

# Voices of Hickling

## Interview Transcript: Megan Butcher

*Interviewed by Ann Louise Kinmonth on 24th February 2019*

ALK: *Just to start us off, could you tell me your full name, where you were born and your date of birth?*

MB: **My name is Megan Butcher and I, I was born [exact date redacted] February 1944 and I was born at Mill Cottages in Hickling.**

ALK: *And what were your earliest memories of Hickling? What comes to mind when you think back?*

MB: **Um, I suppose not having my dad there, because he was away in the war when I was born, so I didn't know my dad until I was 3.**

**And, of course, I lived with my mum and my grandmother and my grandfather at Mill Cottages until I was nearly 4. And, um, I was thoroughly spoilt by them obviously and it was just such a loving family.**

**And my mother's sister, Betty, she never had any children, so I had an awful lot of love and attention from her as well and, um, and the lady next door to my grandmother, she was also on her own – her husband was in the Navy and she was my godmother so we had a lovely little family unit, you know, just in one place.**

**I didn't have to travel very far and I was always with one or the other and, um, and I used to love going into hers because she used to tell me stories and it was just a very lovely happy family atmosphere. I was very much loved, probably spoilt.**

ALK: *Can you remember those stories? What were your favourite stories?*

MB: **Well, we used to, we used to sort of say that, um, you know, "What was it like when you were a little girl, granny?"**

**And she'd say "Well, I had six sisters" or something like that, and she said, and it weren't quite the same, because she said we were very desperate for, you know, the money in those days as we didn't get any help and, of course, my grandfather was a little bit different because his mother was like a farmer and, sadly, my great grandfather, he had a horse and cart accident down Stubb Road and fell off and broke his back.**

**And she had four boys and it was very hard for her and, but they were never short of anything because they had a pig, they had chickens and they always had something there – and bees in the orchard for instance, and things like that so they always had – er, which was a bit different to my granny's family and, so we used to hear stories about, you know, and, of course, having a great grandmother was lovely because I would go down there, and she used to wear all black, with like a top hat on and she used to ride a black trike.**

**And of course it was lovely if we could get onto her tricycle but she was very, very sharp. MB LAUGHS. It wasn't an easy thing to do, to get on her tricycle,**

but we used to like going down there and play in her orchard and one thing and another so, ....

ALK: *Where was she exactly?*

MB: **She lived at, I think it was then called Rose Farm but it is Rose Cottage now, where Peter Crook lived, down Heath Road on the right hand side. And the field behind it was full of chickens and it was just a lovely place to be really.**

**But she was very, very mean and, er, when we used to go down for Sunday night tea – she never had any electricity then, it used to be gaslight and she'd suddenly nip out when it was time to have bread and out would come this very stale loaf and she used to nip it, dip it into the pail or the tub outside and there's all these little black squiggly things and they were on this bread.**

**And then she quickly put it in the oven near the fire and we would eat it. MB LAUGHS. So, she, she.....**

ALK: *You remember that?*

MB: **I do.**

ALK: *How old do you think you were when you .....?*

MB: **I was probably about 4 or 5 and we never forgot it because it happened until I was probably 8, the time when she died. Yes.**

ALK: *And was your house the same? Did you have electric light in Mill Cottage?*

MB: **Yes, we did.**

ALK: *You did.*

MB: **We always had electric light and, although there was a wall oven, near the fire, my granny did have a very basic electric cooker. But very basic, just two rings, but we always did have electric there.**

ALK: *Did she bake bread in that wall oven?*

MB: **Yes, bread and Friday was baking day – Monday was washing, Tuesday was ironing, Friday was baking and she used to make the most glorious short cakes and things like.**

**And she, she was a good baker, of course she was in service years ago you see. Before she married my grandfather she was in London and she started off, um, in the kitchens and then she worked up to be a lady's maid.**

ALK: *How did they ever meet?*

MB: **I, I, I honestly I think she must have come home at some point and they were married I think, they were married in eighteen ninety .... six or something like that.**

ALK: *And he had the smallholding there?*

MB: **No, that was at Mill Cottages.**

ALK: *Aah.*

MB: **And he came home there and he worked for Mr Forbes.**

ALK: *Yeah.*

**MB:** And my granny sadly developed TB and she was very, very ill and the Forbes's paid for her to go to private sanatoriums.

They were really, really good – really brilliant people. I think they still are very nice from what I hear but they were very good to my grandfather never, never went without because they had to pay for doctors.

**ALK:** *Were they in the Mill House then?*

**MB:** **Yes they were, yeah. Yeah, and so they were very, very good but um, um, it was a hard life I suppose but, um, everybody was happy. And I can remember one day I came home and there was mum and Betty, then my granny and my godmother Rosie – they were all laughing and apparently, er, my granny had made some homemade wine and I think her and my godmother, Rosie, had all had a little bit too much of the homemade wine** *MB LAUGHS.*

**I think grandfather was in the harvest and, of course, they had a little drink I think. And harvest time was always lovely because we were allowed in the fields and because in those days the farm labourers never had sandwiches.**

**My gran used to walk down to the field where he was working with a hot rabbit pie and, you know, things like that – and a little apple pie in there. They didn't ever have such things as sandwiches.**

**And I can remember in the wintertime sitting round the fire with a long toasting fork and that really hard cheese, and we used to toast it over the fire with homemade bread for supper – that was lovely. Sometimes I'd be in the tin bath while they were doing it.**

**But that was just a lovely time. I had had a very .... I'd had my ups and downs obviously but I've had an absolutely wonderful life really. And if anything bad has happened to me they've been my own doing, they haven't, it hasn't come through family or circumstance that's been bad judgement on my part. But I always had the support.**

