

Tape No: 0603 George William Hermon

Colchester Recalled

Interviewee: George William Hermon **Interviewer:** Andrew Phillips
Date of birth: 10/07/1911 **Date of interview:** 07/10/1998
Place of birth: Great Tey, Essex **Summary by:** Linda Nicoll
Married: Widowed **Adult Occupations:** Farmworker, Railway,
Transport
Present Address: Great Tey, Essex *Note: A strong local accent is retained in the text!*

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AP It's 7th October 1998, Andrew Phillips recording at Great Tey, Essex.

Can you tell me your name please?

GH George William Hermon

AP Your date of birth George?

GH Tenth of July, nineteen hundred and eleven.

AP So your 87?

GH 87

AP Now you don't look it and you've got at enormous garden of vegetables I've just seen, and it shames us town people. George how long have your family lived here? Do you know?

GH Well they've lived here all they life. My father was born here.

AP And do you know anything about your grandfather, your father's father?

GH I did know my grandfather, not my grandmother, not on my father's side.

AP Where did your grandfather come from on your father's side?

GH Well they was born here, they came from Great Tey. A Great Tey family.

AP So three generations of Hermon's?

GH Yes.

AP You wouldn't know where your Great Grandfather came from? No tales?

GH No I wouldn't know. But I heard my father say they been here all they life.

AP Yes. So what was your father, a farmworker?

GH No, well he was a Horseman.

AP A Horseman?

GH Yes well he was there on Burnley farm for 52 years

AP Was he really?

GH Same farm.

AP Gracious. Well which family owned that farm?

GH Well that was Sharpe and Bickmore at first. He worked for Sharpe & Bickmore. Then Browning's took it from Sharpe, Roger Browning's grandfather, Richard Burnley he took it off James Sharpe.

AP Was that this century? Early this century?

GH Yes, yes.

AP When, do you know? About what time?

GH Well I couldn't say when. I can remember Jim Sharpe having in on in my time before the war.

AP Before the war?

GH Yes, before the First world war.

AP Before the first war. Can you can remember that far back?

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GH I can remember back -I can remember going over to Peldon when the old airship fell down in Peldon, in the 1st world war.

AP Did you really? How did you get there?

GH My father drove a horse and wagon, took a load of people.

AP Tell me about it. Was there lots of people there?

GH Yes there was a lot of people there. He took a horse and cart from here to Peldon. We took a load of people to see it.

AP Including you?

GH Including me yeah. I was 7 year old when the 1st world war finished.

AP Can you remember soldiers being round here?

GH I can remember German prisoners being in the Maltings at Marks Tey. Mr Faulkner used own the Maltings at Marks Tey and I can remember the 1st world war prisoners being in there.

AP What were they doing in there?

GH Well they used to sleep, lodge there, then they used to come out to work on the fields on the farms. That's where they housed them there when they took them prisoners of war.

AP Were the Maltings still working in those days? As Maltings?

GH Well they were until they commandeered them for the prisoners.

AP Did they commandeer horses in the first war from the farms?

Gh I can't say they did. I wouldn't know. Well I can remember the horses. They used to come down to Burnings farm with the horses and guns. You know when they were on manoeuvres. I can remember the old horse-drawn guns. Yeah

AP Presumably the lanes were dirt lanes.

GH Well they were nothing but stones and dirt. I remember when I went to school these lanes were only pebbles and stones.

AP How did they maintain them?

GH Well they maintained them, they used to had an old tar pot and heat the tar and then they put it in a watering can and spread it over the road and then they had an horse and tumble.

They used to come from Colchester, Howards their name, they used to come with the old tumble cart and spread the stones out of the old tumble cart, chuck them over with a shovel. That's how they first started the roads here.

AP Can you remember what they did before they used to use tar? What did the country people do for roads?

GH Well they used to get all the stones. I remember when I left school and when I started at Browning's before then, I used to pick stones off the fields.

AP What just boys?

GH Yes. I'd be in the fields days and days just picking the stones off the fields to make the roads up.

AP What, all on your own?

GH All on me own.

AP Tell us about it.

GH Well you get all the stones that lay on the field, put them in a pail and you empty them in a sack and you left the sacks dotted all about the field then they'd come and cart them off with the horse and cart.

AP Did you have to pick stones up of a certain size?

GH No, all different size stones.

AP In the earth?

GH Yes, all that was laid on top of the earth. Yes I had days at it.. I remember there was a stone heap, down at Browning's farm, a stone heap that'd been picked off the fields, was as big as this room. A big stone heap and they was all hand- picked.

AP By boys?

GH Yes boys and women used to go.

AP What, women used to do it?

GH Yes women used to go.

AP Your father was 51 years...

GH Yes 52 years on one farm

AP Did he ever talk to you about the old days and how he began?

GH Oh yes.(Chuckle) he used to tell us tales. Yes, they used to play these quoits you see and go to different pubs. And they used to hire the old Blacksmith horse and cart and go like that at quoit matches when they played different pubs.

AP Did he start as a boy?

GH He started as a boy. I suppose he was about 12 years old, 'cos I started at when I was 14. 10 shillings a week, six in the morning, 'til 5 at night and 1 o'clock Saturdays.

AP That's extraordinary.

GH Yeah, 10 shillings a week and that was for Roger Browning's grandfather. My father said, 'I think that boys worth a bit more money'. He give me another 2 shillings. I had 12 shillings.

