Duncan Moffat 18 March 2024

Interviewed by Imogen Radford

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**Summary**

Born 1951, Army family, moved to Bury about 1963, then Lakenheath in about 1970. Swam at Lakenheath Mill Pond, later fished there, fished and canoed on the Little Ouse at Wilton Bridge and Hockwold, also fished in the New Cut, and in the river Wissey in Stanta, where trained in the TA for 30 years. Local pubs. Cyril Matthews and Garden Centre, where worked part-time. Rivers and changes in management. Changes in Lakenheath. The Warren and the CND camp.

Key:

**I = Interviewer**

R = Respondent

[00:00:00]

**I: I'll just say, first of all, thanks very much for agreeing to talk to us. My name's Imogen Radford from the Tales From the River Project, and I'm here talking to you – if you'd like to tell me your name.**

R: Duncan Moffat.

**I: Thank you. And I'm just gonna ask a few, like, little basic questions. First, can I ask you year of your birth?**

R: 23rd of the 6th, '51.

**I: And what was your father's occupation?**

R: In the Army for many, many years. Retired at Bury when it's a regular army camp. He then worked for, what was that? Eastern County buses, actually. Unfortunately had a heart attack at work one day and bang, so that was it. So he spent most of his life in the army.

**I: How about your mother?**

R: Mother? She was a chef. Same barracks in Bury, in the officers' mess. And she used to run the officer's mess, basically. They was all scared of her *[laughter]*. Bless her.

**I: A character, was she?**

R: Yeah, just a bit. She wouldn't take any nonsense from them. So that's what she used to do, and then when the camp closed, she then moved on to golf course, Fornham and she was doing the cooking and chefing there until retirement. Sad that she's gone. But that's it.

**I: And how about yourself? What was your occupation?**

R: Maintenance engineering. There used to be a large dairy in Mildenhall, on the Wellington Road. It's all houses now. I worked there for 30 years. And then, told I was gonna be made redundant. They were gonna shut it all down. I had a phone call from Chivers Hartley, the chief engineer. Got wind that I was gonna be looking for a job and went for an interview and they took me on straight away. Well, it got me redundancy first, so sat that out. I was there for about 15 years. I was then asked to stay on an annual contract, which I agreed to, but then I was ill, couldn't drive for a year. Then I had another couple of bad turns, that's it. They changed the shift work and working nights. I wasn't getting enough sleep and that had an effect on me in the end. And they want me to go back on shifts again and I couldn't do it. It's too dangerous.

**I: And where were you born?**

R: Aldershot.

**I: Oh, really?**

R: Military hospital. *[Laughter]*.

**I: In the tradition of the family.**

R: Yes.

**I: When did you move into this area?**

R: When, where were we? Were we in Germany? I'm just trying to think where we were. He got posted to Bury St Edmundsfrom Chichester, down Sussex. He was down there attached to the military base. So it's from Chichester to here. Blimey, that was 1963, '64, I think. Something like that.

**I: So before that, you were just moving around, basically?**

R: Yes.

**I: And then you were kind of settled.**

R: Yeah, here in Bury.

**I: Stayed at Bury. So where did you live then? In Bury or...**

R: On the Mildenhall Estate? Big house there. It's quite nice then.

**I: So basically you lived in Mildenhall from then?**

R: Well, Lakenheath.

**I: Sorry, Lakenheath.**

R: Well say I moved over there 1969,' 70, something like that. And I was there for about 28 years. Sadly, we needed a bigger house and there wasn't a four-bedroom house going for sale at the time. Only these and my next door one neighbour at the time, next door neighbour at the time, he got one. He was next to one but one 'til he passed away when we moved here. Didn't want to leave Lakenheath, but we needed - children were arriving again.

[00:04:25]

**I: So tell me about Lakenheath and your memories particularly about water, but anything else as well.**

R: Water. I used to do...you know how I met my wife.