**ALK:** *So important.*

**MB:** **Yes, it is, yes.**

**ALK:** *So, although you had electric light, you didn't have indoor plumbing with the bath and that? You used .....*

**MB:** **No, we didn't. We had to get the tin bath in.**

**ALK:** *Which day was the tin bath day?*

**MB:** **Usually Friday night's after baking** *MB LAUGHS* **and we used to sit, sit in front of the fire .....**

**ALK:** *Lovely.*

**MB:** **..... and have the radio on, and that was really nice.**

**ALK:** *Some people have said to me they, the bath was in order. You didn't get fresh hot water for each person.*

**MB:** **Oh yeah.**

**ALK:** *How did it go with you?*

**MB:** **Well, I think because I was the youngest I got spoilt and I just had my bath.** *BOTH LAUGH.* **The other ones probably did share when I was abed but I never**

had to. That was in a tin bath – I always had to have my granny bath me – not my mum.

ALK: *OK.*

MB: **Yeah.**

ALK: *So, there you all were and then your father came home.*

MB: **He did, he did. Yeah.**

ALK: *Do you remember that?*

MB: **I do, I do. Yeah.**

ALK: *What happened?*

MB: **Well, he bought me this great big Jeep in, with a star on, from an American serviceman and that's all wooden. And I think he had to try and win me over because I was 4 and my grandfather was like my dad. I always had to call him grandad but he was like my dad.**

And, and, um, straightaway, um, mum and dad got a house and that was called "The Letty" then but it is now called "The Land of Green Ginger" and mum had saved enough money in the time dad was away to furnish the whole house out. Because obviously my grandad and grandma didn't take any money off her, as long as she saved it.

And, as soon as dad got home, within a few days we had moved into "The Letty".

ALK: *Big change.*

MB: **A big change, and for a long time he was always my new dad. And, um, and I suppose it didn't matter because he was so lovely I, I think that after a matter of a few months because I was with him then, um, he became my dad.**

ALK: *And did you have an idea of the war and not the war, or ....*

MB: **Er, well I used to hear the tales, and, of course, my grandfather was in the Home Guard.**

ALK: *Yes.*

MB: **And although it was over more or less by then. And of course my father had been ...., that's how my mum met my dad was because he was stationed down the playing field.**

And he worked a searchlight. And, er, so and that was how they met. And my mum worked in, which is where Doris Osborne used to, she had a little shop and, at Lawson Cottage and my mum worked in that.

And, of course dad came in one day and she said later on, obviously I didn't know this at the time but she said later on "As soon as he came in I knew he was the one for me."

And she said and they met when, I think she was nearly 18, got mar ..., no, she was 17, got married at 18 and he was then going on to France and he had like a week's leave and then she got pregnant and I was born like 9 months later.

ALK: *A war baby.*

**MB:** I was. And he was still in France and he got compassionate leave, somehow or another, and he came home for 48 hours and the soldiers had changed the telegram to say he got a daughter and he'd got twins and he was expecting two of us but sadly there was only me so he was quite surprised – probably pleased but he was surprised, yes.

*ALK:* So, when he walked into the shop was he already in uniform?

**MB:** Yes. Yeah. Yes he was already. Well, he was from North Wales and I haven't got any relations around here – only my sons. All my cousins are in, and aunts were in North Wales and my grandfather, er, died of the lung disease from going down coalmines, and he was supposed to go down as well so he faked his age and got into the army.

Because my parents, my grandparents in Wales didn't want him to go down the mines – but the funny thing is he came to Hickling and Doddo got posted to Wales.

*ALK:* I was just thinking about that, that he might have got sent down the mines anyway.

**MB:** Yes.

*ALK:* So, tell me about your connection with Doddo.

**MB:** Er, well he was, his, his mother and my granny were sisters and they were very, very close. I think the two, those two were very, very close and, um, and course when his mother was ill my granny used to look after her and Doddo was always down at my granny's – he thought the world of my granny and so he was always there, more than his brothers, other brothers.

He was the one who come to see my granny, look after her as well. He was, he was always with my mum and Betty and he was just sort of another extension to the family really. And his mother was lovely, really lovely little lady, Aunt Laura, and, er, she was, um, after she died Doddo got more attached to my m..., my granny and mum then got closer and when I married my first husband, Roger, he took me to the church.

*ALK:* That is close.

**MB:** It is, yes.

*ALK:* Um, what happened to the rest of your family? There were others, it wasn't just yourself. A brother?

**MB:** No, no brothers or sisters.

*“ALK:* I'm sorry.

**MB:** No, I am the only one. Yeah, yeah. Well I think the reason for that was mum always thought that, um, if they had one together, because I was sort of, she didn't know me very well for 4 years, you know the attention might go on to a new baby, another one so they decided that I would be it.

*ALK:* You were precious.

**MB:** I was. I was, yes *MB LAUGHS* Very, very special there for a time. I don't know about now but I was. No I did have a lovely family I have to say.

*ALK:* And after the war what work did your parents do then?

**MB:** Er, dad went into building, with Johnson the builders in Hickling and, um, my mum really didn't do anything. She sort of done a little bit of fruit picking and, and things like that but not really go out to work.

*ALK:* Who were her friends in the village?

**MB:** Um, she had Betty Tillett - Sally who died, er, and most of them I think have died now because she had Betty and I think they just used to have a gang of ladies go out together. Um, who else did she have? Oh, she had Nancy Lambert.

*ALK:* Did she know Joan Greenacre? Wouldn't have known her.

**MB:** I think Joan would probably have been a little younger than my mum wouldn't she?

*ALK:* Yes, yes, I'm getting confused.