AP Now your father was a Horseman?

GH Yes

AP Did he ever talk to you about the tricks they had in whispering in horses ears and using the bones?

GH Yes he used to tell me what he used to do to the horses you know. I mean he used to break his own horses in. If they was on the meadow he'd go give ar a bit of feed and he'd rub their legs, rub them all down and pick their feet right up, he said, so they got used to it for when they was broke in. I remember he used to tell me about one that didn't like their head brushed, he said was always messing about, wouldn't keep their head still. He touched the back of the ear with the back of brush and it went down, he said hit the head on the manger but it weren't no more trouble. He used to tell me things that he used to get up to. (Chuckle)

AP How many horses would they have on Browning's farm?

GH About 12 down there. 12 horses

AP How big was Browning's farm?

GH Well it was about near enough about 300 acres.

AP 12 horses, 300 acres?

GH Yeah

AP So most of it was ploughed?

GH Oh, it was all ploughed and the ploughs were all packed up by Guy Day. All ploughed.

AP Guy day? What's that?

GH November the 5th. I heard my father say that ploughs was all packed up by Guy Day. All finished ploughing, for the winter.

AP They would sow winter wheat?

GH Oh yes they would sow winter wheat. They'd put that in about November time - was a good month for wheat you see; barley - October.

AP Did your father ever talk about the harvests?

GH Oh yeah, the year I was born 1911, he said that was so wet a harvest, as the wagons went down the field the water ran down behind in the wheel marks. He told me that. He said, the year you were born it was so wet, all the ears were grown all matted together and was so wet the water ran down the field behind the wagon, saturated the ground.

AP How did they dry grain in those days?

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GH Well they used to make these stacks? Well they used to make it dry on the stack didn't they? They used to make these stacks and it used to dry. They used to heat it-self to dry. I've been on the stack meself and you'd have a job to part them. It would be so solid it would be as solid as this floor. Where they got heated and got together.

AP Browning's had a stack yard did it?

GH Oh they had a stack yard. About 30 - 40 stacks every year, with hay and seeds and corn.

AP Right and did you have a thrashing machine?

GH Oh yes we used to have the old thrashing machine, yeah.

AP You've worked on that have you?

GH (chuckle) Yeah I should think I have. I used to do all the stacking down there. For three or four year after the bloke what done the stacking and made all the stacks, I took it over. I done it for several year, used to put about 20 to 30 stacks a year, different sorts of seeds and corn and hay.

AP Now you can read about the old harvests when you were a lad but can you tell us what they were like round here, 'cos everyone used to help didn't they?

GH We used to go into co-op; they used to have what they call the 'fourses'. That was there at four o'clock. We used to take, well I have done and me mother and that, we took same as a mug of tea, cos they was working till late and even make a little meat pudding in a basin and we'd even take that out to them and they'd have that for their 'fourses', cos they was working so late you see. And I remember doing that when I went to school with my mum.

AP Now 'fourses' means four o'clock does it?

GH At four o'clock, they used to have what they call 'fourses'. Used to sit down with the old beer or whatever they got. They used to bring the old bottle of beer on the old haversack.

AP Would it be one of those with the screw top?

GH Yes would be a stone bottle. I used to have me father's, I got rid of 'em all, I should have kept them really.

AP They sell them in antique shops now.

GH Yeah my father used to have one, he'd have a bag on the back, with a strap over and the bottle hung on the front. I seen him go harvest times like that.

AP Now what did they used to eat in the morning? They had a 'fourses' in the afternoon, did they eat in the morning?

GH Well they'd used to have a bit of bread and cheese in the morning or I've seen my father take a herring. He'd take a couple of herring and heat 'em up in a fire, you know when they had an old fire, you know when they used to burn the old hedges up when they'd burn the old hedge brushes up.

AP You mean a herring fish?

GH Yes a herring fish you put on a stick. You make a little fork with a stick, seen him do that time. Yes (chuckle).

AP I've been told they sometimes had a pudding; it was meat one end and jam the other. Have you ever heard that?

GH No I haven't but I've took puddings out to them in the harvest field. Little meat puddings 'cos they'd have that at the times they was late home, they'd be working 'til 10 o'clock. I can remember this time of the year or a little earlier on, they'd be working 'til 10 o'clock. I reckon we've lost an hour of daylight in my time. We've lost an hour of daylight. A fact. People say 'No you're wrong' but I say 'No I'm not'.

AP Now when they were in the harvest field did your father remember the days of cutting by scythe?

GH Oh yes, yes, he used to do it. They'd be half a dozen or 7 or 8 of them in the field. They used to have what they call a 'Lord' and he'd take the first sheaf you see and he'd use the

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sheaf behind the first man. Then another one there and another one here and then they'd be the lord.

AP So in other words they all followed him?

GH They all followed one another in a circle. He was cutting here, you see, and the next man was cutting here, 'cos he'd cut that you see? So every man would go back and cut his circle you see

AP So they were staggered across the field?

GH They were staggered across the field. I've heard him say (chuckle) he's been so hot and sweated when he'd took his trousers off at night and they'd stand stiff in the morning with sweat (chuckle). I've heard he say that.

AP You had to be so strong to weald a scythe. All day!

GH So strong. Well you had to be to swing a scythe. You wouldn't get nobody to do it today.

AP Can you remember seeing that?