**I: Tell me.**

R: Well, the Mill Pond. What we used to do, we were sort of teenagers and travel over from Bury purposely just to go swimming in the Mill Pond. I said the other day, there's a diving board there, a bit dodgy. You had to be careful, and that's where I met her actually. So that must have been about 1968, I should think.

**I: So you were just a teenager then?**

R: Yeah.

**I: 17 or about 17, 18.**

R: 18, I think. Something like that. And of course I was, then what happened then, I was seeing her, so I was travelling back and forth with a motorbike, Bury to Lakenheath basically, moved there with her. And that was 1970, I think it was. But while I was there, I used to do a lot of canoeing. I had a large touring canoe. And what I would do was I had an old van then, and I converted the roof rack 'cause it was a big canoe, put it on top. And Wilton Bridge, it's between Lakenheath and Hockwold. There's the old bridge, original bridge. I used to sort of drive over it three quarters of the way, and then you could turn right and actually park underneath the bridge. But what they've done since is they built another bridge to it, next to it, and then demolished the original one. So you can't get in anymore. But to put the boat in, I just used to spend quite a lot of hours actually up and down the river and go down as far Hockwold where it got a bit dodgy there because there's like one river converging to another. I'm not quite sure how that worked, but the current was really strong. So I then turned around and go back the other way. That was quite dangerous there. But it should do a lot of that on the rivers. Probably illegal. I should have registered, but I never did.

**I: What sort of canoe was that? It was a big one, you said. Was it like a wooden one?**

R: No, it was fibreglass but it was a tourer. You could stow stuff inside and whatever. And that's what I used to do.

**I: Did you ever do that? Did you do some touring?**

R: No, not touring and such. I used to put in my Peak 1 burner, which is a little gas cooker, mess tins, brought up a cup of tea on the side somewhere where I could and sit there with a cup of tea and I loved it.

**I: It sounds wonderful. So you went from Wilton Bridge to Hockwold.**

R: To Hockwold.

**I: Did you go the other way as well?**

R: Yeah, used to go both ways. Like see, I could only go so far towards what's it? Hockwold. I can come out and show you on a map.

**I: That's not very far actually, Hockwold.**

R: No, it's not, it's not far. But they say river sort converged and it's, I did look at it the other day actually on the maps, so I can't figure out how quite, how it all worked.

**I: So we're talking about...when would that have been in the sixties?**

R: This would've been…

**I: Further back.**

R: No, a lot of forward actually. It would've been in the '90s. Yeah. Early 90s.

**I: So you’ve got the cutoff channel crosses the river, doesn't it?**

R: Is that what's happening there?

**I: One of 'em goes under the other one.**

R: That's right. And I'll tell you what, that was scary, I got closer one day and I was just so scared. The current start picking up. And it is. And that's what I could have sworn, one crossed the other.

**I: I think it's, there's a structure underneath, I think.**

R: Something like that.

**I: But the current might have gone through, funnelled it through or something.**

R: That was scary, believe me. That's when I used to turn the boat around and then go the other way.

**I: How far did you go the other way?**

R: Fair old way actually, probably past, as far as, I think did it go through the RSPB? Lakenheath, RSPB, probably as far as there, I think. And then it started getting wider, faster running as well. So again, no, far enough I've come back again, but I used to love that.

[00:08:27]

**I: That sounds lovely. Did you swim in there as well?**

R: Not in there, no. Never.

**I: Did other people, did you see other people?**

R: I'm sure people do, but I haven't seen anybody because when I was looking for the Green Dragon Pub, so I found the first time. Found what was left of it. Not a lot as you know. There, the river was really, really wide and quite fast flowing. And actually what they were doing at the time, they were sort of dredging it as well when I found that place. And I thought, if it's like that now, what was it like when the pub was there? The pub cellar must have been full of water all the time, I should think. I walked that one. I parked somewhere up in the fen, but someone knew where the old maggot farm used to be.

**I: Is that at Sedge Fen, right?**

R: Sedge Fen, yeah. Not Burnt Fen. Sedge Fen, I think.

