

# Voices of Hickling

## Interview Transcript: David Platten



*Interviewed by Ann Louise Kinmonth and Ray Cator  
on 10th February 2018*

**DP:** *I was born Hickling. Oh, yeah. I was born at Hickling, can't think of the house now, but, er, it's down near the farm, Brightmere Farm. Holly Cottage - right?*

ALK: Perfect. And your date of birth?

**DP:** **March 1931**

ALK: And what's your earliest memories, do you think?

**DP:** **Walking to school I suppose. We had no bicycles then so I walked to school, and came home to dinner, then went back again.**

ALK: Were you on your own?

**DP:** **That was the life. Yeah.**

ALK: How old would you have been then?

**DP:** **Well I suppose about 5, um, and I spent til I was 10 and then I went to Stalham School, er, and spent most of the time there. Then the war came and, er, we had to scramble and get the place all papered up in the little windows. We done all the windows up with sticky paper to stop the glass shattering, you see. And, er, Mr Drake was my master, Ruth Vincent my first teacher I think. Ruth Vincent**

**I went to school at Stalham on my bicycle. Of course there was not so many cars on the road then. But we survived.**

**My father made an air raid shelter in the dyke next door to the house and er I think if we hadn't, might have got, if we didn't get hit, a gunner or by er, er, sorry, shrapnel or bombs... Er, that was it, but we managed and we got through all right. Yeah**

ALK: Who was the family? Who was in the family with your

**DP:** **There was only my father and mother**

ALK: The only child?

**DP:** **I was the only child, yes.**

ALK: What did your mum do?

**DP:** **I think the spare time she went fruit picking. There's a lot of fruit picking going on in those years. Blackcurrants. And my father worked on the fruit farm for General McHardy. So we carried on like that.**

ALK: What did you do in the war?

**DP:** Well, in the war, I was at school in the war. And we had a plan: I was quite interested in the aircraft then and watching the planes go over.

And there was one crashed in the village in the end and they all jumped out: I watched the skies and saw these parachutes coming out, er, and suddenly the aircraft appeared and roared down to Stubb Road and crashed, which wasn't very nice. But I didn't go to school that day. So, yeah.

ALK: Was that ours or theirs?

**DP:** What do you mean? It was a Liberator, yes a Liberator.

ALK: What happened to them?

**DP:** They all got out, oh yeah. I saw one of the parachutes and, er, they all got out. Yes. I didn't go to school that day.

What else can I say about the war? Er. Well, my father was on the Home Guard and he used to parade down the Causeway and, er, and one had a one, er, with his, with my, er, neighbour. Er, he came along with his walking stick and my father had a gun, a shotgun I think (chuckles). Didn't use it. But they were there if he was needed I suppose.

ALK: And what about the holidays? Do you remember anything about the school holidays, going out on trips or this business about the coronation celebration or anything like that?

**DP:** Well I think I remember, yeah, we had, we had, er, fetes or something like that was arranged on the playing field, so that's about it, I think

ALK: Did you enjoy games? Did you take part in the football, that kind of thing?

**DP:** We had, er, we had a fete. We used to have fetes and garden parties and sports on the playing field. Er. That's about all we done, really.

We had trenches at the school, on the playing fields. We never used those trenches, but we had fun playing in them.

ALK: Did you plant the vegetables as well?

**DP:** The what?

ALK: The vegetables.

**DP:** Yeah, we had vegetables. Yeah, I remember sitting eating carrots and things like that and, er, unfortunately I got told off by one and I was reprimanded, but, there we are...

ALK: What had you done?

**DP:** I think it was a carrot or carrots we sort of sampled. Huh.

ALK: So, you left school; and what was your first job?

**DP:** I left school and my first job was with Waldo Beales. Er. My father got me the job as a hand in the Garage, Waldo's garage and I went on from there.

ALK: That was with cars, not boats, right?

**DP:** Yeah, we done small repairs and served petrol and, er...

ALK: And you were earning money?

**DP: Yeah - that was the main thing I suppose, yeah**

ALK: So did you go out in the evenings, bit of courting, that kind of thing?

**DP: Well, that came later**

ALK: Right.

**DP: Yeah. Skating on the Broads a lot - when we had winters in those years, you see...**

ALK: Yeah

**DP: ...and the Broad would freeze over for one month in the year. I think it was four or five weeks. They got me to cut the ice out on the back dyke so let the Easter sort of influx of the, you know, holidaymakers could get out on the Broad.**

ALK: You used to skate at night, in the dark?

**DP: Yes. With the moonlight.**

ALK: What was that like?

**DP: Well, a bit hairy really, I suppose. (chuckles) Er, we just had to watch out where we were skating because there was probably a moonlight, but we had a good go.**

**Nothing happens now at this point of time.**

ALK: Not like that.

