

Voices of Hickling

Interview Transcript: Norman Belson

Interviewed by Ann Louise Kinmonth on 11th December 2017

NB: My name is Normal Belson.

ALK: *When did you first come to Hickling?*

NB: I was a teenager playing bowls for Joe Chapman's. So youngsters. I think when you were 14 you weren't allowed to play, from what I remember. Because you know there was a lot of youngsters in the village then, and as one lot went out another lot came in.

ALK: *That was a famous bowls club wasn't it?*

NB: Yeah, um, we used to play on a pasture near the farm where he used to keep cows on and for the morning before you played football, him and few of em used to have to go round and gather up the pats so you didn't fall in em, (LAUGH) which wasn't very nice.

ALK: *So let's go back to East Ruston, what is your earliest memory, where were you living there?*

NB: Oh um I suppose we were living about half a mile away from East Ruston school in a cottage called Pound Cottage, and the last time we went that way that cottage was still there - although that'd been modernised you know since we left - and, er, when I was old enough for school we had to walk from there to East Ruston School every day 'cos we didn't have bicycles, not then you know

ALK: *You say we who was that?*

NB: Me and my 2 sister. I had two sisters, Nesta and Beth, Beth is the oldest, I'm the middle one and well Nesta, she still live at Upton, she still with us, but unfortunately of course Beth is not.

But, er, we used to get up to some quite nasty things sometimes. (LAUGH). 'Cos we lived near an old gentleman which kept a lot of chickens and, I aren't sure whether it was before we started school, we didn't know much about broody hens, and of course he had a row of chicken houses with the nest boxes on the outside, so you could lift the lids up to see what was in em, he had a lot of hens sitting on eggs and we wanted to see what was underneath 'em, and of course when a hen is really broody, they won't get off the nest.

And we tried everything to get these chickens off the nest and, course, broke a lot of eggs. And of course poor dad he had to pay for the eggs what got broken. We was to young to really to get a hiding...

ALK: *How old would you have been?*

NB: About 6 or 7 I supposed.

ALK: *You and your sisters*

NB: Yep

ALK: *Nobody else, just you three. What else did you to get up to?*

NB: I remember we looked round the garden to find, you know, big stones to throw in the nest box. (LAUGH) Of course we weren't allowed out to play for several weeks. But the trouble was with me, you see. There was no small lads around there my age so I had to play with two girls, you know, and course they were the boss...

ALK: *They led you astray?*

NB: Yeah! And I always remember 'cos when we moved from there - I spose I must have been 7 - to further down the village near the farm where dad used to work, and 'cos we had to walk from there to the school which was about a mile away then, and we had winter time we used to go past the blacksmiths and 'cos when it got cold we used to slip in there and get warm and then carry on home.

I remember when I must have been, well, before then, we used to have to go to Stalham school from where we lived which was about 2, 3 mile. And course we used to have to get on our bicycles and bike to school every day. And then when I was sort of, well, 'cos me dad was a team man, used to look after the big old farm horses, you know, the really big ones and when I was old enough I used to go help him in the stable and when I got a little older and a horse had to have new shoes, they used to stick me on top the horse and I used to ride him to the blacksmith - and when I got the other end the blacksmith used to lift me off, and of course he put the shoes on and then lift me back on and we'd plod all the way back home again.

ALK: *What was the horse called?*

NB: Well there was several, then one in particular and he was enormous black and white one, and they called him Short, why I don't know. Short.

ALK: *What were they pulling?*

NB: Well everything from ploughs, carts because there weren't no tractors at all, not then

ALK: *When are we talking about?*

NB: Em, I suppose, 1945 When I was sort of old enough I suppose to be trusted to do it. (LAUGH). But the trouble with being alone, you know you couldn't get up to a lot of mischief, not on your own could you, not really. (LAUGH)

ALK: *So your dad looked after the horses, and your mum?*

NB: She was at home. She didn't work at all not then.

