they told me what happened. The next day I thought where can I go, to go out and go round this.

(JJ) To avoid it, yes, in case they saw you.

I didn't see them anymore, thank goodness!

(JJ) So you found yourself in a reserved occupation.

That's right.

(JJ) Doing war work to keep the aircraft in the air, effectively.

That's right, yeah.

(JJ) Very important company, Marconi. So, what memories of the war, when you weren't working?

Well the memories, when I wasn't working?

(JJ) Well, you know, in your free time, any particular stories?

Well that was very little, no, we were working from 8 o'clock in the morning 'till 8 o'clock at night and sometimes I was held back on something, doing something that I didn't know what it was, I could only guess because I had been charge hand at Chelmsford. I was doing special work but I don't know, I can only guess what it was for, it was something secret. I only done part of it and...

(JJ) Wasn't your business to know.

No, you weren't told anything, you were just told what you'd got to do and that was welding and silver soldering and then, as far as I can gather, some other place done another part.

(MB) Yeah, so nobody knew what's going on.

You didn't know what it was and sometimes that was 10 o'clock before I left Chelmsford.

(MB) What was your wages then?

I think the wages then was about nine, ten pound a week. I was on a high wage because, well the highest they could give me on the work I was doing. You see, I used to do the first model and I had also been timed on it, you know, time and motion study, well I knew that I'd got to be fair to the company and I'd got to be fair to the men, 'cause they were going to be put on piece work so I used to hurry one part, take it easy and then moderate, you know, so I could give them a fair deal, see what happened was, once they got used to it, they could do it quick and I used to take their cards round on a Thursday, on a Friday, no, Thursday morning and I could see that some of them were earning more than me.

(JJ) On good money.

So, I said the foreman, I said, "this is not fair" I said. "I do all the hard work in sorting it out, do all the first model" and I said " and they're getting more money than me." So that's when he said "well I'll see what I can do. And they put me on the highest rate they could put but not doing piece work. Before the war ended, just after the war, I was still there after the war for a time, I went to Rugby to modify seventy five kilowatt transmitters. That was the first time the consul was made in this big place that they had where they could go direct, anywhere in the world, with telephones. That was a huge thing, all dials and things, terrific.

(JJ) And this was during the war, was it?

Yes, no, just after the war when telephones were coming.

(JJ) They put a cable under the Atlantic.

That's right and all that, yeah.

(JJ) So, at home did you, was there any family, did you have children?

Yes, two boys, yes.

(JJ) And when were they born?

The one was born in '30 and, late thirties, and the other one was born in '42.

(JJ) And where were they during the war years, they weren't evacuated?

No, no they were still at Fordham.

(JJ) Still at home, they didn't need to be.

No, no.

Poor quality part of recording, possibly a bit missing here, difficult to understand.

(JJ) We have an airfield of course at Wormingford, it must have been the subject of bombing raids, well it was, was indeed. So, after the war then.

After the war, during the war I bought my Ford Eight and I saw it, during the war I saw this, I bought it during the war, I saw this in a garage in the showroom and it had, only been gone out for trials I think, it was only a few miles on the clock and that was a deluxe model, £120, Ford Eight, and four door deluxe model, I got it for £89. And you know Mrs Beard, that married Beard, don't you, do you remember?

(MB) Yeah.

She used to have land army girls staying with her and one night she came round and asked me if I'd take them to the station. I said well yes. She said the taxi's let them down, so I took them to the station and it happened again the next Friday. They'd go back home for the weekend, and of course I'd only got coupons, you know, getting them about, you know, I was robbing meself. So I said, they wanted to pay me but I said I can't take money, I said, it's not, you know, taxi's around there, if they'd seen me taking money, there'd have been trouble so, and I was still at work and anyway, what happened was, somebody came up while I was at work and said, to me wife, can your husband run me to Twinstead and actually they were a relation of the family, so I said alright. Then somebody else said I believe you're doing hire work, can you take us somewhere? So, I couldn't, so Cavell could drive, so she was taking them and that built up until I was getting no coupons, besides I was running out of coupons. So, I thought, well I'll apply to Cambridge for, get some coupons for hire work and, to my surprise, I got them. And I found out afterwards that you have to be vetted by the police, because somebody at the Vulcan applied and they wouldn't let them have them. But anyway, I got the coupons and I started up me private hire, but it was getting to such a state that I was, when I got home, me wife had been doing it during the day and when I come home at night there was jobs for me to do and normally it was to meet the last train at North Station and the next one, the next morning, was to catch the first train.