**DP: No, not like that. I used to like skating and, er, hopefully not to fall in...**

ALK: And you loved the Broads.

**DP: I loved the Broads**

ALK: Tell us about that, the working on the Broads

**DP: Well, we had half-deckers and, er, outboard motors. We used the garage which is opposite the boatyards and so it was, sort of, you know in the background, so...**

ALK: You had to get them all ready for the season?

**DP: Get them all ready, take the boats out of the boatyard, out of the boathouses and took them up to the garage and worked on them there.**

**I used to do a bit of signwriting and paint the names of the boats on the back and then I - in the end - I got fed up with the job and, er, I think I went to the army then, I went and joined the army. National Service. I went to Germany and, er, spent two years there, two years in the army, then came back and went back to Waldo's again. He was pleased to see me back, and then because the wage packet didn't go up with the rest of the terms, and I got a job at Richardsons in Stalham.**

ALK: That was a bigger outfit wasn't it...

**DP: Yes, a bigger outfit.**

ALK: And you had the cruisers there...

**DP: Yes. I enjoyed that, quite a bit. Giving trial runs to people and making lots of friends. And I used to do the signwriting on the backs of the boats.**

ALK: You could have been a painter is that right? Roland Green thought highly of you...

**DP: Yeah, I think rather than wanting me to join him. I don't know whether he, I suppose I would have to pay for that, so that didn't come off!**

ALK: How did you get to know him?

**DP: Er, well, he used to come to the garage and fill his car up with petrol, that sort of thing. [I] didn't get much out of Roland, huh, he didn't give a lot away really. Didn't even give one of his pictures away - I never got a picture from him, but, yeah, he was alright.**

ALK: And did you paint pictures when you were in your teens?

**DP: You what?**

ALK: Did you paint pictures?

**DP: I used to paint a few pictures, yeah. I got one or two in my bungalow at the moment, which reminds me of my younger days.**

ALK: What kind of things did you paint?

**DP: Broadland scenes. Broadland scenes, you know. Ducks and er, we had coot shoots in the — then. That's another thing which is lost. We don't get those any more.**

ALK: Did you go on those, on the coot shoots?

**DP: I did take a few of the farmers on the water.**

ALK: Did you do the quanting?

**DP: We used the quant, you see, which is not terribly easy, but er, we got through that one all right. They all joined at the Pleasure Boat for lunch.**

ALK: Did you go when the king was there?

**DP: The king?**

ALK: Yeah, he came to the coot shoot. I wondered if you were there.

**DP: Er, the king didn't come down, no. I can't think who it was now.**

ALK: Prince Charles came as well.

**DP: Who?**

ALK: Prince Charles.

**DP: Prince Charles, yeah. He came to the boatyard when I was at the boatyard when I was there at the boatyard, well the garage and, er, he called up one night and said "can you put some petrol in, I want to get back to Whiteslea - wanted to get back to home, where he came from, do you see?"**

ALK: Sandringham?

**DP: Yes, Sandringham, that's right. He said "Fill her up" and I filled it up. That's another experience I was quite pleased about, I suppose.**

**Er, what else can I tell you?**

ALK: What about fishing on the Broad?

**DP: No, I, I wasn't a fisherman, really. I used to sail.**

ALK: Yeah? Tell us about the sailing on the Broad

**DP: Yeah, well I had my own little dinghy**

ALK: Describe it - what was it like?

**DP: Well, it was only a twelve foot dinghy...**

ALK: Wooden?

**DP: Wooden boat, yeah.**

ALK: Gaff rigged?

**DP: What? Yes, Yes. Er. What else?**

ALK: Did you race? Did you go in the regatta?

**DP: No, I did join Hickling Broad Sailing Club, but I think it was out of my reach, er, the, sort of, the joining there, so I let that go.**

**But I used to like skating when the Broad froze over.**

ALK: Now the other thing you've mentioned to me is the floods.

**DP: Floods, yeah.**

ALK: What do you remember about those floods?

**DP: Well, er, er, it was quite hairy really. My father took us - on the Sunday morning, I think. Got the car out and took us down to Palling, Sea Palling. Er. We couldn't get past Waxham because the water was up to there. That was quite an experience, that was.**

ALK: Do you remember which one that was? was that '53 or was that...

**DP: Yeah. Yes it was. '53**

ALK: Yeah.

**DP: So, er... That's about it...**

ALK: Did it flood round here in Hickling?