**MB:** I think my mum was born in 1924, and Betty was born 1922.

*ALK:* Yes

**MB:** So I think she might have been that little bit ....

*ALK:* Yes, she was.

**MB:** Yeah, yeah.

*ALK:* I think that's right. So, let's come on to stories of your growing up. BOTH LAUGH. Raising your eyes there.

*So, first – going to school.*

**MB:** Oh yes, loved school. Couldn't wait to go. Um, I think it's because, not having brothers and sisters I did, I always have loved company and, er, of course by that time we lived down Stubb Road in The Letty and who should live opposite me was Mr Drake, the Headmaster.

*ALK:* Hollies.

**MB:** At the Hollies and I used to spend a lot of time across there with her, with him and his wife, and there was also another lady, Mrs Broadhurst, who lived in the house near the Greyhound. As you, before you get to the Hollies.

And she was an ex-schoolteacher and, er, I was always round there – quite a lot and, um, course those days I used to play with David Lambert just up the road. And Patrick Beales, and Mary Osborne and, er, we just all used to go round to each other's and, er, never were worried about where we were.

But, of course, the great attraction was the Chapel Pit. We used to love playing around the Chapel Pit, and my mum was very, very strict. I had to be kept quite tidy, hair done exactly and, um, we used to get in the Chapel Pit and, of course 9 times out of 10 we used to fall in, and I used to go to my granny's and she used to dry me off before I dare go home.

She used to wash my socks out and hang them, hang them or put them in the oven, whichever was the nearest and so I was nice and clean by the time I did go home – and, sort of give my hair a brush and off we used to go.

But Geraldine Beales, or Geraldine Smith now, she used to play round there, and Maureen Allison, sadly, sadly she died, but, em, we used to just all play together.

Ronnie Gibbs and Rex Brooks, and then of course when we got older, 10, 11, Terry Smith then came into the village and took over The Greyhound – his parents. And we just all used to all play together. And as we got older, the teenagers, we'd all meet after tea, even in the wintertime and we'd play Hares and Hounds round the village. Um, er, never did any damage, 'cos my mother would have killed me, but just have fun really.

ALK: *Where would you go with the Hares and Hounds?*

MB: **We'd go all round the wood, everywhere, you know.**

And, of course, just before that age group the great thing was to go into the churchyard and run round this tomb six times, and if you put your ear to the stone you could hear them having their tea with their knives and forks.

And we used to do that quite a lot in the dark but we never, ever felt threatened by anything, and I think that's what made us never afraid of the dark or .....

ALK: *Did the vicar tell you off?*

MB: **I don't expect probably Mr Bullough knew we were there did he? That was usually about 7 in the evening so he was probably in the Vicarage having his evening meal and not aware that we were in the churchyard.**

ALK: *He told my mum to stop playing Bumble Puppy in his churchyard.*

MB: **Oh I say. He was quite strict but I did like Mr Bullough, Reverend Bullough.**

ALK: *Yeah, yeah.*

MB: **And, of course, I, we then went to Stalham School after we did Hickling, but I mean I loved my teachers at Hickling.**

I loved Mrs Gold, she was lovely, and Mrs Myhill, and then, of course Mr Drake.

And then I went to Stalham Secondary Modern School – I was there till I was 15 and then I went to secretarial college at Yarmouth and .....

ALK: *Was the headmaster strict?*

MB: **Yes he was, oh yes.**

ALK: *Did you get, um .....* ?

MB: **I didn't get the cane but I have seen the boys get the cane. Yes, yes, and, er, he used to have 'em stand up the corner and he used to twang 'em, you know. Uuuuh.**

ALK: *What, on their bottom then, not their hands?*

MB: **Their hands as well, yes.**

Of course after they've been, and I've seen them do it to a girl, she lived in, up Whinmere, the cottages up Whinmere and they had a school garden and she had jumped all in his rhubarb and she did get the cane.

Daphne Hill, I think her name was and away come Mrs Hill after lunchtime – 'cos Daphne had run home and, um, there was a right to-do there but, um, he, he, he would – he did cane them and, um, sometimes I've seen him put the boys like Johnny Gilbey across his knee and do it.

Because we used to go and watch, and have a look to see what was going on, yeah.

ALK: *Did you have to? I mean were you lined up to watch?*

MB: I can't remember. I think that we must have been asked to do it because when we were in Mrs My.... , there used to be Mr Drake's room, then Mrs Myhill's, then Mrs Gold's.

I think I must have been in Mrs Myhill's room and I think we had, like, sliding doors and they were open so we could watch.

ALK: *Was there a fire in each of the rooms or just in Mr Drake's room?*

MB: Um, there was one in Mr Drake's room and I can't remember about the one in the, um, in Mrs Gold's room. I don't think there could have been, and I don't think there was one in the middle room 'cos I don't think there would have been enough room.

But Mr Drake had one and, um, because I got pneumonia when I was quite small, and I was quite ill, um, they used to dose me up with cod liver oil and lob(?) and everything else, and I had to have my milk. In the wintertime that used to freeze, that used to stand near the fire and that was warm and that was really awful, and that, that, I thought I shall have to drink it or I shall get into trouble, but that, that's one of the worst memories. I didn't like warm milk but, er, all these little bottles – but, um, yes. I think he was quite strict.

And then, of course, he also had his grandson come, Brian Mark – and so he used to spend say a month or two months with grandad and he used to come to Hickling School and that's so funny because Paul's wife, Alison, Brian Mark is his, is Alison's dad and she kept, I kept saying "Mark, that's a funny name." And Paul said "Yes." and, of course it turned out to be Brian Mark who came to Hickling School with me.

ALK: *How funny.*

MB: Yeah, so it's a small world really, isn't it?