ALK: *And what was home like, electric, water? Those things?*

NB: Ah well there weren't no electricity and you used to get your fresh water out of a well, which was nice and used to come out nice and cold.

And course, when it comes to have a bath used to have big bath in front of the fire, and course my two sisters used to have a bath first and I jumped in the same water what they had and used to top it up with a little more hot water. (LAUGH)

And, well the food. I mean they had enormous great gardens then and, er, when we were at home that's what dad would spend most of his time. Digging the garden and planting vegetables, and well that's what kept us a going for our meals really, with fresh vegetables.

But you know we got along all right really.

I could take you a place now where I stood when the war broke out. I remember I was in the yard, and mum come to the door and shouted it to everybody and I was nearly 9 years old.

ALK: How did things change for you in the war?

NB: Well a lot of chaps then, my age you know, were in the same predicament as we were really cos there weren't no heat an electricity or anybody come round with goods or nothing like that. And course then when the older boys sort of I spose more or less volunteered for the war then ,but you know we weren't really old enough to understand much about it, really.

Otherwise we kept fairly healthy anyhow, you know I can't ever remember being carted off to the doctors or anything like that. Not them days.

ALK: Did you see anything of the war?

NB: No, nothing. Not much, no.

ALK: No bombers or...

NB: No not then. We heard some of them you know but the only thing after that, umm, Dad he joined the fire service, him and me uncle, and they used to go up Stalham and then, course, go up Norwich when they got bombed and such like.

And, em, he was with a chap in the fire service called Harry, which he kept a small holding farm out Sea Palling and, er, I never did know why but eventually Dad left John Durrells and went with Harry at Sea Palling at a little farm in there.

And course by then we did have electricity but not flush toilets you know used to have go and dig a hole in the garden. (LAUGH)

ALK: And were you at Stalham School by then?

NB: Yeah, we still had to go to Stalham...

ALK: But they got you doing things there for the war didn't they?

NB: But then because by the time we moved to Sea Palling you see, I was too old to go to Stalham School.

ALK: You were 14...

NB: Yeah. Yeah.

ALK: And the war was over...

NB: Uhh, yeah, must have been.

ALK: So what was your first job?

NB: Oh there was a farmer near Sea Palling called Mr Gill and he had a few cows and chickens and things like that and I used to go an watch him, and course one day he said to me would you like a job and so I went with him for quite a while. and he was a funny little chap, 'cos he learnt me to milk cows and I always think what the conditions were then to what they are now in the milking parlours.

And I mean there was no white coats or anything like that, and he used to have a sack wrapped round his waist for an apron, and that be that filthy it'd be nearly stiff when he'd finished with it, he'd just throw it away and get clean sack and there was no like washing the udders, you know, with nice clean water or anything like that. You had a bucket and cloth and sort of wash 'em as you went along, really, you know.

And, er, 'cos there were all coal fires and he had a, em, what I call a sawing horse with great big logs big as that and he had a cross cut saw, don't know if you ever seen one of those and there were teeth about that big and he used to be on one handle and I used to be on the other and every 3 or 4 days we'd have half a day cutting up firewood and splitting that up for him to burn indoors.

ALK: *What about the milk - where did that go?*

NB: That went to the Milk Marketing Board.

ALK: *You didn't have to heat that?*

NB: No. No, no, no.

ALK: *But they picked it up?*

NB: Yeah. They used to be in big churns about that big, holding, I don't know, about 8 to 12 gallons I think what I remember.

ALK: *What kind of cattle were they?*

NB: Sort of mixed breed with the cows really. All manner of different colours I can't remember I don't think he ever had any horses 'cos I think the little Fordson tractors had started then and I think he had one of those, but he was I don't know - he was a funny man you know.

ALK: *Did you get at all hurt doing the milking?*

NB: No - lucky. But I didn't like it, but there weren't anything else not then and then me Dad, something went wrong with him and Harry and, course, Harry's wife was boss and I think Dad got wrong with her and so he lost his job (LAUGH) and he moved to Waxham, Brograve Farm, where - who was there then? - oh, Norman Plummer he was there then.