**I: I don't know where the maggot farm used to be?**

R: I knew the guy who used to run that, Peter. I used to drink with him. he's gone now as well. Him and his father used to run the business. They come from up north. And a couple of guys that used to work there. I couldn't tell you exactly where it was, the actual maggot farm, but I parked up near to where it was, sort of thing, and then from there, I walked and used my map, to find this place.

**I: Presumably that was for fishing. The maggots were for fishing.**

R: Yes. I had a couple of mates that worked there, and I used to fish in the Mill Pond. And mate, John, he worked there. And actually my son Gavin worked there. Just a very short while. I used to give him maggots and nothing *[laughter]* for fishing, fishing Mill Pond or whatever.

[00:10:30]

**I: Just going back a bit to when you used to go up to the Mill Pond. And you met your wife on the diving board, what period of time were you going up and down to there? Was it before? So you said it was about 18. You were about 18 when you met her. Going for some years before that as well?**

R: Not too far forward. So I used to go sometimes we just go swim at the Mill Pond. We used to drive over here in an old Ford Popular,or something like that, Ford Anglia. So I was going there quite a while actually, before I actually bumped into her. So, quite a while. We used to do it when we got bored. Just come over here.

**I: Sorry, this is my fault 'cause I might misunderstood where you lived at the time. Did you live in Bury?**

R: I was in Bury then.

**I: You were in Bury. So Bury to Lakenheath, it's quite a way, isn't it?**

R: Yeah. It is.

**I: Is it okay to drive it or to motorbike, but you wouldn't have cycled it presumably?**

R: No. I mean, I have hitchhiked it, as an apprentice youdon't earn a lot of money and just couldn't afford a car, nothing like that. Eventually I got a motorbike from a local guy in Lakenheath. Got ripped off on that one. And then I got another motorbike, and some American guy wrote that off, pulled in front of me. So then I sort of had to hitchhike for a little while because at that stage, I was sort of working in Bury. And then, like I said, story goes, I moved to Lakenheath and I managed to get the job at the dairy. Started work there, so that's convenient. Got another motorbike, *[laughter]*.

**I: So somewhere nice to go.**

R: Yeah, it was actually.

**I: And brought you and your friends up there.**

R: Yeah, a couple of car or something like that. Just go there. So we don't travel. Nothing like that, just enjoy other people were doing it as well, locals.

**I: Would there be quite a few people there?**

R: Probably annoying a lot of fishermen, but...

**I: There was fishing there as well?**

R: Yeah. *[Laughter]*. But again, I did say the other day there were two deaths that I know of because of the weeds in the middle there were quite thick. And so easy to get tangled in them. And that's what happened.

**I: Was that in the time you were going there, or a different time?**

R: One time. The story is, my son Tim, he's my oldest one, said, oh dad, he said the lads are going swimming up in the Mill Pond. This is when I was a single parent. So he said, "Okay, if I go?" I said, "No, Tim." I said, "It is dangerous there now, mate." I mean, I know I swam at it myself and I said it's too dangerous. And he didn't go. And it was one of his friends that actually drowned. The group went up there. They went swimming and one of 'em got caught up in the weed and he drowned. So it was one of Tim's mates. So I'm glad I said no, and I'm glad he done as he was told. So that's quite tragic though. Young lad. Would have been about 14, 15.

**I: So that was when your son was...when would that have been roughly?**

R: That was some...'cause he joined the Army eventually. He went in the Parachute Regiment.

**I: He was about 14, I think.**

R: He was about 14. So what would that be? Mid 80s he joined, just trying to think when he joined the Army, '87. So that would've been '85. Yeah, maybe '85 something.

**I: So people were still swimming there?**

R: Yeah.

**I: His friends and so on.**

[00:14:10]

R: But then you see nobody actually owned it at the time, if I remember right. And a guy by the name of, I think Willie, Willie Flack, no, Kevin Flack, Pancho, his nickname was, he then sort of...I think it was him. He actually formed Lakenheath Fishing Club. So then they granted him and said, yes, okay, you can go ahead and do it. And I think that's when the rules came up, you can't swim it anymore. I dunno if he runs it now, but that was many years ago.