ALK: *Were you ill much?*

MB: Not really, not, no I've been very lucky. But when I was three I really got a bad bout of measles and pneumonia and, um, I had the doctor out.

ALK: *Is that just before your father came home, or after?*

MB: Um, I think it was just, it must have been before because I was at my granny's, so I must have been quite small 'cos, as I said, we moved about four.

So that would have been before that. Yeah.

But, er, and I can also remember playing at my granny's when I was there. I used to put my doll in it, the baby's gas masks – 'cos that was like a thing you were put in to it as a baby and, of course, I played with that for years.

Wish I'd kept it all now but you don't. And, of course, my doll used to go to bed in that.

ALK: *What was it like?*

MB: It was rubbery and it goes, the baby goes right in it and .....

ALK: *Like a cot?*



**MB:** Um, like a basket really, more that shape and you're put in it and then, yes. So I can remember that quite. And my grandfather had gas, gas masks hanging up in his shed for a long time because he was in the Home Guard as well.

And, um, so he, he always had things like that 'cos they always fascinate children don't they? And so it was quite fascinating.

**ALK:** *So you would put your doll ....?*

**MB:** **Oh yes. To bed in that, yes.**

**ALK:** *So you must have been thinking about the war and the safety of it or the risks.*

**MB:** Well, yes. I think, as far as I can remember every, we used to get together every Saturday night when I was about 8 or 9, something like that, and the war always came up.

And the whole family were there and, er, we'd start off, like we'd have a sing song – 'cos Betty used to play the piano and we'd sing songs and, and then we'd hear a little bit of Radio Luxembourg and, er, and then we'd talk about, er, the war. And what it was like for my father, my father to be on searchlight and, er, and, um, also my uncle was down here as well, Betty's husband, and, of course my grandfather.

**ALK:** Yes.

**MB:** **So, there was a lot of war talk.**

**ALK:** *What sort of stories came up?*

**MB:** **Well, I doubt they're very much true but, um, um, you know when the bombers came over and I think one went down at Sutton. I don't know, it was an American bomber and, um, I was only a few days old when that went down and my mum and, I can't think who else who she said it was, walked down to see it and took, took us in the pram as babies down there to see this, this plane. But I can't, obviously, remember anything about that.**

**But, um, you know, how the Home Guard used to, sort of, the soldiers used to torment the Home Guard and different things.**

**And one night my, um, my dad was coming to tea and, um, – obviously this was before they were married and he brought a chicken. And it happened to turn out to be one of my grandfather's chickens which had got out into the field. He killed it and brought it in and that was for tea. [MB LAUGHS] So that didn't go down very well.**

**Dad thought he was doing them a favour by bringing the chicken and it happened to be my grandfather's chicken so he weren't, that didn't go down too well but I think he was forgiven – after we'd all eaten it, [MB LAUGHS] and enjoyed it.**

**But we always had, we had – of course, Doddo's cousins were in the war as well but he went abroad in his case – his brother Jack, and he went to the desert and that way. So when they used to come they all used to come round and you'd hear all these stories. But they never frightened me – I was interested.**

**But, um, it never was gory.**

**ALK:** *Probably good for them to talk it.*

**MB:** **Yes, yes and that was, you know, they all looked on grandfather being in the Home Guard as being a little bit old and ancient and not wanted in the forces**

– but that was all done in good fun and, um yeah but that was what they used to do and at Christmas time and get together it was all about the war.

Now I wish I'd listened a little bit more and I'd think "Oh no, not the war again." [MB LAUGHS]. Can we have change of subject?

ALK: *So, what about holidays? School holidays, what did you do round here then?*

MB: **Um, well we just went anywhere, everywhere.**

**We got on our bicycles and off we used to go, we used to go down to the wood, was the favourite place. I loved the wood.**

**Or we'd bike round to see, um, if somebody lived, you know, if a friend lived in, lived in Hickling but had family or cousins in Sutton we would bike to Sutton, we would bike to Catfield, down the Broad, we'd bike down to Tallowin's Farm, down The Dipping Place.**

ALK: *Did you swim?*

MB: **No. I can't swim. No, don't like the water at all but I used to go down there and have a paddle because apparently that's the only place that's got a hard bottom so we used to go down there.**

**And Mr Tallowin never used to mind, our bikes were everywhere but he never used to mind us going down there.**

**I used to play with Mary Osborne quite a lot and she had an orchard we used to, 'cos on the playing field, I'm talking a bit older now, 10, there's tennis courts– we used to do tennis – and roller skating along the road we used to go. Or in the school playground we were allowed to go and there was always just something to do and that used to be morning till night.**

ALK: *Did you go to the beach or ....?*

MB: **Yes we did go to the beach. But we always had to be accompanied by an adult so mum used to bike down there with us or one of the mums used to bike down with us and we use to go down to Sea Palling.**

**And I can even remember biking with my grandfather and my dad and my uncle to Sea Palling in 1953 when that was flooded.**

ALK: *What was that like?*

MB: **It was quite amazing, it was quite amazing, the water was everywhere obviously, and there were oranges floating about and, and things. All up the Sea Palling road was just flooded.**

**And I couldn't get over the oranges because they weren't that common. But there was either, a ship had either come ashore or something and the oranges had come out of the crate.**

ALK: *Get a few?*

MB: **Yes, yes, we, you know, but I can remember biking all the way to see the floods, yeah.**

**And the houses that was flooded and, er, and, of course, one day, er, Doreen News..., Newster turn out – well she lived just before you get into Sea Palling up near The Land and she lived in some cottages at Sea Palling and a bomb went off right behind her and, of course, I don't know whether this is quite true but she did have a glass eye made, so that blew her eye out.**

**But, er, I mean I know her very well and she has got this glass eye but I don't know if it was quite the same as that because years ago tales were a little bit different, aren't they?**