(MB) Yeah.

And what with work and, you know, so I said well I've got to give up me job and take this on, which I did, I took the hire work on.

(MB) So it that when you come down to Quilters, is it?

Yes.

(MB) Is that what you owned? Tell them about the land you owned down..

Yes, there was a piece of land opposite there that had a little Sunday school on it, it was all tumbled down and

(MB) Where Mary Cook lived, bungalow, High Noon.

(JJ) Oh right, yes.

I bought that piece of ground for £25. I sold it for £150.

(MB) Cor, dear.

That was after I, I built a shop on there at one time. When I was going private hire, and as the, well that was after the war by then, that taxi's were more available then because the yanks used to take up all the taxi's in Colchester and they'd gone back, or a lot of them had, and the taxi's were more available so there was less work for me. So, what I done was, that comes from the fact that doing the bikes, making bikes up when I was younger, of course, I knew all about it then and I done some repairs of bikes, sold bicycle parts and hardware in this shop that I had in front of a Nissan hut and then, I used to take a lady to Lakenheath with flowers up at, do you remember the nursery up at Wood Lane?

(MB) Oh yeah.

Anyway, I took her and she said she couldn't get any seed boxes. I was in Colchester one day and I, at the back of Sainsbury's, and I saw all these wooden egg boxes there, so I went in and asked to see the manager and I said "what are you doing with all these egg boxes?" He said, "well, they're piled up now" he said "'cause it's summer time," he said "in the winter time, people buy them for fire wood." So I said "how much are they?" So he said "sixpence each." So, I thought oh, I could make some seed boxes out of them. So I said "look" I said "I'll tell you what, I'll clear you out each week for fourpence a box. "Right" he said "done." So I used to get all these boxes home, take them to pieces and make seed boxes of them. And then that went that I got some wood, when it come off licence, I got some wood to make the seed boxes and that was ideal for making fencing, so I started making fencing, put it outside, advertised it, you know, orders were coming in, and then somebody said "could you make me a shed?" I made a shed and I went and looked on the forecourts somewhere were there were sheds, looked at them, measured them, you know, see how they were made and anyway so I started making a shed. I went and got a piece of land up on the airfield and I started making sheds. Well, the first year was very hard. The electric light company let me down, electricity board. They promised me electricity, then they put it off for a year, so for a year, I was doing it all by hand, and that was, well I couldn't make it pay.

(JJ) So when was that, what year would that have been?

That would be about '48, '49.

(MB) What can you tell us about the Sunday school that used to be at the end of the road, was it a chapel or a Sunday school?

That was a chapel, what up around the corner do you mean?

(MB) Yeah.

Near Homestead.

(MB) On the end of this road.

On the end of this road?

No, that was year's ago, they had a little Sunday school, little place for Sunday school. They probably used it for worship as well, I would imagine.

(MB) Yeah, it's a pity you haven't got any pictures of it.

The only thing that was left was the chimney.

(MB) Oh right. What did they use the old Nissan hut for, the old Nissan hut, that used to be on the end of, you know the old playing field here, there used to be an old Nissan hut.

Yes.

(MB) There used to a little Nissan hut on there, wasn't there, a little tiny one.

Oh yes.

(MB) What was that ever used for?

That was like an air raid shelter, wasn't it.

(MB) Yeah, must have been. I can remember it but, of course, it was always locked but it was a little tiny one, wasn't it.

Yeah, something used to be stored in it but I don't know what it was.

(BH) 'Course you had a little one, didn't you, up the airfield?

Big Nissan, I had, on the piece of ground that I bought.

(MB) Yeah, pity you haven't got any pictures of it, Arthur.

Pardon?

(MB) It's a pity you haven't got any pictures of it.

No, that wasn't one of my ambitions, to take photographs. I wish I had now.

