

Voices of Hickling

Interview Transcript: John Findlay

In conversation with Ann Louise Kinmonth 31st January 2020

ALK: *Why don't you just say for the tape, um, the date you were born and where you were born.*

JF: **My name is John Stuart Findlay. I was born at 3 High Hill, Hickling and, um, that was, that was an accident as well by the way - not the fact that I was born: it was the fact that there was a - I was supposed to be born in Norwich and there was an ambulance and my mother couldn't be taken to Norwich 'cos there was an air raid on in Norwich, so I was brought back to Hickling and Nurse, Nurse Bishop I think, was the nurse who helped with, with my birth at Hickling. Which apparently my mum didn't, she wasn't very good at having babies so she took a long time to do it apparently.**

And, um, er, she said that, er, I was sort of wrapped up in a towel and said "Oh, well, it's very small, it won't survive, chuck it under the bed, and, and Nurse Bishop said "It's alive." - and that was me! Used to happen in those days I guess.

I mean we're going back 70 years aren't we? 77 years, 76 years. So, I guess, you know, that sort of used to happen in those days. But, um, that was, that was my start, at 3 High Hill.

ALK: *What are your early memories of Hickling? Are there stories you particularly want to share today?*

JF: **Well, my early memories really are, um, of the freedom that we had as children in those days. I mean I used to get turned out, er, in the morning sometimes with a bottle of drink and a couple of sandwiches and, er, a couple of bob, or a half crown or something and young Joe Nudd, my mate from next door, number 4 High Hill, Hickling, we would go down to the, we would go down to the Broad and we would go to Whispering Reeds Boatyard, hire a boat and go out on the Broads, er, for half a day fishing.**

And, er, if we wanted to swim – we learnt to swim by just jumping over the side of the boat and swimming round the boat – and that was what was done in those days. Health & safety, of course, we know, didn't exist, but there was this freedom.

Um, another great memory of the Broad was Roland Green, the, the bird artist, um, and I, on one or two occasions I used to row his boat

out onto the Broad when I was about, I guess, 10 or 11 maybe at the most, um, and he would sit in the back of the boat and sketch. And we did that a couple of times and me and a mate of mine would, would row him out there. And, of course, he's one of the most famous bird artists in the country.

I understand he taught Peter Scott and people like that how to paint, so, er, you know, it was just this blissful childhood.

When you look back on it and you compare it with the childhoods of children today who, whose parents don't let them out of their sight and stuff like that. With me it was off you go, be home by dark – and if it was getting near dark and we'd be on our little bikes and Mr Beales, who was the local policeman at the time and greatly respected – a huge man on this very tall bike – used to, basically he would see you and he'd say “Go on young John. Get home. I don't want to have to come round and tell your mum you're out late.”

And the village was like that in those days and, of course it's still, a lot of, a lot of the families in the village were still very much affected by the war because, I mean, the war was only gone a year or so and, um, it was, it was as I say, my memories of it were just blissful, really, looking back.

ALK: How old do you think you were on your bike and on the Broad and that?

JF: Oh, I wasn't, would have been from 8, 9, 10.

ALK: Mmm.

JF: Late, sort of young, early childhood. Um, and, really and I, I, my family moved to, to Catfield and I went to Stalham School but very much spent most of my free time not in Catfield but in Hickling where I, my mates were – well it was Joseph and David Nudd.

I think David is on your, on your site, and um, and he was, he was, um, very keen on cricket. We used to play cricket in the street. Um, ...

ALK: Whereabouts?

JF: Well, outside 3 High Hill, on the road. I mean 'cos there'd only be a car about every 20 minutes, wouldn't there? And we used to go up what was called the Loke to where the um, er, where, where the allotments were, when my grandfather had an allotment and there was a very narrow path and we used to put the wickets up there and just play cricket on that.

I mean it wasn't like in a field, it was a narrow strip. And you just bowled and kept the ball out, and kept the ball out, and when you were out you changed and the other guy...

And I remember David Nudd , who was on your thing, he used, he used to do an impression of John Arlott, who was a very famous commentator, cricket commentator at the time, and, er, he, he, he did that – he might not even remember that himself now but I remember it quite vividly.

And Joseph Nudd was a mate, a real great mate of mine – fearless tree climber because a lot of our time was spent across from 3 High Hill, from High Hill there is still like a little narrow wood there and in our Norfolk dialects we would call it the Plantin’ – it was actually I guess short for plantation – but it was just ..., and we just, just lived in there.

And my, my cousin Derek, er, would, would - they lived in the Midlands, his father was, um, er a collier, and they would come down for the whole summer. And they would, they would be at my grandparents for the summer – and we would, we would just live again this, this idyllic life, really.

In the, in the harvest time you’d go, you’d go to the harvest fields and you all had, well the kids then had rabbit sticks. They would be men with guns, maybe a couple of them would be there with shotguns. Er, never allowed today of course, shotguns and children running around – you can imagine the horror. But in those days they knew what they were doing, the kids knew what they were doing.

And at the end the binders, I remember the old fashioned binders that used to make shocks of corn, and they were going to be stacked up to dry in the fields. Um, and um, gradually the binder would move to the middle, to the middle of the field and everybody waited with sort of bated breaths because they knew that last few minutes when they cut the last of the corn there’d be about probably a dozen rabbits would run out ’cos they would gradually, gradually be herded into the middle. And, er, the kids, you know, but the kids knew that you stayed back because if there was, some of these rabbits were going to get shot and so you didn’t run in front of the guns.

