

Voices of Hickling

Interview Transcript: Ralph Lamb

In conversation with Ann Louise Kinmonth on 30th July 2018

ALK: *Where does your surname come from?*

RL: **My, my surname? Lamb?**

ALK: *Yes.*

RL: **Well I don't, I've never thought about it.**

ALK: *No.*

RL: **No.**

ALK: *Not local is it?*

RL: **There are one or two Lambs in Norfolk anyway. Other Lambs. Yes, there's not many.**

ALK: *Yes.*

RL: **But where, it a, my , my , my .**

My great grandfather was a, was a skipper. Had a boat in Yarmouth. And they used to trade across to Holland,, and, er, he was a Lamb, of course.

So we've been around in Yarmouth area for several generations.

ALK: *Yeah. What did your father do? He had the shop?*

RL: **It was, my grandfather started off.**

He was, in those days, in the 1880's when that picture of the Volunteer. He was a plumber and gas fitter.

Then the time my father came along, that was just the beginning of the First World War, electricity was then being installed in Yarmouth.

And then of course I came along in 19..., just, just during the war 1945, '39, '40, '42 I started work, and, er, of course I was trained as electric and that's all I knew really. Yes.

ALK: *And did you live in Yarmouth then?*

RL: **I lived in. Well, I live in _____ now, which is only about 3 or 4 miles just outside Yarmouth.**

ALK: *Yes.*

RL: **Our shop, I've got a picture there, is still in being. I've still got the shop and a house in Yarmouth.**

ALK: *Yeah, but was that electrical or?*

RL: **That was electrical, yes.**

ALK: *Makes sense.*

RL: **That was in Mill Road because that was, the biggest, tallest windmill in Norfolk was built about two or three hundred yards away, so the road is called Mill Road, as before that was just marshland then, of course.**

ALK: Yes.

RL: Near the, that's near the Haven Bridge if you know Yarmouth, yes. Yeah.

ALK: *Who would you know? Well, Harry, of course you knew Harry."*

RL: Yes I knew Harry. He passed away fairly shortly...

ALK: Yeah.

RL: not long ago.

ALK: Yeah.

RL: But I, of course, he was with his father in the rescue, in the boat, and he used to go round doing a bit of gardening and one thing and another. He had a 4 wheel buggy he used to rip around here with.

That's when I kept my dinghy on the, on the village staithe, you know. When I first, well I'm going back now, 19, when I first came, 1952-3 what is the village staithe now was just a rond, or reed bed and I used to just put, after the sailing I used to drive up on there and leave it and then next week I used to be, come up by river, come up from Potter Heigham, sail up you know.

But then, of course other people got the idea and in the end the village thought they, well obviously, make money out of people like me being there.

But when I first started that was just a rond, a Norfolk word, just a bunch of reeds and that was lovely to drive in there and keep the dinghy but I, there was another gentleman who was nearby there, a chap called Beales.

ALK: Yes.

RL: And he had a garage ...

ALK: Yes.

RL: ... and he had some boat sheds and he had half deckers and they were named after flowers as I remember it, yes.

And he was very, very good to the, to the, to the sailing club, to people like me 'cos there was always something breaking on the boat and we used to use his, his workshop, his bench for hacksawing this, that or the other.

But, so Mr Beales was very, very good, yes.

RL: My full name is Ralph Cubitt Lamb, C U B I double T. Lamb, yes.

ALK: *And where were you born?*

RL: I was, I was born on, on, on Beaconsfield Road in 1926. In Great Yarmouth.

ALK: *And what's your connection with Hickling?*

RL: Well, beforehand I mean I didn't, I didn't have any connection.

I learned about Hickling when I used to attend, with a young lady, whose niece, whose aunt was Gwen Amis.

And she used to dance at Drake's Dance Hall at Potter Heigham and I was, I was always quite a good dancer, and she was a good... And that's how I got to know, we used to dance together – occasionally, not all of the time and then she said she came from Hickling and I think perhaps that was my first, first connection at all, and I think that she said her father was, um, what's his name? -----(?), Jimmy, Jimmy Turner.

Her father was the head, was the foreman of Herbert Woods and her, and that's how, that's how, and that's how she came into sailing and I said "Well I do a bit of sailing"

And that's how we come to, we got involved with the Hickling club through Wendy I believe.

I used to stay, I used to sail from Thurne to Potter Heigham and stay in the Broads Haven overnight.