(JJ) Yes, don't we all. So when you sold this bit of land here in Quilters Green, who bought it and what did they do with it?

They bought it to store the car on and garage.

(MB) Who bought it?

Greta's, do you remember Miss Beer, used to live with Mrs Wright, Greta's friend?

(MB) Oh yeah, sort of, yeah.

She bought it and, of course, she sold it. She must have made a good profit on it. I was going to have it for a bungalow but then when I started me business I needed all me money for the business, hoping that I would be able to, in the long run, build a bungalow on it.

(JJ) Well somebody did.

Yeah, they did. But, when I bought it for £25, I had the surveyor to come out to see if it was big enough, you had to have a certain area to put a bungalow or house on and I was thirty yards short.

(MB) Who did you buy it off?

Imrie, in Wormingford, and Mr Imrie come over with the surveyor and he said "I'm sorry, he said, you're a bit short." Well there was a ditch that belonged to him. Because them cottages belonged to Imrie as well, where Mrs Rideout lived.

(MB) Oh Rideout, across the road.

Yes.

(MB) Oh, where Daphne lives, war memorial.

Yeah, those cottages where the memorial is, they belonged to Imrie as well.

(MB) Oh right.

And the ditch belonged to the garden the other side.

(MB) There was a pond there, wasn't there, as well?

That's right, that all came with it as well and so Imrie was very good he said "well look, if he has the ditch onto his deeds he'll be able to have enough room, won't he?". So he said "yes thats ok. So the very kindly put the ditch on with the deeds.

(MB) Oh I see.

So I'd got enough room.

(JJ) But you never did build it.

I never built on it, to my regret. But anyway, the end justified the means after all.

(JJ) Absolutely, so you set up in business and, making all sorts of things, until when?

Well I was one of the first, you talk about enterprise, I was never satisfied with what I done, I always wanted to do more. I got a call from the University of Essex, 'cause I used to advertise in the paper, about sheds and garages, and they phoned up and said "do you hire sheds out?". Well I told a white business lie then, I said "well, no I don't," I said "but I'm thinking about it" which I was actually, I started thinking about it right away so I said, he said can you give me a price? So I said "not off hand, I said, I'm in the, I'm just about to sort it out." So he said "well alright," he said, "well let me know as soon as you can" he said, "perhaps you can let me know tomorrow can you?" So anyway I sat up all that night, working out figures and I thought no I've, this is going to be, cash flow is going to be too bad, I won't get enough in so I've got to put a big price on it, to make sure after the first lot I'd be able to continue with the others. But, anyway, the price was too high for them and then they said "I wonder if you could do us a favour though. Could you go to Hornchurch, we've found some secondhand ones, in the airfield up there and see what they're worth. So I went up and had a look, sized em up and told them what I thought they were worth and they said yes fair enough and, they wanted repairing, I said to em well, are the people you're buying them off, are they going to put them up?" "Oh no, he said, we've got to get that done. I said "would you like me to quote you for it?" "Oh" he said "would you do that? I said yes, so I quoted for putting them up. They never had enough, so he said "can you make new ones?"

(MB) So you finished up making them.

They were 100 feet long and 25 feet wide.

(JJ) That's a shed, that's a shed and a half, isn't it?

That is a shed and a half.

(MB) That's not a little garden shed, is it?

Actually, we had to make frameworks inside and sections for a library, for different classes.

(JJ) This was at the, over at Wivenhoe?

That's right.

(JJ) So when would this have been, in the '50's or?

That's right, yeah.

(JJ) Before they built the big concrete jungle there.

Yeah, it'd be after the '50's, after that.

(MB) So when did you move to Penlan then?

Yes, but this was some time after.

(MB) Was it, oh right.

Yes. I, then we moved up on to, where Smith was, you remember Smith's.

(MB) Oh, Bob Smith.

Bob Smith.

(MB) Yeah, I remember.

Well, he was a lad, he was.

(MB) You're telling me.

(JJ) So where was this?

We bought the place off of him.

(MB) Jamieson's.

I, made up a company then, afterwards, I made a company of it and we bought a place off of him.

(JJ) What was the company called?