Once the corn had dried it went off to, I think the farmer was Chapman, I think the Chapmans are still there. They had a farm at Brightmere and, um, the, I think Brightmere Farm is still there.

And I think there is still, certainly recently there is still Chapmans at the, at Brightmere Farm and, um, he always had, if I remember he used to, er, get awards for having the neatest stacks and his stacks, in the stackyard, would be laid out in perfect order and would be immaculate and thatched, and they used to thatch the stacks, er, until they were ready to be, er, thrashed.

And then, of course, the big thrashing machine would come in and again the kids would, at that time, um, the kids would all be there with their little sticks and things because when they stripped these thatched stacks down to put them into the thrashing machines there would be mice and rats and things running about and of course they. It was all part of the game, it was part of the country life.

Er, it was just wonderful, this wonderful thing.

My grandfather never took me ferreting but the men used to go ferreting – they used to get permission from the farmer – and they would take ferrets to the, to the fields and put them in to catch rabbits and stuff like that. They used to catch rabbits in nets and stuff. And, of course, it supplemented people's food in those days because I would imagine shortly after the war there were still rationing and stuff like that.

I remember, one of my vivid memories was my Scottish grandfather, when he used to come back to Aberdeen because we would spend, we would spend, my mother and myself, would spend six months, like in, um, most of the summer we'd spend 6 months in Hickling and then we'd go up to Aberdeen to live with my Scottish grandparents 'cos my mother by that time had not re-married and, um, we would, we would go to Scotland and we would come back, back to England.

But my Scottish grandfather was a sea captain and he would, er, on tankers, and he would come back, he would come back from Galveston – er, that was one of the names where the, where the oil tankers used to come from and he would bring candy, or sweets, er, to the kids.

This was not in Hickling, of course, this was in Aberdeen, um, where he lived, and he was a very popular man with the kids there because he just used to distribute that stuff.

And I remember my grandmother and them, they would save, they would save, they would save their coupons they used to have didn't they? Um, they had coupons that you traded for sweets. You were allowed to buy so many sweets or sugar or whatever it was. Um, so that's another memory I have of that time.

Of the, of the, the, the, the kids playing, you know. It, it, it was, but as I say my overwhelming memory is this freedom that we had. We would walk all the fields. You knew you didn't walk across a field, you went round the hedgerows.

And we went birds nesting and in those days – not allowed now obviously today – kids would have collections of birds' eggs. But they never took them all out of a nest, if there were 4 eggs in a nest they

might take one and then they used to blow them – they used to make little holes in and blow the yolks out – um, um, little collections.

I personally never, I wasn't very brave I suppose at getting through the thorny, thorny hedges. So I never got many eggs or anything like that. I didn't, I wasn't really into the actual collection of eggs but it was, that was another thing we would do.

And we'd be out all day doing that.

ALK: *Did you know the names of the fields and?*

JF: Oh yes, well you did and you knew, there was Eastfield and you'd go down and turn, you'd go down to where the village school was, from High Hill, turn left there and you'd walk up Eastfield.

There was the main wood that we used to play in was up behind the church, Vincent's Wood, I don't know if it is still called Vincent's Wood but, um, er, you know we would go into Vincent's Wood.

There was a bow and arrow tree there. There was, um, a large willow tree that had fallen down years before and it would, the willow saplings would grow straight up from this trunk. And we used to cut these and take them home, leave them for a few weeks, strip the bark off and make bows out of them. And the arrows were made out of rushes, out of reeds and you would have a, a, a rush arrow and the tip of the arrow was always a bit of elder. You would cut a little piece of elder and you would shove the tip, the end of the arrow into this. These were quite strong reeds, of course, and there would be bows and arrows, that was another thing we'd do.

ALK: *What was the flights. Were they ---- head (?)*

JF: There were no flights. They just worked on, they just, they just worked on the weight, er, at the front that would, you know, and we would do, we would do that – bows and arrows.

How we didn't shoot each other I don't know! JF LAUGHS

But we used to do that, it was good.

Vincent actually, Jimmy Vincent who was a very famous ornithologist, gamekeeper and stuff was actually, my mother's godfather. Um, how that came about I don't know, whether there was a family connection I don't know, but, um, er, that was, that was Vincent's Wood and it was lovely.

I remember the kids, we used to go up there and there would be daffodils and there would be bluebells and we would pick bunches of wild daffodils and we would bring 'em back and for my grandmother, for my mother, I'd bring them bunches of daffodils. And I know one or

two of the kids would have these bunches of daffodils in a bucket beside the road and some people used to stop and buy 'em, you know. I never did that, I wasn't, you know, sort of commercially minded enough I suppose. But that was another, just another part of your life, another

And then, of course, there was the, the time, there was conker time wasn't there? The horse chestnut time, there'd be the odd horse chestnut tree – you always knew where they were – um, and you'd have them to play with and it was just wonderful.

It was a just this amazing freedom. Nobody said, you know, nobody was worried about you being out of sight and that sort of stuff.

ALK: *Did you know the other farms as well? Or was it mainly*

JF: **Mainly Bright, er, Brightmere Farm because they had a football team which you've probably heard about. Er, Brightmere Albion.**

There was Hickling had a football team, er, but Brightmere Albion used to play and if I remember rightly my grandfather used to laugh because they used to, they always when we went up there we would be up there, um, probably a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes before the game, er, to shovel the cowpats off the pitch – because it was, it was a meadow.