**It might have been surgery had to take out or whatever. But she did have this glass eye and, of course, that was quite a fascinating thing. It's funny what fascinates children.**

*ALK: Any difference.*

**MB: Yes, and then Peter Fisher who lived near the little bridge on the road to Sea Palling – I think his mother hung himself, hung herself ....**

**And, of course, that was a great, great topic of conversation.**

**So we used to bike down there because we heard that's where she'd hang herself. She, she, she hung herself, so, really gory things sometimes but then we just used to cycle home and think "Oh! We've seen that now." And off we'd go.**

**But amusement was just, marbles we used to play, and hopscotch and dice, you know, those little, no, five stones, not dice five stones and she used to, we used to play those sitting on the grass outside.**

**Never in the school holidays, never in. Used to love being out. But I can't ever remember, um, there being any damage.**

*ALK: Mmm, Mmm, how many of you would there be?*

**MB: Probably 4, 5.**

*ALK: Yeah.*

**MB: And, um, we were told you do not run through the corn. We just dare not, you wouldn't think of doing it.**

**And don't pick the flowers in the wood and, um, but years ago for Mothering Sunday we used to go round and pick primroses off the hedge for Mothering Sunday.**

**There weren't big bouquets and all that sort of thing then, and that's what we used to do. We used to pick bunches of little primroses for Mothering Sunday – snowdrops if they were still out, of course.**

**But, er, just used to be out all day. Out as long as we possibly ....**

*ALK: Lovely.*

**MB: Uh, yeah. Lovely childhood, really lovely, and we were very lucky looking back because it was after the war and in our lifetime, hopefully, there hasn't been a war and I think we were very privileged.**

**Very privileged to have that and, er, and I think after the war everybody was so elated that it was over that I think they'd had enough of horror and and I think everybody was just so happy and grateful that things had turned out and most of the people in the village had come home.**

*ALK: Yes, yeah, although some didn't.*

**MB: Well, no, no. My grandfather was injured in the First World War but, obviously, not as a Home Guard he wasn't but, er, no.**

He, he got shot in the First World War, in the trenches and, in France, and, er, he actually, those Germans come from behind and he'd been shot and it ricocheted off his Testament and went through his muscle in his arm and, er, the people who weren't dead the Germans were coming up behind and shooting them, and killing them. And he got back in the trenches and put dead people over him and they went through and, of course, later on he was rescued.

And, and he got, he got mended up in the hospitals on the front line then he was sent back – but he then got dis..., he got an honourable discharge. So that was nice. But he never could use his fingers to hold a fork.

ALK: *What was his name?*

MB: **William, yeah, William Myhill. I've got his, er, his er, honourable discharge papers at home somewhere. But, er, so he, he, he was very lucky but, um, yes he, and I think at that time, after the war, we were lucky because they all appreciated coming home.**

I mean there's one or two in Hickling sadly who didn't, which was awful, but, you know, in our family, he came home and my dad came home and my uncle came home and Doddo came home and everybody came home so that was really nice, yeah. And I think that makes a difference to people.

ALK: *Sure, I'm sure you're right.*

*Did you celebrate Jack, Jack Valentine's?*

MB: **Oh yes, I used to love Jack Valentine's. I still do.**

ALK: *Because it was close to your birthday.*

MB: **Yes.**

ALK: *Tell me about what that was like.*

MB: **I did it with Paul and Darell and I did it for two or three years to Paul's children because they'd never heard of it.**

ALK: *Yeah.*

MB: **And, um, when I was small, er, on Valentine's Night, the 14<sup>th</sup>, um, there'd be a knock at the door, and you'd go to the door and there's a parcel left on the doorstep and you'd bring it in and open it. Never was very much – perhaps an orange or an apple, sometimes funny things and then, of course, at the end you always had something quite nice, like a little box of chocolates or a tin of toffees or something and this went on.**

And then, of course, when I had the boys my grandfather, my father used to do it for Paul and Darrell.

And he used to do a snatch Valentine where you have a parcel on the doorstep and you pull it with a piece of string, you hide in the bushes and do it. And, of course, Paul, Paul and Darrell used to love that until one, the last one he did, Paul was prepared and got a pair of scissors and cut my father's string.

So that's sort of, sort of too old now. That is it. And, of course the girls never ever did it, and I think about 5 or 6 years ago – probably even a bit more we were going out for a meal one evening, I said "I'm going to do a Jack

Valentine for the girls.” and I'd made up like two, two lots of 3 parcels each and I went and tapped on the door.

“Huh, there’s something on the doorstep, daddy. Look, look, look that’s presents.”

“Yeah that is, that’s from Jack Valentine.”

Then I'd do it again and then I'd do it once more, and it was pouring with rain and, um, I had, I had this white dress on with trainers and a waterproof jacket and so, of course, um, and I did that for about three years and, um, also on a Saturday they played football for years in the tots league and on a Saturday I'd always do them a little bag on their doorstep for when they came home on the handle with, like, sweets in it and on the last Valentine I done it and went out for a meal and when I got home there was a phone message saying “Thank you granny for our sweets.”

And I was, “it wasn’t me, I didn’t do it, I’ve been out for a meal, I haven’t done it” and so anyhow they then got the gist that that was me and I didn’t do it anymore.

I said to Paul one day “Well how did he know....?” “How did they know that it was me” and he said “Mum, who else leaves bags of sweets on the doorstep?” [MB LAUGHS] “Only you.” So I said “Well perhaps that did give it away a bit.” But it weren’t like, er, Halloween. It was, um, just leaving little gifts....

ALK: *Yeah. Kinder.*

MB: I think it, my grandfather and them used to do it and it used to be like a piece of coal for different things and not really any sweets as such but, er, they, they used to do it.