ALK: *Was that Norman Plummer from Plummers farm?*

NB: Yeah. And then I got a job there as well and I suppose I stayed there, oh I don't know, getting on for 10 years I should think. And course dad spent the rest of his working life down there and course them days was when they had plenty of working tractors. But we started off with horses down there and then, course, they gradually got one tractor, two tractors and so everybody was driving tractors to the horses

ALK: *What did you think of that change?*

NB: Lovely.

But I, that always worried me where the horses went when they were finished with you know whether they went for dog food or... I know they said lot of them they said was slaughtered, but what happen to 'em, well they never would tell us I suppose, really. I used to love the horses I still do, yep, I still do.

And then when I played football for the village team and met Arthur, Arthur Beales, who's foreman on the reserve and eh...

No wait a minute, I'm getting ahead of myself. From Plummers I went to Harveys at Waxham Hall then and course they didn't have no horses at all it was all tractor work.

He had an enormous herd of cows and I suppose there used to be about 80 if not more cows, which used to be milked, and course they were milked by machine then, and course occasionally you used to had to take your turn cleaning the cows out and course you can imagine what you got after all them cows had been shut up and been milked... Loads and loads of cow poo and course and then you used to take your turn like cutting kale or cabbages whatever they grew to feed them on. And then course when you weren't doing on that you worked on the land you know in the tractors and that was quite good then.

ALK: *You didn't have covers or anything though you were out in all weathers weren't you. You say it was good?*

NB: Oh no pcabs, oh no. Cor, blimey. But I well I really got fed up with plodding about in mud and cleaning out cows and all that kind of stuff and er Arthur - I think it was Arthur's brother, one of his brothers who was with him - he left so they wanted someone else and he asked me if I wanted a change, and er so I disappeared down there.

ALK: *Moved house?*

NB: No I weren't married then.

ALK: *So you lived at home at Waxham and travelling to the marsh - bicycle, car?*

NB: Well I biked to start with because I was single then and then I married Marlene Beales, Oliver's daughter, and, um, we lived in a little thatched cottage on the Greyhound corner where Philip live now we used to live in this end.

And course Marlene work with Ken in the greenhouses, and course in them days there was nowhere to live. And he had the little old cottage empty and he asked us if we'd like to have it and, course, I was biking from Waxham to Hickling every night and wallpapering and painting and god knows what!

ALK: *In your 20s then?*

NB: When we moved in I was in me 30s. And, em, I had a little motor bike then - still working at Waxham then, as I say, I went with Arthur cutting reed, sedge and, well, cleaning the dykes out and course summertime we used to take bird watchers out, out walking and, you know, in boats.

And course winter time, we were cutting reed all winter, and one year - between the 3 of us - we cut 23 thousand bunches but when we first started you had to mow it with a scythe and course you didn't do many then and then they'd invented a machine what would cut it and tie it, and then you just stack it up and keep it dry, and then you just used to cut the strings and clean it all out and course that was handy and then that time we got 22 thousand bunches between 3 of us...

ALK: *How long did that take?*

NB: Well we were cutting reed all the time the water was down on the marshes on the reed beds you see and it had to be carted to the shore when it was higher to keep dry.

And then the rest of the time 'cos when as soon as the new reed started to grow you couldn't cut any more you was cutting next years crop off.