Um, I don't know if anybody's mentioned this to you before, but I remember it vividly and, and he used to laugh and he used to say these, um, um, town teams that used to come out, they hadn't played on a pitch where there were cowpats and, and of course they, they used to play.

Gordie Cator was one of the better players I remember. That was, that was Brightmere Albion.

Um, and I, I somebody told me quite recently actually, somebody from, somebody in this village who knows, knew the Chapman family quite well, and knew Josie Chapman – I don't know if Josie is still alive or still around, certainly be quite an old lady now – um, her brother Joe who came to this village and he died from this village I think, um, he, he was sort of, um, a typical farm boy who stayed on the farm all his life and I think they said the football team was more or less built around him to give him something, you know, as an interest for him.

Er, and that's why, and they had the field there right where the farm is, where the Hickling/Stalham road is you would turn into the Hickling/Stalham road, go a few hundred yards up there and it was in a field on the left, er, where they used to play.

I remember, I remember that well and we, you could cut through the Loke from High Hill, you would go, come out of, out of High Hill, turn right and you would just go straight up through this footpath, The Loke, across and you would come out opposite Brightmere Albion where they used to play their football.

And, and that was another thing, but it was a smallish world, really. Up, up as far as the church, and Vincent's Wood, um, and, er, occasionally I mean, in the summer, probably every two or three weeks, we would, we would walk to Sea Palling and, er, you know, and because it was what, Sea Palling, two and a half, three miles away – I don't know – and we would walk there.

I remember my Aunt Hazel, um, would be, er, would be pushing, pushing one of the babies in a pram and we'd have sandwiches and stuff and we'd go off, off there, off to Sea Palling.

In 1953, when the floods were, I was 10 and my grandfather took me to Sea Palling on my little bike. We cycled to Sea Palling and as you went on to the main road at Sea Palling you could see the sea.

Well, now there are sand dunes and stuff like that but that flood flattened everything, I remember it well.

And there was another friend of mine, another David Nudd believe it or not, who lived in Sea Palling. I think he got some bravery award for saving people because he was a wonderful swimmer, living in Sea, He was a Sea Palling boy and he, he was at Stalham School and, um, I remember, that's another little memory there. These things come, keep coming back, you know. But, but it was

ALK: *What else do you remember about that flood in 1953?*

JF: '53. Well I do remember that, everything being flattened and on the main road and seeing just the odd house up.

There would be, there were one or two brick built houses but most of the houses along the beach road at Sea Palling were sort of like wooden shacks and things and I guess they were just washed away in the flood, 'cos it was a, a, it was a massive thing, it was a massive flood.

Um, which, er, it broke through at Horsey and it flattened everything at Sea Palling. The, I can't remember the, the name of the pub at Sea Palling but at the top end of Beach Road I think there is still a high water mark on that, marked on that. Or there certainly was for a number of years and you thought, everything, but I mean a huge area was flooded wasn't it, for a time, you know and it was a time when for er, um, for a year or so after that, um, all the pike fishing and fishing was

not very good because obviously the salt water got into the Broads, killed most, most things.

ALK: *Were you a fisherman?*

JF: I, I used to, I learnt to fish. I, I, I wasn't a, a great fisherman as such, er, but I learnt to fish like all the kids. You know, it was one of, one of the things we used to do, you know. We'd go down and we'd fish in the, in the, in the, in the Broads.

ALK: *What did you get?*

JF: Oh, just normal sort of coarse fish, roach and stuff like that. Perch and roach and, er, and if you were lucky, if you, well some of the boys would fish for pike. At that age I was terrified of a pike – I mean they had big teeth didn't they?

Um, I, I, I've since enjoyed pike fishing but, um, er, but at that time the last thing I wanted was a pike on my line.

Well, the only time you saw a pike was if you would catch a roach or something like that and as you were, as you were reeling it in, er, a pike would come and take it, you know. There'd be a great swirl and there it'd be, gone, sort of thing. So, there was that.

The other thing about the Broad I remember, my grandfather taking me down – I, now it must have been one of my earliest memories 'cos I would only have been 4 or 5 and the Broad was frozen over and I remember they had ice yachts. They actually made ice yachts on the Broad. And there was skating and I remember us, me and him, walking out on the Broad and him holding my hand and, and he wouldn't let go of me 'cos he said there were odd bits where there was warm water underneath and the ice would be thin.

That, that was another thing, er, that I, I remembered well. I believe they even had sort of braziers on the ice, that night. I might have got that wrong but certainly, certainly remember something like that.

Um, and, of course, I remember going down and seeing the early sailing um, er, boats down there and the early regattas – it was always great.

There were, and I remember the early catamarans that, that were there. Um, and, and it was, it was quite an event, you know.

And, of course, the Broad was a big part of my life in a way because my grandmother worked for Mrs Amis at The Pleasure Boat. Um, as sort of doing domestic work and stuff like that, and, um, she, she worked for Mrs Amis for quite a number of years, I remember that.

ALK: *Was she there when Prince Charles stayed?*

JF: I don't think so. He, I thinkNo, no. She would have been there before that.

But she, she was there certainly through my early, early days. I remember her telling my grandfather off tremendously because I'd got a cold and I remember him taking me down the Pleasure Boat and giving me a sip of whisky for my throat. JF LAUGHS.

And I think he took a long time to live that one down, you know.