GH Oh yes I've done it myself. I've been round the field mowing for the binder. Me and old Sid Andrews, he used to work down there, he used to mow and I used to take it out. I used to gather with the reaper, with a reap and put it into sheaves and stand it up again up a head. We used to go round every field on the farm, for the binder, cut round.

AP Now you would do the edges with a scythe and the binder would do the main field?

GH And the binder would do the main field.

AP Now they always had binders did they when you were a lad?

GH Always had binders. I can remember them mowing but they all had binders, the Finlays you know. But before then they used to mow the lot.

AP Mow the lot?

GH Yeah they used to mow the lot. Hay an all, grass an' all they used to mow before they had the binder.

AP Now I know some of these things had special words. Now when you put sheaves together do you call that a 'stook'.

GH A trave. Yeah, trave.

AP A trave. So you would pitchfork the traves onto the cart?

GH Yeah You take one at a time and put them on the cart. You see you start one end and pick 'em up and perhaps you'd have about 6 to 8 sheaves each side. Perhaps you'd make a trave about 12 sheaves long.

AP So then you'd pitch them on the cart and then you'd take them to the stack yard?

GH Then they'd be a bloke on there laying them on a round. Perhaps you'd get a load as half as high again as this ceiling.

AP What was the trick – did you put the heads on the outside?

GH No heads inside. You see you'd work your corners then you'd lay it round outside. There used to be two men on a cart, two pitching and two on a cart. One was loading at the back and one was loading at the front, they'd come half way.

AP How do you tie up the sheaf?

GH We used to make our own bend with the straw. You pick up the straw with the head you see, then you crossed them and you twisted it round the other one and that's how you make your bend when you was tying your wheat up or your barley or whatever.

AP So you'd twist two pieces of straw?

GH Yeah, you lay it over like that and you'd twist, you'd hold whichever one you liked, you'd twist it round over the other one and then it would come over sort of like that. Then you'd lay your wheat or barley or whatever it is in this bend you see and put it over again to do the same again on the top.

AP You didn't use bits of string or anything mechanical?

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GH No, no, no. You used to make your own bends. You used to make them with straw. Used to twist them up - made hundreds, thousands.

AP Now did the women used to go gleaning, after the harvest?

GH I'll show you a photo.

AP Now this is a photograph of a lady.

GH My mum.

AP Your mother and she's holding a sheaf?

GH No she's gleaning for the chickens. We used to keep chickens in the back yard and after they's gathered the corn out the fields and that, they was allowed to go in the fields and pick up the odd.

AP But she's got whole ears of corn here?

GH Well they are. Pick up ears of corn, corn in there for the chickens.

AP Some got left did they?

GH Yes.

AP So they didn't pick up individual grains, did they?

GH No they picked the straw up. That's my father's mother and his sister.

AP Good heavens! Is that in Great Tey?

GH Yes it's where I used to live there - the same house down there, by the Rectory. It's where his father lived. And the family, when that come empty, we moved in there. There's three of us born in there, well one of us born in there three of us born on the farm.

AP That's a lovely picture that is.

GH That's my dear old mum.

AP We'll have to put a copy of this in with our recording, as we're talking about it.

GH That's me old dad.

AP Which one's your dad? Oh, that one sitting there.

GH And that's me standing there counting me money on a Friday night (chuckle). He's sitting there on his doorstep. And that's another lad, Blackwell his name.

AP What date is that - 1930?

GH It must have been before then. I should say that was before 1930 'cos I married in '38.

AP Right? That's a lovely picture. And that's on Browning's Farm?

GH That's Browning's Farm. Yeah.

AP And that's you and your wife. That's 1930 something?

GH 1930 or before then.

AP Before you were married. 'Cos I noticed you'd got a 50th Wedding Anniversary.

GH Yep, yes, yes. I got me furniture bill, still the same thing. That chairs - £4/6 each. I had them when I married.

AP Where did they come from?

GH Bloomfield's in Colchester.

AP Now how would you go to Colchester when you were a boy?

GH Huh! Used to go on the bus or used to bike in. Used to bike to football matches. Used to bike in to Colchester used to leave the bike at the Red Lion used to put a bike up there for about tuppence, thru'pence.

AP So you can still remember the old trams.

GH Yes remember the old trams. But you had to be careful of them when you was biking, 'cos if you got in one of them tram wheels you was soon over, 'cos your tyre was just the same width. Yeah.

AP And you remember the old Middleborough market, the livestock market?

GH Oh yes, remember that mmm.

AP When you were a boy did the drovers still used to come through, driving livestock half way across England?

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GH I'll tell you when I was at Browning's, when I left school, must been about 14 – 15, we used to drive cattle from Browning's farm to Wrights in Botolph Street and used to drive it into the cattle market. Me and an old man, well he was older than me. Me and him, used to drive cattle from Browning's farm into Colchester to Wrights in Botolph Street 'cos they had a butchers shop down there, didn't they. We'd drive 'em there all the way, 7 mile.

AP How long would that take?

GH Cor, we'd go in the morning and would take right up 'til dinner time. Yeah I've done that time.

AP Do you know any livestock was driven halfway across England? In the old days I've heard, people used to bring livestock hundreds of miles, on the way to London. You don't know anything about that?

GH You mean driving of them? No I don't know anything about that? That was before my time. But I've drove into Colchester.

AP What about the harvest festival? Was there a big celebration afterwards?