Colchester Portable Buildings, and then we had somebody, and I won't mention any names, but we had somebody in there who really rooked the company. Anyway, we got over that and I thought, you know, we got to build it up again and that sort of thing, so, I was getting on then really and I thought I'm not going all through the same situation again, you know, and anyway, I had, the people we were getting timber off of, they'd heard that I was thinking about selling out and so anyway I sold out and they asked if I would start up for them down at Brightlingsea. So I started the company up for them, and I mean I was getting a good wage, but unfortunately the manager, Palgrave Brown, he was sent to, sent to Coventry, he was sent to take over at Southampton and so we, he packed the business up at Brightlingsea and that was when, and I had a company car, and I got the business going and, anyway, when he left, there was nobody else to, you know, organise anything and so I left, or rather they asked me, that they would have to pack it up so anyway they paid me well.

(JJ) So when was that, what year would that have been?

That would be, in the '70's. Anyhow, yes, what happened then? Oh, so, anyway, so I thought to myself, I don't know, I'll have a break. So I had a week off and had a walk round and I was walking round Penlan Hall and I saw, Smith, what's his other name?

(MB) Tedd.

Tedd.

(MB) That's Bob Smith's brother.

And I saw him, and we had a chat, and those two places up there were empty, and Derek, then, was in the building business.

(MB) Derek's his son.

That's me son and they were looking for a place and I told Derek about it and he went and had a word with Tedd Smith and they hired a place off of him and they were doing pattern making and big concrete building modules and so then I worked for me son for a while and, oh previous I had, previous to, in between, before I started up in business on me own, I was at Paxman's for a time.

(JJ) Doing what?

I was in milling production control and I left there and started up me business and then I went to work for me son, and then some, let's see which was first. Yes, I went to work for him and then I thought I'd like to have a go on caravan's, so I went down the caravan firm and got a job there.

(JJ) Which one was that? Ipswich Road?

No, Fleetwood Caravan's, down Magdalen Street, yeah, Fleetwood Caravan's.

(JJ) So, you've done a few jobs in your time.

Oh yes, I was always looking out for the other jobs.

(JJ) So when did you give up work then?

In..

(JJ) How old were you?

64.

(JJ) So you retired.

Yes.

(JJ) A sensible age.

The last three years, they, when they, I was going to retire earlier but then they, the supervisor I was working under at Paxman's, he heard that I was, you know, not doing anything and he phoned up my wife one day and said what's Arthur doing and she said well nothing at the moment he's thinking about giving up at the caravans and retiring, so he said "tell him to give me a ring" so I gave him a ring, he said "Arthur," he said "what do you mean in retiring, you know you won't settle down, he said, come back on your old job," he said, so he talked me into it and I went back to Paxman's and that's where I retired from.

(JJ) So when you retired, where did you, where did you live?

Yeah, we lived at Fordham, in the bungalow at Fordham.

(JJ) In Sunnyside.

Yes, in Sunnyside Road and then we had a Golden Wedding, me wife died a year later. And then, that was in '87, and I got fed up one night, I was fed up, you know, being on me own and sitting around, so I got in me car one night and, didn't know where I was going really, I just drove off, you know, and I finished off going up Straight Road and when I got to the top of Straight Road, I saw the Social Club and..

(BH) That's right yeah.

And that was the last Saturday in the month where they..

(JJ) Shrub End, yes at Shrub End.

My wife and I used to go there, once or twice for dancing, and I thought oh there's a dance up there tonight I'll, I'll see what it's like shall I, no I don't want to go in, but the nearer I got to the car park the more I thought about it and suddenly I turned in and that's the result, sitting here.

(JJ) So you met Beryl.

Yeah.

(JJ) And the dancing?