ALK: *Did you cut it at one year's growth each time, you didn't give 2 year to thicken?*

NB: **Oh yes. There's some places which wouldn't stand for 2 year and then another marsh would stand 2 year, that all depend on how much water could you get on it when it was growing.**

ALK: *So more water or less water: how did it work?*

NB: **Well, when it was growing.**

ALK: *it needed more...*

NB: **Yeah.**

ALK: *...and then you could cut it at one year?*

NB: **Yeah.**

ALK: *Who did it belong to?*

NB: **Brograve Trust**

ALK: *Even then?*

NB: **Yes. Oh yeah, yeah.**

ALK: *And were they burning it then?*

NB: **Well we used to burn all the rubbish 'cos what we cleaned out, you know, used to be a heck of a lot of great big piles of rubbish, 'cos they used to burn that where it was really.**

ALK: *Did you to take it off in lighters on punts?*

NB: **Well, a lot of the time we used to pick up 7 bunches and walk it to the shore, and we used to have to wear long boots to keep your legs dry and if you were lucky you could pick up 10 bunches. I didn't do that very often.**

And then, after a time, they had a cutter what they called a Mayfield and we found if we made a sledge we could hook it up behind this and that would pull, pull a lot of our reeds to the shore.

ALK: *Did you cut more with the Mayfield than you cut what you told me about?*

NB: **Yeah, yeah, oh blimey, yeah. And course then once that was then you know piled on the shore if the water came up on the marshes that didn't matter.**

We used to go on the shore and clean all the reed out then that all had to be put, we had, well, I used to call rowing boats, we used to fill them up and we had a boat with an outboard engine on and we used to tow them somewhere else - sometimes up to the staithe and stack it on the staithe and the lorries would come and pick it up.

And I know when we cut the great 2000, we were cleaning out reed till the end of May. And course then the reeds on the reed beds well that's how it happen.

ALK: *And then you'd cut sedge after that?*

NB: **Yeah, summer time, yeah, and the spring time yeah, yeah, but it was only certain places you could do that because they didn't want rubbish in it and course you can't clean out sedge like you can reed, you know.**

ALK: *What were the best marshes?*

NB: **Um, for reed, as you go round the drive at Whiteslea towards the lodge, all them reed beds on the left, we used to cut all them. Now they were good reed. But, course, a lot of places, you know, weren't much good and occasionally you'd cut a spot what was old and useless and burn it, for new reed, you know, to come another year.**

ALK: *That worked?*

NB: **Yeah, yeah.**

ALK: *So when did it stop why isn't it done now in the same way?*

NB: **I don't know why of course, um, they have said they have self-employed reed cutters now. You see, that's the trouble. I mean the trust don't do any reed cutting down there at all, don't do nothing. I know the place is growing up to. Wicked really.**

ALK: *Why do you say it's wicked?*

NB: **Well all them marshes, or a lot of them marshes, on the right hand side, there was what they, you know, used to be water based places where the birds could swim and feed and the rest of the marsh we used to cut and leave to grass, and course then the birds could go and feed where they like, you know, like the snipe and everything else, but when you get cold reed, no birds**

ALK: *Tell me about the wild life, tell me what you saw when you were out there.*

NB: **Of course there all growing up now.**

ALK: *Yes.*

NB: **But that was lovely when you were able to take to take bird watchers out...**

And of course, when I first started I didn't know one bird from the other. (LAUGH) Used to have a book to look in 'cos you know we got so...

ALK: *They knew more about it than you did...*

NB: **As soon as we saw a bird we knew what it was, you know. And of course, like, to the south of the lodge there's a scrape - er, what did we used to call it, I thought of it just now, hmm, it's gone.**

ALK: *It wasn't the Chapmans was it?*

NB: **No that was a big, big span of water, and that is still there, and the other one, err, I know it was called **Rushy Was**. And the one on the right hand side... Got me with that one, and that's still there, but there used to be 2 fair sized ones, you know where the observation post is, well to your right, there used to be 2 big ones out there which we used to cut right to the water's edge.**

Of course now that's a reed bed: you can't see no birds at all, but at least the lookout in the trees that's, you know, that is fairly good to, and when that was first put there, there weren't no scaffolding in them days and eh they just had wood up in the trees, planks to walk on and two ruddy ladders.