Um, and, er, it was, she, she, she was a wonderful woman – she was Cornish – and my grandfather was a fisherman and he met her down in Cornwall when the, to the western fishing as they used to say, pilchards and stuff like that.

And I remember because my mother, although she was brought up a Hickling girl, my mother was born in Plymouth. Um, because they were down, they lived down in Plymouth for a while until they came back, came back to Hickling, to High Hill.

Um, I don't know when the High Hill houses were built but maybe they were some of the earliest residents of High Hill.

ALK: Who else was there, in the other ones?"

JF: Well, I, I, I, I can't remember the name of the old couple who were in number 1 but Mitchell, Mrs Mitchell – who was my godmother – had 12 children of her own and, er, her husband, Mr Mitchell – he was just also known as Mitchell.

They didn't seem to have Christian names but they were known as Mitchell – he was the local chimney sweep and, um, he, I remember him having a little pony and trap and going round the village in the early, very early days, er, because he would take the bags of soot away.

And he, he had a smallholding, an allotments up at the far end of High Hill as you, as you go up towards new town, up towards the church. Um, you go round that corner and on the right, on your right there were allotments there, you would have, and it was almost like a smallholding, he would have stuff there.

And I think, well he had 12 kids to support. Well I, I believe they lost, I believe a couple of the older ones were lost in the war but, er, I knew Audrey and Eric were the, were some of the younger ones, I remember, I remember them.

Um, and um, but Mitchell and my grandmother, who lived at number 3, they, they would meet at the hedge, in between, er, the two, and they, they hardly ever went into each other's houses. Er, I think Mitchell would have come into the house when, er, Mitchell would have come

into the house as a sort of impromptu midwife if there, when I think my cousin Derek was born. I think Mitchell was there before Nurse Bishop, before But Nurse Bishop delivered me and, er, and Derek, my cousin.

ALK: *So, who was living in your house?*

JF: That was, that was Tuck – my grandfather was John Thomas Tuck, my grandmother was Mary Jane Tuck, their graveyard, their grave is in, in the Hickling churchyard and, er, um, my mother's ashes are in that grave as well and, um, er, they were, my grandmother was, everyone called her Minnie, I guess 'cos Mary Jane which was her name and he was always known as Jack Tuck.

And then the next one at that was number 4 were the Nudds, that was Alice, she was from Shields, she had this.... When I, when I was learning to speak, I was learning to speak during the time we were going up to Scotland and back to England and when we came back from Scotland nobody could understand a damn word I said because I had this Scottish accent and Alice Nudd would know what I was saying because she came from Shields apparently and she had a

But Jack Nudd was her, her, her husband and I can't remember

There's um, a Robin Nudd in, in there who I understand he's very ill at the moment but still, um, hopefully still living. He was there up until six months ago certainly, living in there and that's I think he's living now in the house he, he was born in or lived in in those days – having moved away and then moved back there. Robin is still there.

And then at the top end there were the Myhills, um. Yeah, and I think there were Beales's. Er, there was, certainly Nudd was a big name there.

Er, I don't know of any other Tucks and, er, I, I remember a Mrs Piggin, who was a great friend of my, my grandmothers. Er, I remember the,er, not Blaxell, er, oh, Osborne – um, she had a little sweet shop and John Osborne is buried in the grave – I think it was John who died very young, 10 or 11 years old, - and he, he is in the next grave to my mother and grandparents grave in Hickling churchyard now. Um, I see that every so often.

I remember him, him dying actually. He wasn't a particularly close friend of mine but I do remember him, him dying.

Oh, there was a Mike Smith, Michael Smith who lived there as well – he died quite young when, but after he left school. He died in his twenties. It was sad, there was a lot, some of them just didn't live for long. Yea, young people who did die.

But, um, as I say, the Beales family were there, er, in, they were quite a big, big family. Um, yeah, um, it, it was – um, I think Waldo Beales had Whispering Reeds, the boatyard where we used to rent, I think it's still at the back of the Pleasure Boat, um, that dyke that runs up the back of The Pleasure Boat.

Um, yeah, but the main, as I say the vivid things are the harvest field, really vivid 'cos it sticks out in my mind.

The other thing was I happened to be born, er, with an ability to run very quickly. In fact if you speak to any of the kids who, whenever my wife meets any of my old school friends, er, they say “Oh, John yeah – he could run like hell.”, you know, and I was, I was quite a good, quite a good runner at the, at the time and, um, sport got me through my life really, because I wasn't a great academic, but, but, um, but I was always quite good at sport which always makes you quite popular I found, you know.

ALK: *Did you play with David Nudd?*

JF: Well, yeah, yeah and um, the, the, er, I still have a photograph, in fact I found a photograph yesterday of, of a football team that I, that I played in and I still remember the names of all the boys on there and, um, that was, that was for Stalham School from the age of, did you go there when you were eleven or twelve, when you went there?

But my first school was Hickling School ...

ALK: *Mmmm.*

JF: ... and my first teacher was Mrs Gold and I remember her being really kind because I, I, I might have mentioned it before, but there was a special occasion and, um, we had to wear our best clothes and, of course, my best clothes was a kilt. And I was sent – mother, mother never thought there was anything wrong with it, you know, she put my kilt on, and er, and my little sporran and my kilt and off I went to this do and, of course, the boys up there had never seen anything like it and they were “Why are you wearing a skirt?”.