**I: So it didn't belong to anyone. It just...**

R: No. I think you find a stage of time nobody really knew who owned it.

**I: So presumably it used to be the pit where they would dig out the clay and stuff.**

R: Clay, whatever.

**I: Probably belonged to the village or something, maybe.**

R: Yeah. Nobody really owned it 'cause I assumed at the time, I didn't...I remember in the early days I never got a permit, nothing like that. But then I had to join the local club eventually and do it legally when it was taken over by a club.

**I: So fishing was another thing you enjoyed doing?**

R: Yes, very much. I've still got my tackle in the shed. But I haven't, because there's a pond just over the road there if you like, just up the road a bit. Shippea Hill. I fished that up until about three or four years ago. I could drive*…* butI couldn't drive for a year. I got me license back, mentioned. Just 'cause I had a soft top car, put the rods in there already assembled and just drive up there and have a day's fishing there. It was lovely. But now I think the children were an age then, youngest three, Chloe, Jack and Ian. And so of course I had to obviously give them time. So when I retired, I done a bit of fishing and eased off because I had another hobby as well.

**I: And when you were young, were you keen on fishing then?**

R: Not really, no. It wasn't until me mate Malcolm, Malcolm Smith, local at Lakenheath. Good mate of mine. I went fishing with him one day and now I've got the bug. So I then started fishing Mill Pond. And there's another one at Hockwold, where the Red Lion pub is. There used to be some pits around the back there. We’d go fishing there as well. I can start again tomorrow, but one, I say I've got the time, I've got a lot of projects on at the moment. But if I got that bug again, I'll spend more time there than I would here, *[laughter]*. And the other place I used to fish was Stanford Battle Area, the old army training area. My second home.

[00:17:05]

**I: Whereabouts, in it?**

R: The other side of Thetford.

**I: Whereabouts within it?**

R: It's the River Wissey, Norwich. There used to be a massive house there on the back area until the MOD took it over 1942, '43. And what they'd done, they put like sluices either side, made it into his own private lake if you like. And we used to use it for watermanship training. So there was only two officers sufficient, myself, the guy from Murray, Huntingdon, serviceman, we had to pass. So I used to go there.

**I: So you went there even though you weren't based in there or you weren't working in there, were you?**

R: No. We used for weekend training. It's only 14 mile from Bury. So we used to just get all in the vehicles and train there weekends. And I thought that's a nice-looking river there. And I went to, I think it was West Tofts camp where the headquarters is. And then I sort of said, any chance? And they went through all me paperwork and stuff, yeah, okay, we'll give you clearance. You can fish it. So I used to go there a lot. I used to bike there as well actually, before fishing here, from Lakenheath. *[Laughter]*.

**I: Quite tricky. And so when was that roughly?**

R: That would've been, I'm trying to think. It was before I met Penny. That would've been late 80s, I think. Yeah, late 80s.

**I: So tell me a bit more about the weekend training. What was that?**

R: I was Territorial Army, army reservist for 30 years. So Penny, my wife, that's where I met her actually. 'Cause when I got myself organised again, back to normal life, I was in from 1970 to 1980, had to leave 'cause I had a full-time job, part-time job down Cyril Matthews, and I just couldn't do it with the children, obviously. So after quite a few years, I organised my life, if you like, got sorted out, childmindersand this and that and the other. And I joined what they call the HSF when it was formed. And it's like a dad's army. And it was literally a dad's army. I'd done about three years with them. Boys were growing up, things were getting easier. I then rejoined my old company at the age of 34 I think, I rejoined again and carried on my time. And that's where I met Penny.

**I: And when you went in there, were there people doing...to fish I mean, were there people doing other things? Like was there any boating or anything like that?**

R: No boating, nothing like that. Occasionally, do an exercise on, *[laughter]* which I was disrupted once actually. I was buzzed by Pumahelicopters and they tightened down on that. What they'd done when you got your fishing permit from them, they didn't have a list of dates in the back when you can't use it because the exercises *[laughter]*. So I could create a bit of a problem there.