The stage went up in two levels, you'd got a small one in the middle and a bigger one at the top and you had to climb up these two flipping ladders and they were up there you know a long way. (LAUGH)

ALK: *That didn't change for ages did it?*

NB: No and course then, when the new rules come out, you see, they just weren't allowed to use it because now that's all metal and that's just the job.

And course I unfortunately now can't go up ladders. I'd like to but I can't even climb up step ladders not now.

ALK: *Do you still go out with people in boats?*

NB: Not now I can't I can't get in their boats, not now

That must be 4 years ago when one of the Cadburys family managed to get me in a boat and course when I got the other end I couldn't get out (LAUGH). They managed to heave me out so I could go in the bird hide and have a look and that was the last time I ever got in a boat. I daren't get in now 'cause I can't get out.

And course I looked after, well me working time on the reserve, was 24 years I worked up there and then when Christopher Cadbury, the governor, he asked me if I'd look after the lodge when I retired and, er, I've been looking after the lodge ever since

ALK: *How long's that?*

NB: 20

ALK: *As long again.*

NB: Er. 65, 75, 85

ALK: *What 25 years?*

NB: 25, 27 years, 'cos I'm nearly 87 now. That's a long while to be in one place.

ALK: *But you enjoy it.*

NB: Oh God, yes

ALK: *What do you like about it?*

NB: Well the solitary really, you know a lot of the jobs you do and you're on your own, really, I'm working round the bird scrapes, you know, although there might have been somebody with you, you'd be working one side and he'd be working the other, and you know that was quite nice really.

Specially summer time, used to take your shirt off and get brown. (LAUGH) But you know I still look after the lodge and I'm sort of in charge of the laundry, only during the summer when nearly all the Cadburys would come, they have to bring their own sheets and pillow cases with them.

Because I mean there's 8 bedrooms and you get, you know, 2 beds in some of them, that's a flipping lot of washing.

ALK: *But there used to be other visitors as well, did you have stories about other people coming down too?*

NB: No. Ever since I've been there they were all Cadburys and their sort of close friends type of thing you know but they had a wedding down there, that's was when Arthur was with us and that was, well his name is Tim Peake, he's a stepson and, um, one of his daughters got married at Hickling and we had to punt them around to the lodge, that was nice, 'cos they decorate all the boats up.

Arthur had one boat, he had the bride and bridegroom and I had the bridesmaids and the little ones. I'll show you a photograph in there.

And the front lawn they covered the whole area up with um, what they call a coconut matting, thick matting to cover the whole area up you see and course put the marquee over the top.

We all sit in our chairs in a ring having our food and drink and all of a sudden Arthur disappeared and he (LAUGH) he weren't a fella, you know, what could take a joke and the last thing I saw of him was his feet in the air and him disappearing out the side of the tent and we couldn't find out his chair had gone off the side of the matting and its legs had gotten in the ground and course Arthur just went over backwards. (LAUGH)

ALK: Somersault!

NB: Yeah. He didn't smile no, you know 'cos I think he didn't like of course everybody burst theirselves laughing, away I think.

ALK: In the mood...

NB: I shall never forget it! You know I've never seen anything so silly! (LAUGH) but we daren't say anything to him, good lord no...

ALK: You're related to him, or just friends with him?

NB: Arthur...

ALK: Yes.

NB: No just friends, workmates, yeah. Well, sometimes, he was a funny man to get on with really, I know I shouldn't say that, but you know he could be more than difficult if you put it that way.

ALK: What about other punting, were you involved in any of the coot shoots and that type of thing?

NB: No no I weren't that. When Christopher Cadbury, I mean a lot of people say he bought the Reserve and give it to the Trust but he didn't, there was a consortium of people all clubbed up to buy the Reserve, although they say you know that Christopher gave the Reserve to the Trust, and he was a lovely man he was.

But, really, I suppose the broads haven't changed that much apart from some of the shores have died back and some of them are growing sort of thing and course we used to go down Candle Dyke and do some, you know, dykes out down there, but now there's no dykes at all. Just a mud flat because the geese used to feed on the **kelp** and every year that got further back and now that's right back to the flood bank.