I remember getting through that day and coming home early and throwing the kilt in the corner saying “I will no be wearing that ever again.” JF LAUGHS.

And I think that kilt went on to be handed on to my sister and I think eventually handed on to someone else – 'cos, of course, they never wore out. But I had the little sporran here until fairly recently and it's, it's probably still around somewhere.

ALK: *So why did you have that pattern of living? Why did your grandparents come back to Hickling? What, what's – you were an only child.*

JF: Er, I had a sister who was six she was by my mother's second marriage.

My mother married – it's strange, if you look in Hickling church you'll see that a Mrs, Mrs W J Findlay er, widow of James Findlay, married James Findlay because my step-father was also called James Findlay!

ALK: *But not related?*

JF: Er, they were sort of distant cousins I understand, from the same little village on the Moray Firth up in Scotland. And, you know, and my grandparents, I don't know – I guess my grandfather was a Hickling man and when they married I guess, I think it may have been when the house became available in Hickling, they moved back from Plymouth to, er, but they weren't there a long time because my mother said she was brought up, along with her two sisters, in, in, at High Hill.

And, um, er, she said my grandfather was quite a tough character, a fisherman, and, um, apparently my grandmother if they were naughty when he was away "Wait till you father. Wait till your father comes home." You know.

When, when, when she'd say "your dad's home: upstairs." And they'd be, she'd say Jack those girls have been this and that and the next thing and he would go upstairs and he'd take his belt off and he'd thrash the pillow, and he'd hit the pillow and they all used to shout and cry and pretend to be. JF LAUGHS. She said "He'd smack the pillow with his belt so

ALK: *This is your mum?*

JF: This is my mum and her two sisters – there was my Aunt Doris and Aunt Hazel.

Aunt Hazel married a collier and he was in the army and came down to this area on the anti-aircraft guns and, um, of course, because he was a miner, um, he was released from the army early because he, it was a reserved occupation – he had to go back and work in the mines.

ALK: *Be a Bevan Boy.*

JF: Well, whatever he was, you know. He was, he was a miner all his life, um, and er, and er, er, Alf, their name was Hayward, Alf Hayward – he was a very famous dart player, um, got very high up in the World Championships at darts in those days.

But, I mean, that wasn't that much to do with Hickling – they lived, lived in Swadlingcote, um, er, which was the Belper constituency.

He was, he was a great personal friend of Lord George Brown who, the old politician and they were great drinking buddies and spent a lot of time together.

But um, my grandfather - as I say he was a tough, he was a tough old fisherman, you know - and they retired from fishing I guess they used to retire fairly young. I mean he was in, he was in um, er, on an armed merchantman during the First World War - there's a picture of it on the wall over there - and, um, anti-submarines and minesweeping and stuff like that.

And then after the war they went back, they went back to, to fishing.

In those days they used to have, every so many trawlers they put a gun on one and I used to say "What was that for, grandad?" and he said "If the Scharnhorst and Gneisenau came up the channel to sink our fleet we had to chase 'em off." JF LAUGHS.

What they would have done with these German battleships, God knows but that was, that was the way things were in those days. But, er, and then in the Second World War he was in the Home Guard er

ALK: *So he brought you up?*

JF: Largely, yeah. I think my mother married again when I was 7 – 6 or 7.

ALK: *Do you have any memory of your dad?*

JF: None at all. Um, we have the picture, of him, um, holding me. See I was born in October '43 and he died in July '44.

And, but my mum said, you know, she said today if a, a, a, sadly if a boy gets killed abroad in the army or something like that the family want counselling, they want to go and see where it happened, they want this that and the other, she said "I had the vicar came up to the" She said "We got a telegram." And then I had the vicar come up to the path and say "Joan, sorry to hear about Jimmy. If there's anything I can do for you be in touch but I'm very busy at the moment."

'Cos Hickling lost several men didn't they, I mean these villages lost men.

Um, I think, I think there was a guy called Arthur Nobbs and he was not well. I remember as a young man, er, him still being ill and he died, um, from stuff caught 'cos he was in a Japanese prisoner of war camp and stuff like that.

Because, of course, Hickling the men, the men, the Royal Norfolk Regiment was one of the regiments which were captured. I think they were captured in Singapore, by the Japanese, you know, they had a terrible time.

My, my father hopefully had a quick clean death, um.

ALK: That was in Normandy?

JF: In Normandy, yeah. Um, and he's buried in er, er, near Calvados um, and I haven't, haven't been to his grave.

I have actually pictures of my mother meeting the Queen when she went over on the fortieth, on the fortieth anniversary, um, of that, er, er, they took forty wives of, forty widows and, er, they should have been widows who hadn't remarried but because my mother was still called Mrs Findlay and still married they invited her, and when she pointed out that she had remarried they said your name is still Findlay and you're on the list now so you've got to go.

So we've got cuttings out from the front page of the Daily Mirror of my mother actually meeting the queen. Er, when she went over and, um, and my mother also met, er, a general who was over there during, during that time who knew her and actually recognised her.

'Cos my mum worked in the central war rooms, er, the old Ministry of Works, um, offices to the war rooms. Churchill's war rooms were underground in Whitehall, and my mother was one of his, um, I think he had something like 4, um, er, er, personal assistants, and my mum was one of them and she used to take, take his messages and she used to do coding and cypher and stuff like that.

ALK: When did she do that? How did she fit that in with being here and...?