But, um, we never left nothing nasty and we were always told when we went out, by mum, that you know you don’t go so and so, you don’t go so and so because the lady’s on her own or they are old and you don’t go there you go to people you know.

And then, of course, when Paul and Darrell got to about five we used to do mum and dad and we used to do Betty and Stanley and they used to love it because they used to always give it away because they would be laughing such a lot in the garden when we were hiding and, um, then, of course, they, Betty came out and said “Well who’s that? Who left us a present?”

And Darrell got up and said “That was me.” [MB LAUGHS]. So that sort of weren’t quite what they were supposed to do but they did enjoy it. But, and I think that Paul didn’t do it so much as we did, I think that’s probably dying out.

ALK: *Mmmm, yeah, I think so.*

MB: And a lot of people hadn’t even heard of it.

ALK: *I learnt about it doing this [Voices Project].*

MB: Yeah, yeah, we used to do it.

ALK: *So, now, coming back to when you’re sort of rising 12, 13 and the boys started courting you – tell, tell me a bit about that.*

MB: Well, I can’t remember being courted at 12 or 13.

ALK: *No, it's a bit early isn't it.*

MB: **In our day and age, as I say we used to play hares and hounds with the boys  
....**

ALK: *Yeah.*

MB: **.... And that was it. And then we'd all come home together, and the boys used to go home and we used to go home and I suppose until I left secretarial college and went to work in Yarmouth that I really, um, thought about having a boyfriend.**

**But, through the school, we did have pen pals as boys and, um, we also had, um, people we wrote to in like, I don't know if that was India or somewhere we did – I had a lady, a girl there and we would send letters.**

**But not really as boyfriends really.**

**I don't suppose that until I got working, in Yarmouth, that I really thought of having a boyfriend and, um, and then of course we all went out together, us girls, to the dances at Potter Heigham which were there then.**

**And you'd meet some boys but mainly they were holidaymakers and I suppose my real serious boyfriend was Roger when I met him at about 18, 19 – 18, yes 18, something like that and I got married at 19, so probably a little earlier.**

**And I lived across the shop with him and his mum, which is now, um, Harry Purnell's, and there was a shop there.**

**And then, of course, we had the bungalow built and, er, so really that was about the first boyfriend that I had.**

ALK: *You stayed in the village pretty well all your life.*

MB: **Yes, yes, until I got, I got divorced, I married Brian – he came from Dereham and I had to sell the house, obviously, and so I bought a flat for the boys, at Sutton, and, um, I moved in with Brian.**

**And then, of course, my dad sadly got cancer and he died and mum just couldn't manage. And so we had dad's vegetable garden and we put the house on it.**

**But, yeah, so that was how I, but I always came back to Hickling two or three times a week, largely to see mum and then, of course, not long after dad died, my uncle died as well and Betty was blind, and very, very partially sighted, and, um, they really did need me, and, er, so we got the house passed and I haven't regretted it one moment.**

**I enjoyed being in Dereham as I'd never lived in a town.**

**And I did enjoy that but, of course, I came back to Hickling, and, er, it was, everyone said it's so lovely to have you back, er, and I was really pleased to be back.**

**You just pick up from there really, then don't you?**

ALK: *When did you come back?*

MB: **Um, I came back, um, I got married in '90. 19, 1990 in December, and my dad died, er, in April 1992. Then I came back perhaps, by the time we got the plans passed, probably a year later – if that, yeah. But, er, er, I was over quite a lot,**

and I used to work evenings, er, because I just, and for the last fortnight I did live here with mum, the time dad was ill, obviously but, er, and er, but you know, she did need help because she was so besotted by dad and dad was with her and she just couldn't cope with him being ill and gone.

She used to go down the churchyard every day and wash that stone, she washed all the gold plate off, and, um, she was just really, er, she was really just so lost without him.

And he was quite a, he was different to my mum, she was very sharp, dad was very calm – nothing bothered him – there was always a way out or, and they just shared everything.

And so, of course, when he did go, she really couldn't believe it. She just, and as the time went on instead of getting better it got worse and, of course, she ended up with dementia – but that was a bit later. But, um, she went into Hickling House in the end.

But, um, it was a very sad time, very sad. But, er, she, she just, that was her world gone.

ALK: *Very sad.*

MB: Yea. That did, yea. But she had Betty next door and, at that time, my uncle was there as well.

And she used to go in there with them and he used to take her out shopping and that, but it wasn't the same. There was always something missing, so she, she just really didn't get over him to be quite honest.

ALK: *So, going back to, to earlier times, what are your memories of the seasons, kind of changing round Hickling, and the things you enjoyed about them?*

MB: Oh! I, yes, lovely. We used to look forward to every season.

ALK: *Mmm.*

MB: And at Hickling School Mrs Gold in the babies' class – she had this big picture and it used to be spring, summer, autumn, and winter. And she used to change it so you knew very well what was coming, and we used to wait for the spring to come after the snowdrops we were waiting for the spring to come and, um, of course it got to autumn and we'd spent ages collecting leaves and pressing them in books like orange leaves and yellow leaves .

And at Christmas time because we never really had, um, the shops in Hickling were always decorated up and Jack Martin's shop was always the best. And, er, me and my mum used to walk out nearly every night with our torch and I said "Oh, let's go and look at Mr Martin's window." 'Cos he used to have all these glorious chocolates up there and things that you could buy for Christmas, and dates and.... 'Cos at that time they they weren't an everyday item – dates and figs were Christmas.

And although everybody made their own cakes for Christmas, we always had a bought Christmas cake, you know, from Roys of Wroxham, because he used to deliver groceries – Roys of Wroxham did and we always had a bought Christmas cake, because that was a special one.