**DP: Not really, no. We didn't feel it. It was high water, but didn't feel it at Hickling. Dykes were full. My aunt was involved at Sea Palling. She had to move out. The**

water came up to her awning (?) in the hall somewhere, in the... But, so much, she moved out and went to live at Waxham, er, further out of the danger area

ALK: How are you? We are more than half way. Are you all right?

**DP: I'm all right, yeah. (chuckles)**

**Then I, er, after that, I got another job after that. Stalham Boatyard . That was quite a big affair that was. Then Ranks came along and, er, we enjoyed the, all the taking people out, trial runs. And then they made me up to a Charge Hand and then I used to put the names on the boats, which was exciting, I suppose.**

ALK: Did you use one of those sticks, to steady your hand?

**DP: Yeah. What did we call them - pogo sticks, I think. Something like that, to rest your arm.**

**We had a fleet of new boats come in after that and, er, then I, er, what happened then? They closed up. It was Ranks I think. They closed up, and I had to find another job. Luckily I had a friend in, er, to change the job and found me, got me a job as Pest Control Officer.**

ALK: What did they call you?

**DP: Well, they called me (laughs) Well, most men I think ————— That was good, meeting people. Alright?**

ALK: Perfect. Can you tell me about that hornets' nest?

**DP: The hornets' nest? Well, I think I got stung, actually. In the loft, opening the loft and they all came out, huh. But, er, we managed anyway.**

ALK: Where do you think the wasps have all gone?

**DP: Where? What, this year do you mean?**

ALK: Any year, in the last few years.

**DP: Well, they, er, I don't know. I've lost touch now, because, er, I haven't seen the pest control about, anyway. Now, that seems to closed up, that sort of thing.**

ALK: Tell us about a day in your life when you were the mouse man. What would you do?

**DP: No, I enjoyed that.**

ALK: What happened in a day?

**DP: Well, I had my own van and, er, just sort of went round...**

ALK: Did you see anything like large numbers of rats or things like that?

**DP: Not really, no. I didn't get involved too much about that. I didn't like that part of the job. But I met people, tried to please people. That was another one of my side lines.**

ALK: I read about one of the nests was in a lavatory

**DP: Was it?**

ALK: Yes

**DP: What have you heard this from?**

ALK: In your writings.

**DP: Oh, did yer? I don't know about that one.**

ALK: OK. So, a couple more things?

**DP: Yeah.**

ALK: Were there any particular birds or animals that you really loved in the...

**DP: Kingfishers was my favourite bird.**

ALK: Why was that?

**DP: Well, I suppose the colouring and that was all a part of my interest in painting.**

ALK: Where would you go to see them?

**DP: Where?**

ALK: Yeah.

**DP: Hickling Broad**

ALK: Where?

**DP: Well, this end of Hickling Broad, which, er, Hill Common way, really.**

ALK: They're still here.

**DP: Are they?**

ALK: Yeah, I like them. What about other birds and things that you loved to see?

**DP: Well, thats another thing I used to paint, I used to try and sketch them out. Er. Got one or two in my bungalow to show off. Huh. What else can I say about that? Used to hear the bittern booming. Never get that now. I don't know whether they have sort of, still in the area.**

**But I enjoyed sailing. I've got a sailing dinghy.**

ALK: What about going up Meadow Dyke, straight into the wind?

**DP: Yeah.**

ALK: How did you do that?

**DP: (23.10) Well, you had to tack, didn't you? That was the word, I think. You tacked. Went up to Horsey, Horsey Mere.**

**Done a bit of fishing and that. Went swimming at White... not Whiteslea, er,**

ALK: Tallowin's place?

**DP:** Yeah, Tallowin's. The Dipping Place we called it.

ALK: So how has Hickling changed in your lifetime?

**DP:** Well, it's no longer Hickling really because all the people have sort of "gone before", you know, sort of thing...

I'm still happy to be in Hickling. I used to get involved with the church, did a bit of singing with the male voice choir. That's all finished now. Hickling's not the same any more, but that's my home.

ALK: What do you still enjoy about it?

**DP:** I can't answer that, really. I've enjoyed my time in Hickling: I don't think I want to live anywhere else really.

ALK: Very good. Now. Norfolk Wildlife Trust...

**DP:** Yeah?

ALK: ...now has responsibility for the whole of the Broad.

**DP:** Oh, yes.

ALK: It's taken it over from the estate.

**DP:** Yes.

ALK: Now lets say they came to you and said "What do you advise us, Mr Platten? How should we take care of the Broad? What advice would you give them?"

**DP:** Gosh. I can't answer that, I don't think... It's altogether changed, you see. Potter Heigham bridge won't let the bigger boats in - they can't get under the bridge so it's gone bit by bit \_\_\_\_\_ . I'd certainly use my dinghy which is, er, when I get a chance.

ALK: What do you do with it? Where do you go?