ALK: So if that was cut more you think they'd be able to get more from it?

NB: Well I think that's dead now, there's no roots to grow, you know, the geese have killed the whole lot, really.

'Cos I know when the reed was its full height and course you know the great big clouds of starlings and, er, we used to go trudging down the reed bed, 4 of us lined up and course then all the starlings used to come in and roost on top of the reed and that just bend down like that with the weight and, course, that weren't any good to us then. We used to have to go down and in daylight with shot guns and keep 'em off our reed bed, and we used to have to stay there till they all went to bed.

You know you'd see enormous great clouds of 'em going round and round and round and you'd watch 'em all going down then that go silent and then we could walk away and leave 'em and the part they slept on, the reed would be that high off the water 'cos they used to sleep on the reed above the water you see for safety. And so we had to do that every year to keep them off our reed bed (LAUGH) which I didn't mind that, but I didn't like the trudging back 'cos that you know dark and horrible. (LAUGH)

ALK: *Sometimes frozen...*

NB: Yeah, yeah. But then you know Robin threatened to pack up down Whiteslea, but I don't know what I'd do with myself if I did really. I did threaten to the other year, but they wouldn't let me (LAUGH) 'cos they said nobody else knew anything about the place.

ALK: *Well you certainly do. What other stories have you got about the place? That was wonderful.*

NB: The trouble of it is when you're working riding in boats you have to behave yourself or you sent over the edge. That's the only trouble, but, I know when we used to be in Dove, we used to clean the dykes out standing in the front of the boat with what they call a maid, that was like a blade on a long handle, we used to cut the reed off in the water then fork it out in heaps.

And then course lunch time, you'd sit in your boat and have lunch and fall asleep. And George was with me then and I and George have started work and left Arthur up the other end asleep in the boat, and course we weren't very popular not then. (LAUGH)

Oh dear, but, er, the last lot are only now gone from Whiteslea: that was full up 'til then. That was last week, now I got to go and take all the mattress covers off and pillow cases and duvets and send 'em to the laundry.

ALK: *Things'll be quiet now.*

NB: Yeah, yeah. The biggest load I had was when Roger Cadbury's family came and I think there used to be about 16-17 of 'em sleeping down there then and I used to have to, well I do still do it, gather up 'cos they had their own laundry left in the lodge and, er, no else is allowed to use it you see, and when they're finished I have to go down there and gather it all up before the next lot come in and last time I had six bin bags full. (LAUGH)

I had to bring 'em home and tip 'em out on the floor and, you know, count so many pillow cases and all the rest of it and put 'em in the bin bags and put a label on 'em and take 'em to Stalham.

ALK: *Better than cows!*

NB: Oh good god, yeah! (LAUGH)

I think the last, the last bill I sent to Roger when all his lot was there was £230 for a laundry bill, I'm glad I didn't have to pay for it.

ALK: *And do you go up those steps and look out from Whiteslea across the marshes there?*

NB: Not now, no. Um 'cos there's the new one now, I don't know if you've been down there and saw it have you?

ALK: Haven't seen the new one.

NB: Now a new one and I done a silly thing just you know when they'd finished it and Steve said to me well he said you'e the oldest, he said, you've been there the longest , he said you've got to go up it first see I didn't think what I was doing really. I went up there like a fool.

I got hold of the hand rails and I was up in no time and come down just as quick. For two days I couldn't move.

I couldn't of - well if it hadn't been for this chair I wouldn't have got out either, 'cos I can just heave myself up you see, I wouldn't have got out of it, I said to Andrew I shall never do that again, and I haven't been up a pair of steps since.

ALK: But you must have had some lovely times up there in the past ?

NB: Yeah, yeah. Oh yes.

ALK: Best view in Hickling...

NB: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

ALK: And do you know the names of all those marshes?