My selected crew used to come up by Eastern Counties bus on the Sunday and then we used to sail from Potter to Hickling.

But sometimes a chap called Billy May, who had a bit of a boat building business in, in Potter, he used to tow, tow me up together with Mick Richardson, whose photograph was there, to, to, to Hickling, and race for the day and I didn't often stop for the last race 'cos I had, we got back, I had to sail back to Potter, get the mast down, and then, then, then get to Thurne.

So I had quite a full day.

But, anyway that's how I got to come to know Hickling, through Wendy Turner.

ALK: *When do you think that was?*

RL: That was, definitely would have been '52, '53 time, yes.

ALK: *And did you have brothers and sisters?*

RL: I had one sister, yes.

ALK: *And what happened to her?*

RL: Well, she's still around.

ALK: *Good, yeah. And did you ever get married?*

RL: No, I had one or two lady friends and I had one special lady friend, and it's all my fault.

I know that, we didn't get married but I put that down to me. She was a dancing teacher, a ballet dancer and, er, had a dancing school. Her mother did in Yarmouth – called the Phyllis Adams School of Dance, and, er, there we are.

But we didn't get married but we were, were together for 50 years. That's right, yes, and I think to myself what on earth was I thinking about.

But I was so busy with the business, she was so busy with hers, but, but I know that the reason is probably with me that we didn't get married.

Yes. I was too happy as I was. I think I don't really know, and she didn't sort of mention too much about it.

ALK: *I know how it is. Yes.*

RL: But there we are.

ALK: *I know how it is. So, one of the other things we talk about is whether you've got any particular memories of, of growing up that come to mind. Um, school, holidays, the war, those kind of things.*

RL: Well of course I was, I was conscripted in 1945 and, er, 'cos I was then 18.

'Cos I remember the war in Yarmouth, they had lots of bombing there. And then, of course, I was just about to embark in, on the Cunard Askelia (?) - that's a small liner - when they dropped the atom bombs in Japan and by time we got to the, they dropped another atom bomb – Nagasaki I think.

By the time we got to the end of the..., we stopped at Gibraltar, then I was disembarked, then by the time we got to the end of the Med the, the war in Japan was over.

They seen, seen the result of the atom bombs – so I spent three years in Egypt, Palestine, Libya, Transjordan etc. then I was demobbed, yes.

We were, I was in Haifa, believe it or not on the board, on the orders one day “Anyone interested in joining the Army Yacht Club in Haifa, put your name down here, put your number.”

Course I was only a private or a gunner, put my name and I can remember now 1,4, 9, double 5, double 6, 0 – you can always remember your army number.

Anyway I finished up in, in the, in this yacht club in Haifa in charge of a chap who’d never seen a boat before.

We had six converted assault boats, an ex Grafton Able (?) whaler. Anyway that’s another story, long story.

I was there when the, when the Jews who were fortunate enough to escape Hitler, they were coming across into Haifa and being dis-embarked and I was rounded up to, not to round them up, I was rounded up to stand there and the ATS and the ladies were given a WAAF uniform etc. and the men were given army uniforms and they finished up in a, in a place called Latroun – its not a concentration camp that’s just a holding camp.

So I was there when all the, and that was really the start of the trouble what we’ve got now because they were coming in in their hundreds and then a thousand or two and they sort of took over the Palestinians and that’s what, that’s what causes a lot of trouble at the moment ’cos soon as the Jews were there an old piece of desert, semi desert, was turned into an orange grove within a short space of time, and now, of course, the Arabs want it back – which probably I can understand.

But I was there, during that time, I was there when the boats were coming in. Yes.

ALK: *Extraordinary.*

RL: Yes. The boats were financed by the Americans, they came from Italy and they didn’t like, they didn’t like when they saw uniforms.

I, they thought anyone with a uniform was an enemy and they were flinging great big tins of pork luncheon moat, meat onto, onto the ground.

Course they, we had a, come to a bit of history now – in the 1920s we had an agreement apparently, with the Palestinians, that we wouldn’t allow unlimited immigration and our navy was out there trying to stop these boats what were coming across from Italy.

So, we were, we were the enemy, and in the end of course, where our camps were...

By this time I’d come back on leave into England, 1947, the coldest winter ever, and I remember coming here, to Hickling, and there was all big posts in the, in the Broad, with wires in between to stop sea planes landing. Yes.

ALK: *What was it like.....?*

RL: ——— (?) come to that subject.

ALK: *What was it like coming back?*

RL: Pardon.