JF: Oh, no, no, you see that was before I was born, er, and as, when, when she met my father, in '42, and they married early '43 I think – they got married in Scunthorpe for some reason 'cos he was posted up there – and, um, she worked for Churchill - until he said to her one day “Miss Norfolk, er, we are going to have to part company because I can't have you running around with that lump in the front of your uniform.”

And then she came out of the army then.

ALK: He called her Miss Norfolk.

JF: He called her Miss Norfolk, yeah.

There was one very funny story. Probably you wouldn't put it on a tape or anything like that, but she said she dashed into his office one day and his office was, I've seen it, I've been there. It was probably not quite as big as this room, highly polished linoleum floor and a mat, rug, in front of his desk.

The desk with two telephones on it, - oh, I've been there – and a bed, single bed up one corner, er, where he used to sleep when he wanted to sleep.

And she dashed in one day and slipped on this rug, ended up on her backside with her feet in the air, and he said, he looked over the, um, he looked over his desk and said “Is that you Miss Norfolk?”

She said “Yes sir, sorry sir.”

And he said “I see we are not wearing regulation dress.”

She said because she had a boyfriend who was, at the time she had this friend of hers, er, who was an American serviceman, this was before she met my father, and this was an American serviceman and he brought her some silk knickers over from JF LAUGHS and she wasn't wearing her khaki bloomers like she was supposed to so... JF CONTINUES TO LAUGH,

But she said she remembers Lady Churchill, um, er, as she later became, then she was just Mrs Churchill I suppose, um, er, driving up. She said um, er, Downing Street was a one way street, she said “and I can remember her driving this car up, up with the kids in the back of the car and er, the wrong way, Mrs Churchill , I'm only going one way sort of thing, you know. I remember that happening“ she said.

And I remember, er, looking after certainly one of the kids, er, for a couple of hours, you know, and, um, she said, she said “When you go to the War Rooms” she said “see if the crypt is still there.”

And I said “The crypt?”

She said “Yes we used to, if there, if there was an air raid going on we couldn't go home at the end of a shift.” She said we would sleep on the job, sort of thing, and she said we used to go down into a crypt underneath and there were these bunk beds, er, three high bunk beds and she said you used to just grab a blanket, and just lay down on the bunk bed, cover yourself up and you stayed there.

And she said I've frequently laid there and there'd be a general over there and a, a Vice- Admiral over there she said everybody went in.

So when we went there to the..., when Kate and myself went to the central War Rooms they had actually got a plate glass thing over it so you couldn't go down in the crypt but there was a panel, there was a little plaque saying this was where people used to sleep.

So she had a very exciting very

ALK: *How did she get that job?”*

JF: She was very clever.

Sadly, um, because my Aunt Hazel was constantly ill, asthmatic and stuff like that, um, and that was before the National Health, all the

family money went on doctor's fees for her, so my mother couldn't actually go to the grammar school, the high school, so she left school, um, and, just as a very bright lady with a lot of potential. When....

ALK: *Was she living in Cornwall then?*

JF: **No, this was, she was in Hickling then. When, when she, when she went to join the army, as soon as she could she wanted to get out. She see, wanted to see a bigger world.**

ALK: *How old was she then?*

JF: **I guess she'd have been about 18.**

ALK: *Yeah. 17 or 18.*

JF: **18. Anyway, she went into the army**

ALK: *So she was at Stalham School?*

JF: **No she, I think, think it was just Hickling School till they left.**

ALK: *13, 14.*

JF: **Yeah, yeah. And, um, she, they did aptitude tests and they discovered she was very bright and she was only in the army six months when she became a sergeant, because she was doing work which, um, er, needed a certain rank to, to, to do.**

And, er, that's why on the wedding photograph up there you'll see my father is a sergeant and my mum's a sergeant. They've got, you can see, their stripes and, um

ALK: *Is that where they met?*

JF: **In the army , yeah. In, in, in London and um, it was, um, you know, er, and she couldn't be an officer 'cos she hadn't gone to a Grammar School and it was. It was a class thing.**

But she was very, very bright so Churchill had three, three officers and my mum as his personal assistants. And she said, you know, she said.

And then when I was born, obviously she came out of the army, when I was born and just after the war, er, she joined the NAAFI, er, Navy, Army, Air Force, Institute, the NAAFI. And she became manageress in a NAAFI at, for the, right at the end of the war, at Dyce Airport, up in Scotland – she got transferred up there.

And, um, and she met, um, she met some of the Dambuster Squadron and people like that up there.

ALK: *And where were you?*

JF: **Oh, she, I was taken up there with her and lived with my grandparents.**

ALK: *Ah, those grandparents, yes.*

JF: **Those grandparents. Yeah, I mean, it was almost like I'd got three sets of grandparents because my, my, my father's family were still alive, my stepfather's family were still alive – although I didn't have that much to do with them – and, um, of course, the family down in, the family down in Hickling.**

But most of the family then emigrated to New Zealand and they're in New Zealand now, the family's in Mel..., so I have now, my sister died a couple of years ago, er, and I have my cousin Derek, and I have my, a niece, and that's all my family er, at the moment.

And my cousin's er, my cousin's offspring obviously, Derek's offspring.

Um, and I married a woman whose family are like the seven tribes of Israel, there are thousands of 'em, JF LAUGHS, you know, so I married in to a huge family.