GH Well I heard my father say after harvest they used to go into Colchester. Have a day in Colchester. They used to walk into Colchester and have a day in Colchester after harvest.

AP Spend their harvest money?

GH Spend their harvest money. And he'd say, he'd always buy a new 'shep' knife, (chuckle) I don't know why. They'd walk into Colchester and have a Beano in Colchester, 'cos I mean there weren't nothin' on so they gotta walk in if they wanted to go into Colchester, there weren't nothin' else.

AP How did your mother get your clothes and things like that? From Colchester?

GH Yes. Use to go into Colchester. Me Grandmother used to lived down in Priory Street and I always used to go down there with me mum, In Priory Street, she was always good down there my grandmother, she used to help my mum a lot.

AP That's your mother's mother?

GH Yep.

AP Do you know what your mother's father used to do when she was a girl?

GH He worked on the farm. Her father worked on the farm.

AP But he lived in Botolph Street?

GH No. Me mother's father, no that was her stepfather what lived in Botolph Street. That was her real mother, name of Keyes. They used to live opposite Priory church but that was her stepfather what lived in Priory Street. She lost her father and her father's name was Jocelyn.

AP Was he from Great Tey?

GH Yes, he was from Great Tey. I got his knife in there. He was born with one hand.

AP Gracious me!

GH I'll show it to you. That's an old cherry pipe.

AP Did he make that himself?

GH I don't know. He had somebody make it for him. That's a cherry pipe. That's me mother's fathers. He was born with one hand. That's a shep knife, he used to cut his food and pick it up with the other side. That's years and years old, that was her fathers.

AP Because we're on tape I'll explain, it's a folding in knife, with a fork on one side opposite the blade and it's got an interesting makers name on it.

GH Sheffield. It was made in Sheffield.

AP Something made in Rowbothom and this is ivory.

GH Ivory handle. That's over a hundred years old.

AP Of course, I'm sure. And this cherry pipe is made from cherry twig?

GH Cherry tree. They say to me what make you keep them Dad? I ought to leave them to somebody I 'spose. I 'spose they'll fling 'em at the finish.

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AP No, you make sure they don't. You tell them. When the harvest was finished did they have a big harvest supper?

GH I think they used to have a big harvest supper. I'm almost sure they did. They used to have a big gathering.

Side B

AP Did they drink on the farm in your time?

GH No I can't say they did. I mean they used to have a beer and that every day. I mean they used to have a real good do during the day. I mean that was all home brewed beer.

AP Where was it brewed?

GH Just down there, down by the pub now. That was an old brew house and they made it in a cottage and I went in there when I first married. I can remember they used to brew the beer in there and they used to take it out on an old barrel on two wheels. They used to take it to which house who brewed the beer. They used to have days of brewing you see? They used to have a book for the day they wanted to brew.

AP And everyone would have their own barrel?

GH Everyone would have their own barrel. Yeah.

AP And that would be before the war?

GH Oh before the war, oh yes, yes, yes. I remember that when I went to school.

AP Was there a school in Great Tey?

GH Yeah, that was the old school down the road there, yes the old school. That was down where the old village hall is now.

AP Church School?

GH Yes Church School.

AP One teacher?

GH Two teachers.

AP And that was all the ages?

GH Yes, all the different ages right up to fourteen. I got several old photos different ages, one that was took 1919 - all me brothers and sisters on there.

AP Can you remember any celebration when the first war ended? Was there a party for children? Soldiers coming home or did you go into Colchester for the march past or anything?

GH I can't bring that to mind. I think there must have been a celebration, something like that.. There must have been but I can't remember you, but there must have been.

AP In the old days, the leading farmhand used to bargain with the farmer for the harvest pay, did your father used to do that?

GH Yes, I heard they say about that, I heard me dad say. They'd want so much. They'd make a bargain as to what they'd do the job for, you see. I heard him talk about that. The boss, the lord, there was a lord on the farm you see, he was the top man and he'd be the first man to take the first sheaf and so on. He'd have an understanding of what they were going to pay. I've heard them talk about that.

AP Who decided who was the lord - your father?

GH Well the man that had been down there the longest I 'spose, he was the lord you see.

AP Did he get paid more?

GH I couldn't say whether he got paid more. I heard me father say there was a lord and it was me wife's grandfather what was lord, when he was down there. His name was Smith.

AP Now, how many men would there have been working, when you were a lad on Browning's farm?

GH 10 to 12 I suppose.

AP Can you tell me their jobs?

GH Yeah, they'd be the four horsemen, and then they'd be what they call the day man, they'd do all the stacking. Then they'd be another one that'd do all the cattle. Perhaps they'd be about 5 or 6 day men you see, they'd all do the same job. Like hoeing and reaping and things like that. But there were 4 regular horsemen when I went down there. There were 8 horses.

AP What equipment would a farm have? Would they'd have a drill?

GH They'd have a plough, wooden ploughs. They never had no iron plough. A lot of farmers had iron ploughs but these was wooden ploughs.

AP Do you know why?

GH Well, they liked the wooden plough better. They didn't like the iron plough, it used to run on a wheel and it more or less keep itself out but with a wooden plough, you hold it, if you tipped it, it would upset the horse. If you lifted the handle, it would go in there and bury itself. But you gotta hold that just right. I mean, I used to do it. I took a pair of horses, when the horseman died. I got to be a horseman, I've done it myself. You gotta hold it there so it slid along there at a certain depth, about 4 – 5 inches.