**I: Did you get the wrong date?**

R: Well, that was before they started putting the dates in there, you see. And it's 'cause of me, they started publishing dates *[laughter]*. So I never got told off, but just...

**I: Good job you didn't get strafed, isn't it? It could've been nasty.**

R: Well, it could have been a bit sensitive because it's Northern Ireland training and that's quite *[unclear 0:20:43]* training.

**I: Of course, they've gotta be really careful.**

R: Very, very sensitive. But then I stopped doing that there as well actually 'cause that's, again, I met Penny and things...she moved over here and things started happening. And she's worked here.

[00:21:05]

**I: So your fishing, that's your fishing places. Was there anywhere else? Did you fish in the river as well or...**

R: Illegally, me and Malcolm Smith, we used to go down to New Cut when it was a lot deeper than what it was when we saw it the other day. And that's what threw me when you said about the flow. 'Cause what it was that they wouldn't let people fish it, because the banks were so steep. So they said, no, it's so dangerous. But me and Malcolm did and a local guy who was like the bailiff, he used to keep an eye on the place, he lived there on the edge of river, if you like. He died actually about three or four weeks ago. Another Lakenheath guy. He cut in his own swim. I mean, he was the bailiff and he cut in his own swim. So he used to fish in his back garden. So we shouldn't have really been doing that. That was a bit illegal.

**I: It's just right out the back, more or less out of the back of where you live though, wasn't it? Not literally, though.**

R: Yeah, not far. Because the other place we used to go to now and again, was Hockwold. Again, it's the same, the New Cut, steep banks, and we did go there now and again as well 'cause that's good fishing for pike.

**I: Was it good fishing there?**

R: Yes, it was good.

**I: I suppose they might have got trapped where they couldn't go through the, I don't know...**

R: Very likely. I had another mate of mine. He used to work for a water board of some sort, but he used to look after the rivers and whatever. And he used to say that some of the big fish that he did see there, were trapped, caught up or whatever. I don't know.

**I: You choose places where you are likely to... Because pike fishing's quite difficult, isn't it? Is that right? Is pike fishing quite difficult?**

R: Yeah, you gotta be patient. But I was more into just ordinary fishing. But Malcolm used to like pike. He would actually if he caught pike, he would get rid of it and if you like, and then just boom, boom, cut it all up, take it home. He used to eat it.

**I: Did he?**

R: Yeah. I never tried it. I never fancied that.

**I: He liked it though.**

R: He did. Malcolm, he was a real old outdoor country bloke. He lives in Bury now. He moved from Lakenheath.

**I: Yes. I've heard that pike is a bit sort of bony and...**

R: Tastes of the river. Muddy. Muddy taste and very bony.

**I: Obviously a delicacy to him.**

R: Yeah. Not me. [Laughter].

[00:23:40]

**I: So I think you mentioned to me something about the Highbridge Pub. Is that a place you knew?**

R: I never went in there. Ray Smith who died, I think told you that again, who died not long ago. His parents used to run the pub and obviously he lived there as a kid. Ray, he was a popular man in Lakenheath, Ray Smith, he owned an irrigation company somewhere around...I think Sedge Fen, no Burnt Fen, somewhere over there. Sadly, Ray died, but another guy I used to drink with locally here, you should be...play your darts and whatever. And he was saying that you could get your arm up high enough, sort of get the dart in flight because the ceiling was so low in the pub. I have seen pictures of the pub and the bridge. There's pictures of it in the local surgery at Lakenheath. But yeah, as that’s much as I know about it, to be honest.