NB: No well I did do, I did do.

ALK: Did you know the other marsh cutters, did you know Doddo Sheppard and Newks?

NB: Yeah, but I think...

ALK: Wasn't quite the same.

NB: You see, they were self employed.

ALK: That's right.

NB: You see, they didn't work for the Trust really, but Doddo, he was there before my time because he went after. I don't know whether he went fishing after he'd been reed cutting or he did reed cutting first, I don't know.

But Newks, he was reed cutting when I was working down there and who was the other one? Oh, Dindo, er, Dindo Flaxman he was a Hicklinger. He used to be down there tying reed. Bertie Beales was another one.

ALK: Ted Pigginn?

NB: He was a warden. He didn't do no work at all (LAUGH), or so they tell me 'cause he weren't there when I went you see, and when I went, oh, he used to live down Staithe Road. Good God, what was his name? Ted Bishop.

ALK: Yes.

NB: He was a warden when I started and then there was Colonel Sangtey, he was a right old boy he was 'cos he, he used to like his drink and course them days in the lookout there used to be an offertory box you know, and, er, he'd always go down the Pleasure Boat by boat and when he went passed there he'd always take the cash out the offertory box and go down the

pub and he'd ask nearly everybody if they wanted a drink. Course then we found out how he could afford it. (LAUGH) He was nicking the money out the boxes, and he, he was a nice old guy really, but you couldn't really trust him I don't think, Colonel Sangtey

And then there was, oh, what was his name, young chap from Neatishead. He took on board with Philip for a while 'cos he used to come, you know these I think you call them bicycles what you lay down in and do with your feet, he used to come from Neatishead on one of them down there to work every day. And then of course I don't know where he went to after that.

And then, oh, a tall chap. I thought of his name a little while ago. Hmm, can't think of it, 'cos he would, he went to Ranworth for a warden there for a few years and I haven't heard of him since. And course now we got John who's there now and, course, he been there a few year he really have.

ALK: *So now what do you think if you were in charge what would you do how would you advise the Norfolk Wild Life Trust who's got to think about this great area?*

NB: The thing of it is they do everything different to what we used to, you see.

I mean we used to stand in the boat with our meg and cut reed and stuff off in the water to keep the dykes open and all that kind of stuff and I mean the entrance to Whiteslea, er, I don't think you'd get out there now with a rowing boat cos the reeds. All they've got now is a passage for the big boats to go through, and you know I think that's wrong because that make it so difficult for other people, and I know one or two of the, you know, the Cadburys have moaned because they're trying to row down there and they can't because you can't get your oars out the flipping reed after you pulled, that sort of thing.

And I think a lot of the waterways where the birds used to feed, you see they aren't open any more, they're all grown up so there's nowhere for the birds to feed. Then they moan because they don't see any water birds. That's the only problem.

They got a space as you go down Whiteslea Lane on the right hand side as you know they've been the flood blank all the way round and that's where they got a lot of the soil from and that's open water now. Nothing will grow in it because they've taken all the reeds and everything out and they've got birds on it. They even got little egrets and little **wrens**. They've got two pairs on there where, years ago, you never used to see one. And that's how the scrape should be opposite the lookout. It's no good looking out there now because it's all grown up and I think they'd get a lot more money in if they cut the reed to sell it and sold it.

They don't cut any off, not now because they are you know self-employed reed cutters and they're paid so much a bunch and the rest, really, which there's 4 self-employed reed cutters come down there every year and, um, er, what's his name young Nixon, no young Nicholls, him and his brother, cut a lot of the sedge down there as well as you know other places, but, er, I suppose you know they get enough revenue to carry on. I suppose if they do.

ALK: *So you must have seen the water clearing and the weed growing up and not growing up...*

NB: Yeah, yeah.