AP How do you keep it straight?

GH Well once you got it straight, you kept it straight cos' the horses walked in one furrow. You'd have horse walk in one furrow and you'd have a horse walk on the land you see. Once you'd got it straight, the head horseman he'd go and open the land on what you'd call a 7ft 2 stetch. If you got peas or anything like that, that'd be about a 7ft 2 stetch you see? He'd open all that up. The field would be flat for a start and he'd open a furrow every 7ft 2 stetch. Then when you went to plough, you'd got to head that in and you'd gotta leave that in the same size that he'd opened it. You'd shut it up the same he'd opened it so it would all be ploughed.

AP Now what is a stetch?

GH A stetch, that's a 7 foot 2 inches. We'll say there's a furrow here you see? The chap would go in and he'd open the field and draw a furrow there. He'd draw another one here look, that's another furrow, that's a stetch – 7ft 2. All the implements, the Spys (?) drill, was a 7ft 2 drill. That'd straddle that, that'd drill that stetch you see? When you went to plough, that'd furrow what he'd opened there and you'd head that in. Go up there, turn a furrow, back, turn a furrow, then you'd come to here and you'd cut half that stetch you see? Then you'd have half that side so then you'd have a 7ft 2 stetch the same as he opened it you see, then that would fit the drill. That's a job to show that but that's how that's how that used to be you see. [*uses hand movements to show what he meant*]

AP Yes I can understand that.

GH In the winter time, they used to grow a lot of peas for picking you see. Especially down there, we'd have 80 to 100 acres of peas, and they'd all be drilled by Christmas time. They'd all be grewable for Christmas. Well you gotta have that on the stetch to let the water off you see. If you'd had it on the flat that'd be waterlogged, so you gotta have it on the furrows so the water would get down you see. Then they'd draw one across.

AP I see. Did this mean that, if you were doing that year after year, did that mean you'd get hollows where the head ploughman was putting his first furrows in?

GH Well if you didn't want it in that field you'd plough it cross ways another year, then you'd have the 'arrows and the cultivators to level it off, then they furrows would be squashed.

AP I always thought the furrows would go along the lines of the slope.

AH You're talking about the waterways. Then they'd have the waterways in another part of the field and they'd take the water what come down here, they'd have a furrow right across from hedge to hedge to the lowest part of the field to take the water that was coming down from these hedge furrows.

AP At right-angles?

GH Yes, yes.

AP It's fairly flat here isn't it?

GH Yes, it fairly flat. You haven't got many of these fields round here.

AP Now, I'm interested to know about the crops you grew. From the time you were a lad to right through to the war, 'cos when you got the war come you got all the war agricultural committees, so from when you were a boy to when you were married, just before the war, did the cropping at Browning's farm go always the same, year after year?

GH No, no, we used to grow a lot of seeds. We used to grow mangle seeds, turnip seed, swede seed. We'd change the fields you see. Then you'd have clover seeds and then perhaps you'd have a field for hay. You kept changing your fields.

AP Who made that decision, Mr Browning?

GH Yeah, the farmer. He'd say what he was gonna have on there you see, which would suit it better. Same as if you grew a bit of hay or anything like that, they'd put a mangle seed behind it 'cos it suited it. They'd put a bit seed behind a clover lay or anything like that.

AP All this seed you would sell to the seed firms?

GH We used to grow it for Hurst's and different people. At the finish he used to grow a lot of flower seeds, pansies and all lots of different flower seeds.

AP Really?

GH Yes. He's a big seed grower. That's Roger's father I'm talking about and his grandfather. Big seed growers. They used to change the fields you see.

AP What about the two grain crops, wheat and barley, there must have been a lot of that?

GH Well yes they did. That was the main thing. And oats, you don't see a lot of oats growing now, but the used to grow a lot for the horses. Barley and wheat, those was the main crop and they'd grow a lot of seeds. Peas was another thing, they used to grow a lot of peas for picking.

AP Are these peas for humans?

GH Yes, we used to send them up the market.

AP Did the women used to go pea picking?

GH Oh yes. Where these houses are now, where we're sitting here now, I've been on here with my mother – picking peas. Then I went to school. Used to take us up about 5 o'clock in the morning, you'd hear the old prams, trolleys and what have yer, taking the children up to pea picking.

AP How much were they paid?

GH A shilling a bag, I can remember, the cheapest ones. A shilling a little bag. A 40 pound bag - a shilling for picking all of them. I've tied hundreds, thousands of them – I used to tie bags for Browning and pay out. I've tied thousands.

AP Did you use string for that.

GH Used string. Used to take your string on here, then you had your money, give them a shilling. Then it got so it went up and used to give them 2 shillings, three shillings as the years come up, as things were getting better, but the first ones I can remember paying out was a shilling.

AP So there always have been women working?

GH Always women working. Browning used to have a lot of women working.

AP How far did they come?

GH Well, must of come from the village, some of them come out of the village but most of them was out the village. Used to come on for different things – bean picking.

AP Can you remember, at harvest did you get Irish men come over?

GH Never used to get them, but used to get them for pea picking. A lot of Irish men used to come over, all different, some of 'em were rum chaps too.

AP What do you mean? Did they used to fight?