ALK: *What was it like coming back?*

RL: Well coming, well, as I say I was here for a month, that's all, and that was in 1947 and I came here ice skating, yes.

How I got here. I expect I cycled from Yarmouth and I stayed with Barry Besford (?), he's gone now, but the Broad was all posts and wires in between where..., whereas our boat, all of a sudden we went to Thurne and the dyke was empty.

And coming out of the shop was a Mr Curtis (?)

"Oh" we said, "What's happening?"

Well, your boat has been confiscated with all the others.

And in the family we had the Volunteer, we had the Dora and the Doro, and the Dorothy, three boats in the Lamb family and he said "Oh yes, you're all on South Walsham Broad. You're not allowed, you're not allowed to visit and they're being kept afloat by someone in the village."

And that was it and we didn't step on board for, for three and a half to four years.

ALK: Did you not go?

RL Well we went, we couldn't get on, we weren't allowed to get on board.

And in that time the brass clock, the barometer, the gimballed oil lamp had been taken, and even the bowsprit had been taken – why goodness knows, perhaps they wanted it for a linen pole, I don't know.

But this is only what hearsay, I was told that the, the, the, boatyard at, at, at Potter Heigham – I mentioned their name, sorry – Woods, Herbert Woods of Potter Heigham, they had a really big, which they have now, they had a really big fleet of cruisers and all their cutlery was put on, on, on the Glistening Light and at the end of the war there wasn't a teaspoon on board.

Yes. But I've been told that through other people so I don't know quite how true it is. But I think that must have been a certain amount of truth. Yeah.

ALK: You got all three back? You got the boats back

RL: Oh, we got them back but, of course, the awnings were absolutely rotted through etc, er, and every boat that had anything what could be lifted off gone.

We had some nice little pictures, you know, much smaller than those, in the cabin – but they'd gone. Yeah.

ALK: Mmmm. Not such a good memory, that one.

RL: That was, that was my memories of the war. Then of course, as I say, I was in Palestine and, er, I've told you about my, when the Jews were all landing. Yeah.

ALK: So, the other thing we ask about is those years up to 18, when you were conscripted.

RL: Yes.

ALK: I'd imagine you did a bit of sailing then. When you were sort of, I dunno, what age were you when you left school?

RL: Oh, fourteen.

ALK: Yeah, and then you went.

RL: Well.

ALK: And you went to the electrical training then?

RL: Went straight in as, as an apprentice with my father.

Five shillings a week was my wages. Yes. It's hard to believe – 25 pence isn't it? But then at the time I got, got called into the army my weekly wage was 17/6d, but when I went in the army I got a pound a week plus "the King's shilling so that was what they call a guinea and, er, so, so, so by going in the army I got a wage rise. There we are.

But, er, yes, I went on leave to Cyprus, admittedly all my time was spent in Egypt but I did see, oh yes when I got to, I was trained as an anti-tank gunner, I had a good shot and I was a gun layer.

That meant I had my eye to the telescope and had your ear down. And then, of course, when you pulled the trigger the gun recoiled right past your ear – we didn't have cotton wool, or anything in and so this ear which I've got a hearing aid, from the time I was about eighteen and a half I couldn't hear a watch tick in this ear.

Now, with old age, that's, that's got considerably worse. Yes. there we are.

ALK: *Ah, interesting. So, when you came back and the fifties...*

RL: Yeah.

ALK: *...what was that like?*

RL: Oh it was completely lost because when you were in the army that was all, you get to know the chaps all pretty well, we're all mates together, but when I came back my friends were either courting strong, either still in the army and I was on my own.

Thank goodness I had the boat.

We had a piece of land in Yarmouth, where the boat was, and there was a fair bit of work to do, putting new keel bolts in and goodness knows what so I spent my first, first two or three months, in the evenings, sort of working on the boat. So that gradually got me back into the...

ALK: *But it was cold. Oh, no. You didn't get the boat back then.*

RL: No. Well, the boat we, the boat was back by 1947.

The time I was demobbed that was late '48. '47 was when I came on leave.

They call LIAP, leave in advance of python – that's like, python is when you done 7 years.

I'll tell you something I heard the other day, sorry, the other day some girls talking about their boyfriends "Oh he's been out there three months."

My regiment, when I joined it, had spent five years in India. They were on their way through the Suez Canal when war was declared. They were immediately disembarked in Port Said and they spent the next three or four years being chased up and down the desert by Rommel – and so they done all those years and never been home.