ALK: *Lets, let's, let's go, get back to there then. Um, thinking about your growing up, and you said a bit about holidays, a little bit about school. Can you say a bit more about school, I think.*

JF: **Well**

ALK: *You've just told me that Mrs Gold is very kind. Can you tell us a bit more about it?*

JF: **That was when, that was the first school I went to**

ALK: *Yeah.*

JF: **...and I was there until we moved.**

I remember that being that first school and Mrs Gold was really good. I remember there was an occasion where we were learning to read and she made the mistake of, of getting us all to read the same passage, so when it came to my – it was about Jack Spratt I remember, Jack Spratt could eat no fat, his wife could eat no lean, and so between the pair of them they licked the platter clean.

Well, I'd heard this about four times so "Jack Spratt could eat no" ba, ba, ba, ba, I just said it 'cos I knew it. She said "Very good John, ten out of ten.", you know, "Go and sit down."

I do remember that, whether she actually twigged 'cos I, I, I, you know, I wasn't slower than any other kid to read but I was quick enough to learn that, you know.

I was quite good at learning poetry and stuff like that, um

ALK: *Do you remember who you sat next to?*

JF: No, no I don't really remember who I sat next to.

ALK: Or played with?

JF: It might have been Joe Nudd, it might have been Joe. Certainly I used to spend all my time playing with him, we were, we were great buddies.

And David Nudd was around quite a bit. I don't know if he, I don't know if he, what year was he born? I was born in 43, I don't know if he was slightly older.

ALK: I think he was.

JF: Yeah, he might have been a year older but it would only have been about a year, maybe two at the most.

But I remember him doing John Arlott impressions, I do remember that. That was quite funny.

ALK: Do you remember the classroom?

JF: I do remember the classroom and the school, of course the school is still there and, er, you know, it brings back memories every time you go past it.

I drove, I drove past, um, I drove past, um, there every so often when I can – about every few weeks I go down and see my mum's grave and all the rest of it and I go past High Hill and, um, I, I, my, my, I, I remember my wife, my wife had a couple of very grand aunts and she came from a quite well to do background.

Um, and I remember taking Aunt Kate, she's my wife's Kate and I remember taking Aunt Kate and we pulled up outside 3 High Hill and I said "That house there, Aunt Kate, is where I was born."

She said "Were you really dear? But that's, isn't that a council house?"

Any way we gloss over

ALK: How old were you when you met Kate?

JF: When I met Kate, I was twenty seven.

ALK: Yeah. Where were you then?

JF: Er, I came out of the Navy and I jobbed around odd little jobs and I ended up working at Cantley Sugar Beet Factory and, er, my parents had a pub, at Reedham, and the chief chemist was a guy called Bill Dickie, a Scotsman, and he said, er, "Do you know any chemistry, John?"

I said "Only very brief, school chemistry." I said "I did a bit when I, at Naval School, when I went to Ganges." I did a little bit of chemistry there.

He said "That's good enough, come and see me." He said. I went there and he got one of the shift chemists to teach me the routine tests that they were...

ALK: *Sugar analysis.*

JF: Sugar analysis. So, um, it was fairly basic, very basic stuff, and, um, so after a while, er, when the sugar campaign finished, I did two years there and then, er, a job came up to train in work study engineering, in the, within the corporation and they sent us, they sent me to Ely, and, of course Kate came from Ely in Cambridgeshire.

And, um, by this time I'd taken up golf and I was, I'd got an aptitude for sport and I was, I was a reasonable golfer.

ALK: *You don't have to run with golf.*

JF: No, but I, I'd play any game really, table tennis, tennis, er, I just, football. It turned out that the best sport, the best sport I was at was rugby, funnily enough – because I could run.

And anyway, um, I was there and I had a sort of lowish handicap at golf. I was playing off about 5 or 6 handicap at golf. And, um, er, I went down and joined the local golf club.

Well I went down and asked if I could, because I was going to be put at Ely for 6 months and I said "I don't want to join for a whole year because I'm only going to be for six months and I really can't afford to pay the fees for a whole....".

And they said alright, the secretary said you'd better come and meet the captain. I went and met the captain – very nice chap, big tall fella, very military looking – and he said "What's your handicap, young man?".

I said, er, "5."

So he said "You're in."

So I said "Don't I have to?"

"No" he said "you're in." He said "I'm the captain, I'm in charge, you're in".

That was Kath's dad.

After I'd been playing there for about a month or six weeks all of a sudden this really gorgeous girl with this big mop of black hair, dark hair, turned up behind the bar and I said "hello. Who are you?"

Oh she said "I'm going to be the temporary stewardess here for a few weeks until they get a new steward".

What happened, the old steward and stewardess left the club to go somewhere else and she'd been working in Germany and came home, um, came home and he said while you're home would you do this.

Because she, she'd been to some sort of a finishing school somewhere and learnt how to cater and do stuff like that. So she could make cakes for the ladies, and tea and stuff like that. So she worked at there and, and we met.

And after about, I don't know, I didn't waste a lot of time I know. After 3 or 4 months I proposed and we got married and she was 20 when we got married.

Then we came after, after a year, eighteen months, we came here to Winterton, um, through, again through golf connections and through my parents having a pub, er, we came to Winterton, to the Fisherman's Return.

And, um, I think she was the youngest landlady in Norfolk at the time, 'cos she was only – I would be 27, 28, oh no when we came here I was 30 – and she would be about twenty two or three, twenty three, something like that.

And we were here for 34 years.

ALK: *That's a marvellous story.*

I want to take you back now to that time we haven't really talked about. Which is just a couple of years after you must have left the pri...