And, er, Christmas time we used to go carol singing, which we used to love. And we'd stop at Joyce Turner's house and out come the mince pies and sausage rolls and a glass of sherry for the older people and cold drinks for us

And, um, Christmas was such a big thing, I think, and even if it was cold we'd have lanterns and we'd all go out carol singing with the Methodist church and it was lovely. It was really lovely.

So, although I'm not a winter person we always used to look forward to that.

And then, of course, February come my birthday and Jack Valentine's Day, which was very important and, um, er, then, of course, away comes spring and all the flowers start coming and you see the baby birds and, of course, again we were down the Chapel Pit to see the ducks hatching out and, er, but, er, spring is lovely isn't it?

I think it just makes you feel 'cos everybody's in the garden, starting to do things and you see all the vegetables growing and, of course, the, this is what we ate.

And, er, we used to walk down to Mr Markham's where Yvonne lived, the butchers – to get our meat and then on the garden you went with a fork to get our vegetables and if you didn't have enough money to buy any more meat then we just had vegetables made into stews or whatever. But we always had something nice to eat.

And then, of course, away comes summer and of course we never were seen, we were just off.

And the same happened even when Paul and Darrell were small. I mean they had a canoe on the Broads and they used to go canoeing and they went out in the morning with sandwiches and didn't come home until....

Never had to worry about them, you know, and, er, thoroughly enjoyed it. But we relied on, I used to love the summer 'cos it was cutting corn.

And my grandfather used to be, he worked at Hickling Hall and we used to go down there and watch the boys run about with sticks hoping to catch a rabbit. Never saw them catch one, mind you, course all the old balers and the combine harvesters.

ALK: *Who was in the Hall then?*

MB: Er, well when my grandfather first went it was Lionel Borrett and I used to go down there on a Sunday to feed the cattle with my grandfather and he used to come out.

He was a lovely old man. He used to live there with his sister and I used to go down and feed the bullocks and he used to come out.

My grandfather always tipped his cap and said "Good morning master." And he'd say "Morning, Myhill" and then we used to go and feed the bullocks together and then Lionel Borrett's sister – I can't remember her name – used to call me in and she always gave me home made like lemonade and a piece of her yellow seed cake and I used to think that was fantastic.

Go up these steps in her big kitchen where she was cooking and, um, I used to love being on the farm, with grandfather and, er, I've got pictures of me sitting on the two big carthorses – um, Prince and Duke. I was only about 3, I was quite tiny and, um, coming down the road on them.

And we used to go into, where, the forge and, where Fred Watts used to be, and his wife, and I used to go in the, I used to come off the horse and go and



sit with his wife while the horses were being shod and then we'd walk back with them to the, and put them in the stables for the rest of the evening.

And it was just such a happy, carefree time, and, er, we were allowed to go on there.

And Paul and Darrell had a bit of that but then, of course, suddenly the big bales came in and when we lived where Ian lived then, of course, opposite wasn't the bungalows then – it was covered with corn field and potatoes or whatever. And when it was corn field time that was awful because they had the big bales come in and I used to say, 'cos Peter didn't want them on there because that was so dangerous. Not to go on the bales.

And I happened to be upstairs and I looked out the window and where were they?

About ten of them all on the bales and the next minute I saw a truck draw up and it was Peter. And, of course, everybody got away except my Darrell, who'd got his wellie caught in something or another – and Peter got hold of him and really smacked his bottom and sent him indoors.

And he came and he said "Peter ----- (?) has smacked my bottom."

And I said "If he hadn't done I would have done. I told you not to go in there."

So, when I saw Peter we did laugh about it. Peter said I did smack your boy's bottom. I said yes I did hear, if you hadn't done I would have done. [MB LAUGHS]

But nowadays I suppose they would be cross about it but that was how it was, wasn't it?

**ALK:** *Mmm, mmm.*

**MB:** It wasn't cruel, it was, you know.

**ALK:** *Safe.*

**MB:** Safe. Yes, exactly, and, er, we used to go down, me and Paul, and we used to go down, we used to think that was lovely, we used to go blackberrying down the .....

We used to drive down to the thing when I was smaller, and dad and mum used to come, we used to go blackberrying, down near the Trust and all those sort of places and we used to go walk the two mills and get blackberries – we still walk the two mills, it's lovely down there.

And, er, go down the Broad and feed the ducks.

**ALK:** *You enjoy the wildlife?*

**MB:** Yes, yes, I love it.

And Paul was very much into it. Darrell is not quite so, but Paul loves it. And he know quite a lot, he's very interested in , um, you know, what happened on the Broads and so he is really interested but Darrell is not so keen.

Paul is very interested in the history of our family whereas Darrell isn't quite so interested but there we are.

**ALK:** *So, you've got several families from the village linked together ?*

**MB:** Yes.

ALK: *There's the Myhills and ...."*

MB: Yes.