GH Well I remember I was tying an Irishman's pea bag once and they got a lot of 'harm' in, the old rice, it was dirty picking you see. Half of it was this old harm stuff what that grew on, old rice. And I said at the time, I want some more in here, more peas in here. And I kept saying that's old harm in here there's no peas. And he got so mad he kicked it right out me hands. And I was up like this and he cussed too and he set to and kicked it right out me hands. They was a rum lot we used to get here for pea picking.

AP Now did they keep any livestock?

GH Oh yes a lot of livestock. Browning used to do a lot of livestock – a lot of pigs, used to have 2 -300 pigs out there, and cattle. Used to buy his calves and used to keep the cattle 'til they got to milking age.

AP Where did he keep so many pigs?

GH Well he used to have them in a lot of places. Where those units are now, he used to have them full of pigs. Every place used to be full of pigs.

AP How far back are we going? When you were a lad?

GH After I was married. Yes. Up to just recently. He had all those places all built and had them turned into units.

AP But when you were a lad there wouldn't have been pigs like that would there?

GH Oh yes. He's always had pigs. He's always had pigs and cattle down there. He's grandfather used to keep a lot, 'cos I started with his grandfather you see.

AP Did your father used to tell you how people used to keep their own pig in the garden?

GH Oh yes. Most everybody used to have a pig and chickens.

AP When you were a boy did your father have a pig?

GH My father used to have chickens when I was a boy. He never had a pig but I had 3 pigs when I was up there. 'Cos I went out and I went after a load of pigs at Mersea. Roger's father said to me, he said 'there's three there I didn't buy, you'll see 'em, there are three there that weren't so good'. I think he bought about 20 and there were three left over. I said to the chap 'What you gonna do with them?' and he said 'Do you want 'em?' 'Well' I said 'I got a place at home for them. How much do you want for them?' He said ' £20'. I gave him £20.00, I put it in the hold over the cab and Roger's father said to me 'I didn't buy them' I said 'No, I did'. And he said 'How much did you give for them?' and I said '£20'. And he said 'Well, that weren't a bad buy'. And do you know, those old pigs done well. They went to Dunmow Bacon factory and there was two of them done grade A and one done grade B. Them old pigs done well and I was proud of that.

AP When would that have been?

GH After I married. During the war years I think, yes during the war years.

AP When you went to the village school in Great Tey, everyone left at 14 did they?

GH Yes, everyone left at 14.

AP Did all the boys stay in the village?

GH Well yeah. There wasn't nothing else really. There was the only the brickworks, Collier's at Marks Tey or farm work there weren't nothing else. Either they got a job on the farm around here, a lot of 'em went to Collier's brick yard, that's all there was doing you see.

AP What did the girls do?

GH Girls used to bike to the factory.

AP Which factory?

GH Coggeshall factory- Hollington's. Yeah they used to bike some of them. My wife went in service; she was in service for Mr Focus up there by Browning's farm. She went there when she left school and 'til we got married, but a lot of them went to the factory and a lot of them went into service.

AP Did any of them go into service in Colchester? Did any of them used to live in?

GH My sister used to live-in but she went to many different places. She was in Colchester and all over the place she did. She used to live-in, my older sister, she did.

AP How many of you were there in your family?

GH There was four of us – two boys and two girls.

AP Where did you come in the four?

GH I was the second one, there's me sister Mabel, she was the oldest one and then me brother and then me youngest sister.

AP Did your brother go into farm work?

GH Yeah he worked on the same farm as me; he worked for Browning's but he never married, poor old boy.

AP And your youngest sister?

GH She worked in the factory at Coggeshall Dolly did, but they all died young. My sister was only 56 and my brother was 62.

AP I imagine things were pretty hard, to make ends meet for your mother?

GH Huh, they was.

AP Can you remember examples of not having enough for food and that, or wasn't it that bad?

GH Used to go on to school with condensed milk on our bread. Or sometimes you'd have a bit of dripping or something like that –brown sugar.

AP Do you think your mother went without to feed the children?

GH Oh she was good, she wouldn't take away, she'd give the children first. She was a good mother.

AP Was there any bad feeling against the farmers in those days?

GH No, everybody was happy, everybody was happy. Given how it is today, back biting and all this how it is today. Today it's everybody against one another, but years ago they was happy-go-lucky, well I think they was anyway.

AP Was there a trade union for farmer workers?

GH Oh yes there was a trade union. I went in union when I started work, well when I was 16. My father put me in the union, General Transport Workers and I kept in 'til I retired.

AP Did that give you sick pay and so-forth?

GH They used to give us sick pay yes, and then you was covered you see, in case anything went wrong.

AP Accident?

GH Accident yes. I mean I was into it up 'til I retired. I retired on the lorries. I was in the union up 'til I retired.

AP Did your father as a horseman, have to look after the health of all the horses?

GH No they all looked after their own. They all looked after their own horses.

AP And where would the Vet come from?

GH Coggeshall.

AP And what was his name?

GH Dr Young. The Vet was Dr Young, the veterinary surgeon.

AP Probably there was still a lot of village remedies in those days?

GH What do you mean?

AP Well if you had a cut or something you might use a leaf rather than a plaster, those kind of things.

GH Oh, same with a headache! They'd use brown paper and vinegar. I've seen my mother several times with that 'cos she used to have these migraines. She'd get this old fluffy brown paper, dark brown stuff. She'd soak that in vinegar and put it on her head, then tie a scarf round it, to keep it on, seen her times like that, with brown paper & vinegar. Then if you had a sort of a pain, a cold or you was a bit bronchial or something like that, they'd put on a

linseed poultice. Linseed or boiled onions, if you got a cold. They'd say you want a pan of boiled onions. All things like that.