JF: **Yeah.**

ALK: *You know the Hickling school, before you left the area. Take us through that.*

JF: **I lived, after the war there was a shortage of housing and, but at Ludham, the old Ludham airfield, there was a large airfield at Ludham.**

A big air base there, and there were still lots of Officers' Quarters and things there and my father who was, stepfather – who was Air Force – and my mother and myself went to live in the old Officers' Quarters, er, along with quite a few other families.

ALK: *Were there still members of your family in High Hill then, or that?*

JF: **Yes, my grandparents were still, they were still there.**

ALK: Yes.

JF: So we, we were then at, its between Catfield and Ludham. I don't know if you know where it is, or where it was and we, we were there, so and I, my first school after was Ludham Primary School.

So I went to Ludham Primary School and I was there till I was about 11.

Um, and then I went from there to Stalham School.

Um, I could, er, at one stage my mother came to me one day and said "John, where do you want to go to school?"

So I said "Well, why, 'cos I've got to go to Stalham".

So she said "No." she said "Because of your father's death in the army and my army service and all the rest of it", she said "you are entitled to go ..." and it was to Duncan Hall School.

Now Duncan Hall School, I don't know if you know, was like a minor private school just two or three miles from here, between here and Great Yarmouth.

ALK: *Between Winterton and Great Yarmouth?*

JF: Between Winterton and Great Yarmouth. Just the other end of Hemsby.

And, er, and she said "You can go to Duncan Hall School".

And I remember seeing the kids get off the train, 'cos they had a special halt at that school, and the kids I remember – they wore blue blazers - and they used to get a

And I said "All my friends are going to Stalham."

So I could have gone to this little private school, it was like to call it a public school would have been wrong, it was a private school and, um, it's not there anymore.

But, um, the, um, er, I could have gone there but I elected to go to Stalham, and I was not academic but I was bright enough to be in the A stream, er, which was like the top, there was A, B, and C streams that used to be in those days didn't there? And an R class which was remedial or something whatever that meant.

And, um, er, I was, I was bright enough to be sort of half way up the A stream and I was bright enough to get into the Navy and er, that stuff and that was it.

But, of course, I went into the Navy January 6th 1959, um, at HMS Ganges where I completed my schooling.

ALK: *Got your education there really.*

JF: That was where my real education was because of the discipline of it.

I, there, there was discipline at Stalham and all our teachers were, had been through the war so they knew about discipline. They'd all been ex-servicemen, people like that. John Ponsonby- Weatherall (?) was my favourite master and I remember Jack Emmerson – he was 3A – er, a Mr Pestle, Sid Pestle, was 4A. I was in 4A and then at 4A I left and went to, to Ganges where we did, completed our schooling.

And in those days the equivalent of “O” levels were called the HET, and I took the HET exams which were O level exams effectively. Er, although things like the history was biased towards naval history and physics was biased towards electricity and stuff like that mainly and mathematics took in gunnery and tangent elevations, all this sort of stuff.

Er, so that was where my, my education was completed and um, er, and that was until I got to my twenties, young, young twenties.

Again, I had this ability to play rugby it was discovered and I played, I was shipped off down to Devonport, er, Plymouth, where I played for Devonport Combined Services in the Navy and, um, I got a bang on the head.

I got a detached retina and they said “You can either downgrade into a non-fighting branch, into a clerical branch or you can acc..., you can take your discharge.”

So I took a medical discharge and came out.

And that was when I sort of jobbed around.

I worked for my parents for a year, in their pub, um, and then I did a, a, a season at the sugar beet factory and I worked for my parents the following summer then the sugar beet factory and then on to Ely and that sort of stuff.

ALK: Where you joined it up.

JF: And that's where, that's where my life sort of joined up. And the luckiest thing in the world was meeting Kate because I was always able to earn money but never able to keep it and - JF LAUGHS - but she, she keeps it. I, I

Oh, I did something silly once with Joe Nudd, and I've just remembered, remembered it.

Er, um, he could have starved to death, he could have never been found again.

We went up to the, to the school and there were some old rabbit hutches in the school. I think they kept pets for the kids, I think they kept pets for the kids at the school.

Anyway, Joe got into one of these rabbit hutches and I locked the door and went home and, um, left him there.

And, I, um, got home and, er, - I'd still got a little Scottish accent then – and my mum's, and Alice came round and said "Where's Joseph?" – she was from Shields, she had a Geordie accent- and I said "You'll no be seeing Joseph any more."

She, I said "I've shut him in the hutch."

And my mother grabbed me by the ear and marched me all the way – what was it about four or five hundred yards – marched me all the way, "Show me where he is. "

And he just got out and he said "You shut me in." JF LAUGHS.

I remember that.

He was a tough little character, Joe. He was a lovely, he was the best climber of trees that I ever saw in my life. He, he, he would climb the, there was a poplar tree in the middle of the Plantin, in the Plantation there, this tall poplar tree, and I could never climb it. I couldn't, I wasn't brave enough I don't think – and he would be right up the top, he'd get up the top.

And I remember when we made our bows and arrows the achievement was to fire an arrow over the top of this tree. It was, um, yeah, bliss.

*This transcription has been made to back up, not replace,
the audio tapes that form the main record output of the VOH Changing Village project 2015 to 2020.
The transcribers used their best efforts and checked back for proper names and places.
We ask for forgiveness for any errors...*