**I: So it's gone by the time you were in that area? Or do you just about remember...**

R: I think it was all about the same time. There was another pub on the edge of the Lakenheath on the Eriswell Road, called The Roebuck. And that was still standing when I moved to Lakenheath. As you come into Lakenheath from Eriswell, there's some bungalows on right hand side and it used to be approximately where the first bungalow was. And there's a thing come up in Facebook a few year ago that some women...can anybody explain why I'm always finding broken bottles and bottles in my back garden, blah, blah, blah, blah. So somebody sent that, one through saying yes, because where you live used to be a pub. I remember the building and I can't remember if it was still open when I moved to Lakenheath. So it was 1970 or '69, '70, The building was definitely there, then it got demolished. And I think Highbridge went much the same sort of time, but I couldn't believe the size of that dyke. When you see that picture of Highbridge, it's really, really wide.

**I: Yes, it was. Yes. *[overspeaking]*.**

R: Yes, really wide.

**I: Yes, they used for navigation. *[overspeaking]*.**

R: And I couldn't believe it, but I drove up, going to Ely and when I left here, 'cause I had to be there fairly soon. I drove past where it would've been and I dunno again what they'd done with the waterways there, but it's like a large mound. And I think they rerouted some of the water in pipe work. I vague remember again, back in the very early 70s in Lakenheath, there was a lot of work going on somewhere. Had a lot of Irish and navvies about...and I think they were doing...diverting something then.

**I: Where was that roughly?**

R: It's been 1970, '71, '72, '73. Early 70s. And I think that's when it was all going on. They were doing some work there of some sort and I think that's when they demolished the pub as well. It's just nothing now.

**I: Nott even the water?**

R: No, it's just rubble now. It's just, literally levelled it and rubbled it and that's it. I drove past it the other day or what was it.

[00:27:58]

**I: So you mentioned going to look for the Green Dragon more recently. That's not one you remember either, I shouldn't...**

R: No, that got knocked down in the early 50s. '54, '55, something like that. Because I read up all the history. I even went back to as far as landlords who owned or who run it. And somehow, I managed to get it all up because I'm useless on that sort of thing to be honest. But I managed that. And that gives you the licensees back to whenever it opened.

**I: It is an interesting place to know about.**

R: I've got photographs. I've got my phone actually, which I got downloaded from the web.

**I: But no direct connection. You haven't heard anybody who went there or anything like that?**

R: I think it was Roger Bacon. He's another Lakenheath guy. I think many, many years ago, I heard him talking about it going near as a kid or something like that. Other than that, I dunno anybody who used it.

**I: No, it did go quite a long time ago. So Cyril did, but...**

R: He would've probably known.

**I: He's a little older, isn't he?**

R: Yeah.

**I: I mean you talked about working with Cyril. So you worked with him on the Garden Centre?**

R: Yeah. At the start of the Garden Centre, there's me and Mickey. He's a lad you need to talk to. I'm trying to think...his name will come in a minute. I had my full-time job, but also 'cause just getting married and whatever, there's not a lot of money about. So I took on this part-time job working with Cyril Matthews. And the barn, which was a garden centre, which now a restaurant, isn't it? Or cafe. That used to be, 'cause it's listed I think, you'll find, and I remember we took all the roof off. All the roof tiles off, stacked 'em up. And then we had to underpin it. Mickey Tusk that's the name of the guy, Mick Tusk, I actually worked with Mick Tusk. But also Cyril Matthews kept a lot of chickens around the back of the building now. Right the way down. He had three or four big chicken huts, and so did his brother who lived further up the high street, opposite the playing fields, if I remember right. He used to keep chickens as well. So anyway, when we used to caponise chicken in them days. Don't think you can't do it now. It's illegal.

**I: Say it again, sorry.**

R: Caponise them. Basically you inject a tablet into the back of their neck. I think it all got stopped and that would fatten the chicken up in a very short period of time. So, his son John Matthews, me and John Matthews would do that and Mickey as well. But we done a lot of work on that whole barn, me and Mickey. And then he opened up the Garden Centre.

**I: So that was in the relatively early days?**

R: Yes, it was.

**I: Because that bit of land goes down to the cut off channel as well.**

R: It does.