'Cos they used to tell me this and I used to be in a tent.

When I went there I was only, well I was a boy and they were grown men and they treated me like a, like a son. Yeah, that was a, that was a funny experience.

But I, you know, I know now that really when I, when I joined, when I was called up I was really proper, a mummy's boy. But within a short space of time being in the army I was entirely different. That really transformed me. Done me jolly good. I can see now that, that was the best thing that could've happened to me. \

'Cos when you're living at home mother did this, mother did ..., but there we are. That's another story.

ALK: *Great story.*

RL: Yeah.

ALK: Very good story. Well, we'll perhaps just do one or two of the other areas so you know

RL: Yes.

ALK: But a particular one is Hickling Broad, its nature and wildlife.

RL: Yeah.

ALK: Anything you liked about it, any stories you had, you know, about falling in or seeing birds or...

RL: Well when we first used to sail from Potter Heigham, used to be, used to be arriving on the Broad round about ten o' clock, sometimes we didn't quite make the first race, that didn't make any difference, and as you were sitting low down in a dinghy there was not a hundred swans, there was several thousand – the whole Broad ahead of you was completely white.

That was several, I don't know if anybody has ever told you about it, there was several thousand swans on the Broad, and the, that didn't last.

For two or three years that was the same and then all of a sudden they must've, the Broads Warden, they must have had a cull or whatever and, er, they, they gradually disappeared to just the odd 50, or whatever there is now.

But, that time I would guess, guesstimate there was a thousand or two. Yes.

ALK: When was that do you think?)

RL: That would be, well, 1954-55, yes, yes.

ALK: That's a fantastic story and what about, what about other birds, fish, animals?

RL: Well no I've obvious I've seen 'em now, my, I've only just recently seen 'em 'cos I spent a bit of time with the Lady, that's another story, the Lady Yacht Club – you never heard about that I suppose, no.

There's no ladies at all except that Herbert Woods allowed his men, at the end of the season, to take a yacht out for a long weekend.

Then, in the end, people like me who floated about a lot around Potter Heigham were invited to join the Lady Yacht Club and we used to sail what they called Lady Boats - "Perfect Lady", "Leading Lady", "Fair Lady" and so this club got called the Lady Yacht Club.

Yes, and, er, there we are. Anyway we have a meeting, which is about a month ago, at which I didn't attend this year and, um, I, last year I saw marsh, marsh harriers, they are really a big bird. That's the first time I seen 'em, they certainly weren't on the Broad when I spent a lot of time here. It's only this last, well a short while when I've seen a marsh harrier, and I've seen one at Thurne as well. Yes.

ALK: What about bitterns?

RL: Uh?

ALK: Bitterns.

RL: I've heard one but I've never, ever seen one. Yes, I've heard one – that was a long while ago. Sailing about one night in the semi-darkness. Yes. Yeah.

ALK: Otters?

RL: Pardon?

ALK: Otters?

RL: No I didn't see otters. I've seen an otter, otter at Thurne. I've seen, I've seen the results of an otter when they got into Mr Cook's pond with his big fish, and they, and they ate all the flesh off and all the skeleton was absolutely perfect.

Yes, and Mr Cook wasn't very pleased about that.

ALK: Coypu?

RL: Mmm?

ALK: There's coypu.

RL: Ah, yes, I've seen the odd coypu but that was way back in late 60's – they were, they were more or less eliminated by the end of the 60s, yes. As far as I know. Yes.

ALK: And how do you think that the Broad and so on has changed during your long sailing lifetime? What would you observe about it?

RL: Well that, well that doesn't seem to have changed too much.

I think there's just about the same amount of water. The reeds haven't encroached on it to any great extent.

That used to be a hut called Turner's Hut on Turner's Island and that, that was still there in the late, early to late 50's. But that, that's disappeared. Yes.

No, I can't think of anything, anything else, no.

ALK: You know the Norfolk Wildlife Trust is taking it over now?

RL: Have they? Yes.

ALK: Yeah. What would you advise them, to do with it?

RL: Oh. Well I think leave well alone perhaps might be one word.

No, I can't think anything that, I can't think they should.

I suppose to restrict the sailing – I don't suggest they should but that would perhaps improve the wildlife but.

As I say the swan, the swans were culled, must have been – from thousands down to a couple of dozen in the space of two or three years. Something must have been done, yes.