In between, around about the private hire service, after I was filling in jobs to, while I was waiting for orders to come in. After I made these boxes, for this lady, more people asked for boxes and then I went up to Jencol, well I didn't go up there, he phoned me up, the manager, phoned me up. Actually, he was put in there by the bank 'cause they were like that, and he was trying to get them out of trouble, and he said "could I make some boxes for them?" and I said "yes" and then in the end he said "well look, it's going to be a bit complicated," he said "could you come and organise 'em and get 'em going here?" So I said, I thought about it, and I thought well, I could discuss terms with him and I thought well I gotta get more than what I've been making, so I discussed terms with him and I got more and anyway we made hundreds of boxes there. We even made them for the jam factory and then that got

so that the firm was going down, the coal people, the apple people were going downhill, so he said to me one day, he said "I hate to have to have to tell you this, he said but, I don't want you to say anything about it, I don't want it mentioned until it happens, he said, but it's going to happen, 'cause he was in the bank when they were in the bank, trying to make a go of it.

(JJ) So bankruptcy came.

Yes, that was on the cards, so I went, he said "if I was you" he said "I would look for another job" so I went down to, in that immediate hour, I went down to Hunwick's on the bypass where they were doing furniture and making orders for the admiralty and all that sort of thing..

(BH) Nearly to the bridge.

Yeah, and anyway, asked for a job down there and he set me on right away. So I got a weeks' money, plus a handout, from the apple people and I started within a couple of days.

(JJ) So since you've been retired then, what have you been up to?

Well since I've been retired, I've done, the people opposite me, I've done a fitted kitchen for 'em.

(JJ) So keeping your hand in then?

Yes, I made a fitted kitchen, I've made a big wardrobe up to the ceiling with three doors on it, double wardrobe, another one with shelves all the way up. I've made about a hundred, easily a hundred, chairs haven't I? All the family, the kiddies have got chairs.

(BH) Children's chairs.

I've made loads of stools.

(BH) All upholstered.

(JJ) So you've got a good sized shed in the garden have you?

I've got a garage. When I packed driving the car I kept the garage on and I used to make all the, cut all the wood in there and the reason I got a new carpet is because I done the upholstery indoors.

(BH) He'd got a workshop indoors.

(JJ) Well, we've just about reached our time, we've done almost an hour on the tape and we'll just thank you for coming along and talking to us.

I hope that's been satisfactory.

(JJ) Adding to our oral history and certainly Fordham and the general area, It's a piece of history.

I remember when there was two shops in Fordham, two pubs and two Sunday schools.

(MB) Yeah.

(JJ) Two pubs, the Vulcan and the..

(MB) Yeah, there was three, The Shoulder of Mutton as well.

(JJ) the one at the bottom as well. Well we'll end there, thank you.

(MB) So do you, do you still write poetry.

Yeah.

(MB) Do you ever get it published, do you ever..

I've had five published.

(MB) Have you?

(BH) Of course, he can't see so well no so he can't write them out.

I have to think about them and then put them on tape.

(MB) Did Mossie ever say anything about the First World War to you?

Who?

(MB) Mossie Pettican.

No, no.

(MB) I know he always used to say he had a sweetheart over there and he'd go back and see her.

Oh yeah.

(MB) I know he was married to your sister in law but that's beside the point.

Oh yes, yes. Oh yes. I tell you one that I sent it up, to try and, publishers, they do all these, they take all these poems from people, put them in a book and then they have them published and all the royalties go to charity.

(BH) Yes, a Christian Aid thing.

Christian Aid, that's right Beryl, you've got it. And I done one, a Christian one, about our beautiful earth, and I've done, if you'd like to hear it.

As I wandered through the haze of the warm summer days,
Through the fields and the trees so green.

As I stand by the brook and around me I look,
I see nature's most beautiful scene.

As I stand there and gaze, I feel the sun's golden rays,
All like the touch of a hand.

Am I really worth this beautiful earth,
A beauty that only God could have planned.

I hear the birds in the trees, I feel the warm summer breeze,
Gently caressing my face.

And the flowers that abound in the fields all around,
Given to us by God's grace.

But we must pray to God everyday, that man will not destroy this beautiful earth,
But preserve every turf, for future generations to enjoy.

(JJ) Lovely.

(BH) Yeah nice.

(MB) Yeah, that's lovely, that.

(JJ) Thanks very much.

(MB) Excellent.

Thank you.

(MB) Yes, excellent.

(JJ) And we've got that on tape as well.

(MB) That's good, that's a nice ending, isn't it? Don't put that on it...

Transcribed by Theresa Jephcott in February 2012.