**DP:** Sail up and down...

ALK: Do you? Are you still sailing?

**DP:** Oh yeah.

ALK: I haven't seen you sailing.

**DP:** Oh yeah. I don't enter any races any more (laughs) No. But its nice to get out and ... there's no swans on the Broad any more. It used to be full of coots and swans, but, er, it's gone down a bit now.

ALK: So you think the Norfolk Wildlife Trust should get it up a bit?

**DP:** I don't know about that, no.

ALK: Or leave it down?

**DP:** (Chuckles) Yeah. I don't know. Hickling is sort of my home and, er, I'm quite happy to remain here, I think. I got two children - well, they're not children any more! - er. My son is a chef and my daughter is an optician. Hayley.



ALK: Are they local?

**DP: Yes**

ALK: Do they see you a lot?

**DP: Yeah, oh yes.**

ALK: Are they happy to be around Hickling? Or do they think it's a bit down?

**DP: Paul's gone to Sheringham to live: he's a chef, and my daughter is an optician.**

**What else can I tell you?**

ALK: Anything else you wanted to tell me ]that I haven't led you to. Anything that you thought "I'll tell her about that"? Let's ask Ray if he thinks there's something you ought to tell us. He's been very very quiet hasn't he?

RC: (Chuckles) I've been trained...

Well, not really. I mean, I did mention to you the fact that obviously you were not born when your Dad went to America...

**DP: No, no. I wasn't. No.**

RC: How many years did he stay in America?

**DP: Well, er, I can't remember. He didn't discuss it very much. He didn't say a lot. But he liked skating on Hickling when he came home on leave.**

RC: So was he in the army as such?

**DP: Yes, he was in the army, but I don't know quite what regiment he was in.**

RC: Was that First World War?

**DP: Yeah. He wasn't in the Second War**

RC: We kept a lot of forces in the country, didn't we? More or less half of those called up stayed actually in the country.

**DP: Oh, yeah. My father I suppose left the war and got married and I came along (chuckles)**

**Hickling's not quite the same any more, is it?**

RC: It's definitely changed in some ways for - obviously - the better. Yeh. In some ways maybe not for the better.

**DP: You see, we used to get... there was more people who we knew and we used to have fetes on the playing field.**

RC: Indeed. Dancing down where you used to live down near Brightmere Farm, wasn't it...

**DP: Oh, yeah.**

RC: Hunter's....on Hunter's Lawn. Did you ever go dancing at Hunter's Lawn?

**DP:** Hunter's Lawn.

RC: Next to Joe Chapman's.

**DP:** Yeah, I know where you mean. No, I didn't get involved there. No. I didn't get involved there.

RC: Now, I've seen a photograph of you in one of the productions wearing an army hat and coat and...

**DP:** Oh, did you really? (Chuckles)

RC: Yes, I've got the incriminating photograph of you being part of the production. I think it was a church production. In the fifties?

**DP:** I can't remember that. We used to have fetes on the school field, on the recreation field

RC: Tell us about the searchlight, what you can remember about that.

**DP:** The what?

RC: The searchlight.

**DP:** Oh, the searchlight. Yeah, that used to light the whole village up! Er. I suppose it was there to guide the RAF in after they'd been on a raid.

**My father joined the Home Guard. He used to come down the Causeway where I lived once, armed with a pitchfork (chuckles)**

RC: And your mother cooking the cake?

**DP:** My mother cooked for Christmas, yeah, and she helped to feed their committee.

RC: How many people. You said there were about 30 people on that searchlight...

**DP:** Yeah, there was. Yeah

RC: I mean, that was quite a few people, wasn't it, actually, just in that one little area on the playing field

**DP:** Yeah, it was about 30, I think.

RC: Yes.

**DP:** I think there was about 30 there.

RC: Which all used to billet there in that wooden shed that used to be there.

**DP:** Yeah.

RC: Can you remember any of the names of the people who were on the searchlight?

**DP:** Well, I. I knew Bill. He was the one who used to come and borrow my father's bike and go off to Stalham and do some shopping, and he'd bring it back. He repaid my father with a little bit of sugar or something. But we knew somebody who'd been.. yes...

RC: Stanley Wright was there, wasn't he?

**DP:** You what?

RC: Stanley Wright was on the searchlight, I think .

**DP:** Oh, was he?

RC: And also Megan Roberts' father.

**DP:** Yes, that's right. Well, that was a good place to start courting, there, wasn't it?

RC: I suppose so, David.

**DP:** Oh, I see. Well, in the end I met this person. I don't know if I want to tell you all this... But, we;'re still happy together anyway.

ALK: It's nice to hear that bit.

**DP:** Yes, yes.