AP What about raw eggs and gin? Drinking raw eggs if you'd got a cold. Did you ever hear that one?

GH No, no I never heard that one. But they got all these things. Or chilblains – soak it with lavender oil or paraffin. Another one was put them in the gerry pot you know the old commode that they keep. They'd say stick 'em in there. I know I'd do that enough times when I went to school. Been pea picking sometimes and don't hardly know how to walk.

AP Were the old folk a bit superstitious when you were a lad? Like if they saw a crow they'd say someone was going to die?

GH Oh yes. If they see a black crow in the back yard they'd say someone was gonna die.

AP Anything else?

GH Oh if you see a black cat across the road, it was a sign of death. Things like that or a robin. They'd say you mustn't hurt a robin 'cos you'd hurt yourself. Or they'd be something happen.

AP What about flowers and things like that? They'd say you couldn't bring flowers into the house 'cos it brought bad luck.

GH May blossom. I wouldn't bring May blossom into the house, this old thorn blossom. Old May blossom, old blackthorn. They wouldn't bring that into the house 'cos they reckon it was bad luck.

AP What about thunderstorms and things like that?

GH Huh, thunderstorms, they used to put knives under the tablecloth. (Chuckle) My old mother used to say 'Put that knife under the tablecloth' when there was lightening. Yes, they'd shove them all under the tablecloth.

AP Did some of the old people, like your grandparents, talk about fairies and devils and things like that? We're going back to the before the 1st world war now.

GH Well I hear my father say, if you behave badly, you'll see the devil tonight. I behaved badly he'd tell me that. 'Cos of what boys was – he'd say 'You'll see the devil tonight'.

AP Were parents very strict?

GH My father was. He was good father but he was very strict. He only wanna look at ye, that was enough. At the table, I'd keep onto my sister sometimes and me brother we'd keep acting, saying things to one another, he'd look across the table, much to say as if you don't leave off, you'll know what you'll get. But he was very strict, very strict he was. But still, it don't do me no harm. You see I've got four daughters and they didn't do what they wanted when they was girls. They often say 'Dad? Can you remember what you did when we was little? You used to huss us up the stairs'! (Chuckle) But they four good girls and it don't do no hurt.

AP Did your father say grace at the table when you were children.

GH No, but you gotta behave. You gotta stop there 'til you all finished. There was none of this getting down and that. And if you didn't like anything he'd say 'You know what you can do, you can go without'. He'd say that many times, you know.

AP Did they ever say that old people were witches.

GH (Chuckle) Well, they used to call old women witches.

AP But they didn't actually believe it did they?

GH Oh no no. But there was old Mrs Harrington, who used to live down by the church, down the old chase there. They used to reckon she was an old witch, they used to call she an old witch. (Chuckle) Poor old girl.

AP Now can you remember when you first heard a radio, because they'd be no radio when you was a boy?

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GH No the first radio we heard was an old 'cumalator. There was an old boy and he used to charge them up you see. Then he used to come back the next week. That was the first radio I ever heard. When there was a thunderstorm, he'd say 'Switch that wireless off'. There was a switch on it and you'd have to turn it back whenever there was a thunderstorm.

AP There can't have been many cars when you were a boy.

GH The first one I can remember was an old solid tyred one. Old person up the road had it, up the farm, an old solid tyre one I remember. That was an old T Ford, that's the first one I can remember. I can remember bikes with solid tyres.

AP And the first buses must have had solid tyres.

GH Oh yes they did – the old Charabangs. They used to call them old Charabangs didn't they?

AP What was the name of the old bus company that used to come here?

GH Well, Hutley's, they used to come from Coggeshall. Then there was Blackwell, they had open top buses. We used to go to Clacton or Walton in the summer time. We used to get on the top there, we used to like getting on top they was open top ones you see.

AP What about carrier's cart?

GH Oh yes, there were carriers' carts from here. Several of them used to go from here into Colchester. They'd take chickens or anything you wanted to go to market or anything you want collected brought home.

AP Would they buy things for you?

GH They would do, they'd get stuff for you if you want it.

AP What was the name of the carrier here?

GH Dixey was one, Cotty was one. They used to do the carrying.

AP Presumably, you used to often go into the Colchester market because you said you used to drive cattle.

GH Used to drive cattle there.

AP And they'd be sold for you would they?

GH Yes, they'd be sold.

AP Would they be auctioned?

GH Yeah, they'd be auctioned. They gotta go at some price, chickens and all, used to take chickens in there. Rabbits I used to take when I kept chickens and rabbits, used to take them in myself.

AP Now I've heard say, before the war, they'd be so many rabbits on the farms. Is that true?

GH Loads of rabbits. You'd have to catch 'em, used to snare 'em. I used to sell them for half a crown each. I used to make my beer money. I used to take the children out once a year for what I used to get on rabbits, half a crown each.

AP Probably a lot of rats still were there?

GH Huh, rats! Should think there was. When you were thrashing, they'd be in old stacks and when you got on the bottom of the stack, 'cos they used to put straw on first you see, for keeping the corn and that from getting damp and wet, I've seen the straw moving like that.

I've seen the straw, the bottom of the stack come up like that, when they'd be on a run.