ALK: *Who are the other families who are linked in?*

MB: **Chapmans and, um, my – all come from my granny and, obviously, grandfather.**

**My grandfather was the Myhill side of the family. My granny was a Chapman which linked us to Doddo's side of the family.**

**And, 'cos my granny had Arthur Chapman, her brother, who used to live, who lived where, he owned where Nick Baker now live. He, he, he used to live there and his wife Aggie, and she used to mend fisherman's nets. 'Cos she came from Yarmouth and they used to dump all these fisherman's nets and she'd sit in her grey, grey house mending these nets. Quite fascinating, she used to do them so quickly. I used to spend hours across there with them.**

**And then, um, I'm slightly related to Velda, Andrews as was 'cos she was Velda Reed and my granny and Stella, my granny was aunt to Stella because her mother was my granny's sister. No my granny's, no I got that wrong my granny, my granny's brother.**

ALK: *I've lost you.*

MB: **Yeah. My granny, my granny, um, and Velda's grandfather were brother and sister. I got the gran, I got the, the other sister has the grandfather.**

**So, sort of related to Velda Reed and Peter Andrews and that sort of thing through that.**

ALK: *Is that the garage Andrews?*

MB: **Yeah. On Velda's side.**

ALK: *So, coming towards the end. How do you think Hickling has changed in your lifetime? What's been good in the changes and what's not so good?*

MB: **Actually, um, I don't think it's changed an awful lot.**

**Not, not, um, I mean, er, I think the farmers are really good – we've got lovely footpaths and we still do the same sort of walks, we can still go in the woods as long as we don't do damage – Bernie's very good. Er, we don't pick the flowers but we can go in there and we've still got some lovely walks and I loved my walking so.**

**And the only thing I do miss is a shop. I'd like to have a community shop which I think would be very handy. As we get older we don't always want to drive to Tesco's and I think that would be nice.**

**Lots of people who have moved in, er, all join in and I think, you know, they add something to the community. People say "Oh! Jolly newcomers." " I don't find it like that. I quite like them – they all come to the Barn, they all come Nordic Walking. We play indoor short mat bowls together, we go to Zumba together and, and, I think a lot and, and a lot of people have joined things and they do put effort.**

**The newcomers who have come into the village have , you know, they join in things and I think they've helped to, to, to make it better. I quite like, I quite like having the newcomers here and, er, and they're all so friendly and I, I, but in the sort of the village I don't think it has changed an awful lot.**

We haven't got the same amount of farms or the farm labourers so probably if you've got young people now perhaps the work isn't so easy because a lot of the boys just went straight onto the farms didn't they?

And the girls, except for me 'cos I went to Yarmouth to college, um, did cleaning in houses or worked in a shop or something like that fairly close. Um, and of course that venue has gone now 'cos we don't have the shops but, um, no I still think it's a lovely village and I wouldn't want to move. I think that's nice.

*ALK: Did you. I know you did the secretarial in Yarmouth, did you then work as a secretary after that?*

**MB:** Yes. I went and did the secretarial college and then I went into REP Televisions and, as, in the typing pool. And whoever wanted a shorthand typist off you went. That's right,

And then, I'd been there about 2 years and, um, there was a position advertised at Wroxham, at Norfolk Fruit Growers, Secretary to the General Manager. So I went, I applied for that and I got that and I was there till I had Paul. I didn't have many jobs again – very plain, you know, ordinary, but .....

And I was there till I had Paul and then after that I did one or two little jobs and helped across the garage and typed up Tony's invoices for him.

And then I thought I'd have a complete change and I went to work for the elderly. And I went to Ingham Old Hall and I did, I did enjoy that as well.

And then I went to Sydney House and then, um, I was offered a job at Herbert Woods. So I went back to being a Secretary/Receptionist at Herbert Woods and I really did love that. 'Cos I loved the atmosphere, you know.

Sometimes it could be, you know, if they'd had a wet week and the children were sodden wet because a wooden boat had leaked. You know you did have complaints but I just loved the work because of the people, you know, and I left there.

Obviously I did come from Dereham for a time because I didn't want to leave but that was just too far.

So, I left Dereham and then I went to Norwich to work and I worked at BBC Fire Protection, and I left there and I went to the Doctor's Surgery at Stalham and I was there 'til I retired.

*ALK: That would have suited you.*

**MB:** Yes, I liked it. Yes I did. I thoroughly enjoyed that.

I used to do the dispensary side but I was out the front so that was nice. And I would of liked to have stayed on but mum had then got, the dementia was then coming to the fore and it got really quite hard.

In the mornings I had to get her up and she didn't know what I was talking about and I used to come home lunchtimes and, by that time, my uncle had died as well and, um, and, you know, and to make sure she was alright.

Then come home at night and I had to sort her out again and so that is really why I had to, I did retire.

But I did love it there and the doctors and that were lovely. Although I don't go to that practice I go to Ludham – which I wouldn't change because I think

they're great. But they were nice to work for, nice people to work for. But the doctors were really, and I'd never done it before.

It was, it was nice and I thoroughly enjoyed it and worked there till I retired. And after that I said "Right, that's it." I don't want to touch, I did do some typing for my husband, he does it now, but, er, he, er, I didn't really, was not interested in, um, anything to do with a computer or anything.

I just wanted to be out all the time and I was, I just was everywhere, yes, yes.

ALK: *So, now that the Norfolk Wildlife Trust is beginning to consult about what they should do, have you got any advice for them about, er, how they can work well for the wildlife and the village?*

MB: **Um, well, again, when I've been to the meetings, I think they are keeping us informed and I think everybody likes to be kept informed of what is happening don't they?**

**If something suddenly appears you think "Well, I live here. Why wasn't I consulted". But I think they've done a, when they've had the meetings, you know, and we've obviously seen little bits and that on the television, which is nice.**

**I I think, no I don't think again they couldn't do any more to keep us informed. We seem to know what is going on and what is happening and I think that is the most important thing and they've got my full support. I think they're great, yeah.**

ALK: *Now, we're going to finish. Is there anything that you'd hoped I'd asked you about that I didn't?*

MB: **No, I think I'm happy with what we've done. It's just that I have had a very blessed life I must say. Um, and, as I said before, the mistakes that have happened in my life have been man-made – by me.**

**But no, I think I still love the village as much as I did when I was first here and, um, I would protect it. I, I won't have people saying things about it which are not true or whatever. I love the village and I would stick up for it if I had to.**

*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...*