ALK: *What do you think about that and managing the big area of water there?*

NB: Well the thing of it is when I first started there, there was a huge flock of swans, coot and ducks. Where are they now? As far as I know in the summer time there was 2 coot and they

nested near Whiteslea and had 4 babies and the Cadburys told me that was the only coots they saw on the broad, and course the swans used to feed on the weed.

Coot, I don't even know if you'd find a coot, not now, and I mean there used to be hundreds of coot, they used to feed on the weed and so for now the broads is clogged up with weed which everybody is moaning about. (LAUGH)

They can't blame em I suppose, but there is a reed cutter go up and down, but he only just do the channel - you know where the big boats are - and course when they're sailing they can't spread out much on the broad now 'cos they get a bit entangled up in the blinking weed, but what they can do I don't know 'cos they got no swans or coot to feed on the growth what's in there.

Of course now they got the weed - and weed that they don't want, not really but how the heck they get rid of it I don't know. (LAUGH)

And course, now the Trust have got the other half, I can't see them doing anything with it at all really because I think they wanted to buy it in case any big boys turned up and turned it into something else.

So like where the boatyard is, and of course the sailing club belong to the Trust now and the boat yard and all the way round and they said you know they were frightened some big buyers might come in and change it into something else, which I don't blame 'em really in some ways. And, course, Brendan Judge - last time I saw him - he said he didn't think, you know, things had altered much at all, if they did at all, but whether they will them who live longest will see...

ALK: *We will. Well I don't want to tire you out but I wanted to ask if there was anything else you wanted to tell me about?*

NB: No, not really

ALK: *It's been very interesting.*

NB: One I can think of now. Yeah, I did meet Prince Charles down there. He had a party come down and you'll see photographs in there of the boats what we took 'em round, round the broad and I think they went down Candle Dyke and went right all the way round and we shook hands with him. I had an embarrassing moment when I met him, and course we - down near the lodge - we had a great big stack of reed ready for the lorries, you know, to come and pick up. And of course we all had to stand in our line and how do and shake your hands one thing and another and he said well what length do the reed grow you see. And of course we'd put some long ones on the top and, course, he asked me to see a long bunch of reed, I stretched up to get a bunch of reed and I got one what bent like that. (LAUGH)

I never felt so embarrassed in all my life. (LAUGH) But, as they said well it didn't matter to him course he didn't know the difference and I don't suppose he did, did he?

And then before that we had to go to Ranworth - when they first opened Ranworth - and be introduced to the Queen. We all stood there and shaked hands and I remember as she went along she sort of asked you know people what they did, and course she got to Arthur and asked Arthur what he did and he told her, and course she got to me and she said, "well what do you do?" So I said "same as him", she said "what was that?" (LAUGH) Course I felt a ruddy fool and course she didn't find out she didn't ask Arthur what he did. Oh dear oh dear. But that was a nice day out really you know. The only thing is there was so much pomp because you were only regulated where you were allowed to go and all that kind of stuff.

But when Charles came up Whiteslea they didn't allow cameras, nobody were allowed to go down there with a camera and, um, I was down there with one of the lads, I had me camera in me dinner bag and he said to me why don't you get up there he said and take a few snaps.

I said I can't I'm not allowed. Well he said there's no one near us, he said no one'll know and so I climbed up on the look out and took a few snaps of them getting in and out of the boats and then legged it.

Oh dear, that's the thing about Whiteslea. When Christopher was alive he wouldn't allow anybody to go in there with a camera, 'cos occasionally we used to have you know since I've been looking after it, you'd have groups you know of ladies, or whatever group they were, would like to have a look round inside you know. Well, we used to let them in and have a look but all the cameras had to be left outside, he didn't want nobody taking any photographs of those pictures, but now they don't bother. They just come in and snap and gone. (LAUGH) But the thing of it is they've seen pictures of Whiteslea in the paper and on the telly so what matter and they haven't been able to pinch them 'cos they never get em off and they'd never get them away would they, only some small ones only little ones. But um that's as far as I know.

ALK: *Well, thank you very much.*

*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...*