They'd been so many rats I've seen the straw lift like that, where they were in these runs.

Loads and loads of rats.

AP Can you remember being paid to catch rat's tails.

GH Yeah used to get thruppence a tail, thruppence for a mole and thruppence for a rat.

AP Who paid you.

Gh Well the farmer or the foreman. At the finish you see, when they started poison on them, it would be Roger's uncle, his father's brother, he used to put poison on 'em. There were blokes where they poisoned and killed them you see, blokes that were cutting the tails off the ones that'd been poisoned. (Chuckle) They'd sell them, hand them on you see. Well, course

they have to find that out, you see, find out where they'd been poisoned and get the money for them. He knew a rat that had been poisoned and the tail had been cut off. (Chuckle)

AP Well I imagine the last war must have changed the farming. Did the War Agricultural Committee make you change the crops?

GH Well the War Ag used to make you do a lot. But they used to drain the land the War Ag did. They kept the land in better shape than it was more in before the war.

AP I've heard say that before the war a lot of these farms were vacant.

GH Oh they was. The War Ag took a lot of these farms over what couldn't make a go on it.

AP Was there ever any round here like that?

GH Well yes, there was one at Oldham like that. There was one, Howe Farm they was sort of took over for the War Ag like that.

AP Browning's Farm didn't much change did it?

GH No, it's always been a good farm.

AP It's always been good soil has it?

GH It's good farm mud. I reckon I've trod on every foot of it. I was down there thirty year. His father used to leave it all to me, 'cos Roger was in the war you see. His father used to leave it to me, 'cos his father used to go out buying a lot of pigs. He was a rare pig man he was. He used to leave it to me, he'd say if you want a bit of drilling or you need a set of 'arrows, you know what to do, he used to leave it to me. He was a good boss.

AP Did you have the land girls here.

GH Oh yeah, had the land girls during the war.

AP Do you know where they came from, the land girls?

GH A lot of them used to come from Writtle I think.

AP Did you have Italian or German prisoners?

GH Yeah used to have Italian and German.

AP Where were they living?

GH Well a lot of the Italians live in Gosfield I think, in a camp at Gosfield. We had the Italian and Germans living down there.

AP They worked on the farm did they?

GH Oh yes. They were good workers.

AP I suppose all the change came after 1950 did it? The horses going, more machinery?

GH I had an old Standard Ford down there. That was the first little tractor I had. Then he bought a new one, a Case tractor.

AP That was a Fordson you had, the first one?

GH Yes, a Fordson. A little Standard Ford.

AP Was that in the war you had that first one?

GH During the war that was a job to get new tractors and after war finished I had a new tractor, a new Case, then I had a little Crawler tractor, then I had a TD9 International. I had several tractors down there. I was with the horses you see, before the tractors come on.

AP Presumably you've seen all the mechanisation?

GH Ooh, I've seen it right the way through.

AP Tell me, when you left Browning's, where did you go?

GH When I left Browning's I went in where they made the board, the **???? board** and I stayed there for about 18 months and then I went on Tiersons on the railway laying trackway, track laying and draining. Then when carrying cable started up, electrification, from Clacton to Liverpool Street, I got a job in the store first at Arnatch (?Argents) Lane at Stanway, then I managed to get on a lorry and I managed to get on the lorry for cutting the cables. Used to run up to Preston, Prescott, Liverpool, Crewe - all over the place. Then when the contract finished they went up to Rugby and I could have went on me lorry. The yard foreman said, if you like to go George, you can keep your job he said, but you gotta go up to Rugby. And I

said to the wife, but the wife she don't want that, see. Then when that finished I went on to Blackwell's, Earls Colne, what do all the roads and went on there on transport, used to do England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland. That's where I finished up, at Blackwell's, on the lorry, used to go all over the country. Nights out, over in Ireland, sleeping in the cab.

That's where I finished up at 65. I seen about. I had all those years on the farm and never seen nothing 'cept sky and earth and then I went out and see the world. See different people.

AP Did you have evacuees here, little kids and women from London.

GH They had two women. When I first married in '38, year before war broke out, we had two from London. They was great people. The husbands used to come down to see them at weekends. Talk about jollification – we used to drink (chuckle) but I don't now 'cos I take these tablets. I don't drink a lot now.

AP Why did these women come down and where did they come from?

GH They used to come from the other side of the river, Brixton. We had two of them.

AP Long way to come and did they have children with them?

GH Just the two women.

AP Did they fit in alright?

GH They fit in alright, had good time.

AP Good. You get all these stories about London children never seen any sheep and so on.

GH Some of them never knew where stuff grew did they? Never knew whether things grew on trees or come from the river. Lot of Londoners about here now.

AP Did those women stay long?

GH Stayed all the War.

AP All the war? And their husbands went in the Army?

GH In the Army or sometimes used to come down weekends, working in London you see.

AP And they stayed then?

GH They stayed with us yeah.

AP Were there any children in the village? Any evacuees in Great Tey?

GH No, can't say there were any children. But several had different women.

AP Of course the land girls.

GH The land girls, they was about here, plenty of land girls.

AP Do you reckon they were a bit of a liability or did they get the hang of things?

GH They got the hang of things. Some of those girls were very handy on the farm, used to do the thrashing and that. Used to have them for thrashing you see. 'Cos I mean a lot of the blokes had gone in the army.

End of Interview