ALK: Very good, so, at that point then we usually, those are the kind of areas that we cover and then we ask you if you've got other stories you'd, you'd like to tell yourself. And it may be that that's what you want to think about and maybe come back to us with. I've got a picture to show you.

RL: Well. Er.

ALK: You know some of them?

RL: I think his face on the extreme right...

ALK: Yeah.

RL: ...is familiar, but I couldn't put a name to him anyway.

ALK: Well, he's the cricketer...

RL: Yes.

ALK: The county cricketer.

RL: Oh yes.

ALK: *Um, and this man...*

RL: **Yes.**

ALK: *...he's the owner of that boatyard you were talking about. Potter Heigham.*

RL: **Was it, oh, er, Mr Woods?**

ALK: *That's Mr Woods*

RL: **Yes, I, I, now you mention it.**

ALK: *And next to him is Aubrey Herbert Smith. Did you know Aubrey?*

RL: **Herbert Smith. No.**

ALK: *No.*

RL: **His, his face I've, I've somehow seen.**

ALK: *Yeah. That's Aubrey...*

RL: **I'll tell you who used to come across the Broads in the early days.**

Immediately in front of the clubhouse on the other side that was a well known and a very good artist.

ALK: *Yes. Roland Green.*

RL: **You're right. Roland. He used to come into the pub on very, on odd occasions.**

ALK: *Yeah.*

RL: **Not very often but he did. Yes.**

And I'm going back now to, do you know what I mean by if I said Gwen Amis?

ALK: *Yes.*

RL: **Well, she kept the pub, her husband had died, and every, I don't know whether that's late in the year, early in the year, there used to be a big shoot on Hickling, and, um, Prince Philip, Charles, when he was about 9 - 8 or 9, and other members of the Royal Family who I don't, they came and they made up a party.**

And for one, some reason or another, have you heard of Whit, Whiteslea Lodge?

They used to stay there but for some reason or another, I believe this is right, the water was so high they couldn't use it as accommodation, and they stayed with Gwen Amis at the pub.

And as related to me by Wendy Turner, and I believe it was her and not Gwen, Prince Philip said, said to Gwen "If that young bugger gives you any trouble give him a good clip across the backside."

And that's Prince Philip talking about young, er, young Charles. I know that's true.

What else I can tell you I don't know. But I don't think they have that shoot now, that just

ALK: *No coots.*

RL: **No. No. But that used to be a regular thing, yes. I believe that was sort of, well, sort of late in the autumn, but I'm not quite sure about when they held the shoots.**

I'm not into that sort of game.

ALK: *So.*

RL: That's all. Without people like Gwen that would have been difficult to keep the club maintained, because all we had then was a, was a barge, a ----- reed barge, and, er, after the sailing we all went back to the pub and she laid on sandwiches etc, you know, and this would be about half past four in the afternoon, and of course that wasn't like it is now.

There was no open, there was no licensing hours after two o' clock so she helped, she helped the club enormously.

And, of course, her, her brother, um, Wendy's, Wendy's father - I keep forgetting his name, er, Jimmy Turner – who was the foreman at Herbert Woods and he, that was her brother, I believe.

And, of course, the whole thing was, without Gwen there, that, that, and we used to use the case store, beer store, as a changing room if anyone happened to capsize 'cos there was nowhere to sort of go. We all put all our gear in there anyway.

So, she was very, very good for the club. That's before the clubhouse, and although the clubhouse eventually came along, which I suppose the, the load of the membership was getting more and more – instead of twenty or thirty of us as it started off and there were nearly, I was a stranger, they were nearly all village boys.

When they built the clubhouse that changed, there was nothing wrong in it, but that did change the atmosphere and you got a lot of people join because they could come to our clubhouse and sit on the lawn.

But they, they didn't, they didn't sail very much. They had about nearly a hundred, over a hundred dinghies laying about and, and the membership was getting on for two or three hundred but there was no more people sailing.

So I sometimes look back on the days when there was just the old reed barge, Gwen Amis, as the sort of golden days.

But that was bound to happen that there would be a clubhouse but I could see that the, the changing. That's not a wrong atmosphere, just different.

ALK: *When was that built?*

RL: Well I'll ask my friend, who was an architect, when that was done. But that would be, I don't know. Hard to, hard to say now, somewhere I would have to say, that was, that was in – somewhere in the middle of the '60s I would think. Yes.

But I could, I could tell you if I rang my friend up, Leslie Seaforth, he was the architect, and he'd be able to tell you, yes.

*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...*