**I: I dunno if it's connected with it, or is it?**

R: I can't remember if I ever walked all the way down 'cause it is a fair bit land around the back there. It was gonna open up, they were gonna do a Tescos there actually initially and then that was all thrown out. Now somebody's opened a tea shop there, but I'm not sure why he finished doing the Garden Centre. I don't know. So I haven't seen his son John for a long time now.

**I: I think he'd been doing it for about 50 or 60 years.**

R: Well initially he had a flower shop at the Back Street and then he moved from there. And he used to live in that big large house next to it. That's where they used to live. But yeah, a lot of work there, looking out the chickens and that sort of stuff. And I need the money 'cause very young, we didn't have a lot of money.

**I: Yes. And helping out as well. Quite a connection there 'cause we talked about Cyril on the walk didn't we, and some of his stories. And sorry, this is a bit aside, but if you want to read more of his stories...**

R: I've yet to do that. I'm almost on it. I'm not gonna miss out on it.

**I: It's really interesting. I was mainly collecting the bits about the water of which there are quite a few, but there's a lot of other interesting things about earlier life than yours or my generation. And then also, you can see his stepfather's story as well, which goes back even further. That's handwritten but it's still quite, it's readable. You get that from the same place.**

R: Same thing when you was setting up on Thursday, I was standing by the entrance of the car park just keeping outta the way. The guy walked in I hadn’t seen for 28, 30 years, Ron Morley. And he was like the local historian.

**I: Oh, really?**

R: Yeah, he is got a lot of stuff that he's found on display at Moyes Hall in Bury, the museum. You can see that's labelled underneath found by blah blah, blah. Actually, as he walked in, I recognised him. I didn't speak to him. We sort of looked at each other and then just crossed paths, but he was like the local...used to just go around. I've been out with him a few times, and we didn't find a lot of few Roman nails here and there. So on a Sunday morning, just go out with him for a walk with a little trowel and have a little dig around on the fields.

**I: That's interesting. Might you catch up with him?**

R: Well, I probably won't see him again. The only time I go to doctor at Lakenheath surgery or that's about it really now. I've never called to go there anymore.

**I: Yes. I've not heard of him. So that's interesting. And Mickey as well. Sounds...**

R: Yeah, Mickey Tusk*.* He knows a lot. Well, he's born and bred in Lakenheath. He's like my son, Jack. Number two as I call him. He was actually home birthed, born in Lakenheath. And I think Mickey was the same actually.

**I: No, my main connections with Lakenheath have been the Lakenheath Heritage Group.**

R: I didn't know there was such a thing, to be honest.

**I: They've got a very good section on the website and leads you to lots of information they've gathered. I think they always like to do more and they did those notice boards you see around as well. They got them all organised and...**

R: I've got the wife to download it all for me because I'm useless. So it's all on my phone now.

**I: Ready to read.**

R: You ready to read?

[00:33:45]

**I: Yeah. No, it's very interesting place. So yeah, you had quite a connection with her, 28 years, and you did all these different things. Canoeing and did you just go on your own with the canoeing?**

R: Yeah. Yeah, by myself.

**I: Did you enjoy that?**

R: Yeah. Oh I did enjoy it and 'cause then I've met Penny then you see as well. So I had to ease off a bit 'cause Penny was coming over 'cause she used to live in Ipswich, you see. So we were toing and froing. So she wasn't here. I was over there, well here, Lakenheath. Then we got married and got this place. So the canoe is gone. *[Laughter]*.

**I: Sometimes these pursuits are things when you are younger and you haven't got all those responsibilities, aren't they?**

R: Yes. That's the reason I left the Army Reserves as well because the kids were at an age where they were...Penny left before, obviously left before me. She'd done 18 years. She was a staff sergeant. And I carried on but the kids were getting too much for her so I had to knock it on the head too. 30 years is enough, you know.

**I: It's interesting when those sort of pursuits of things, you've kind of gotta stop 'cause you've got to do some other real-life things. But do you think that sometimes you look back at them with extra pleasure 'cause you had the leisure then, or just 'cause you enjoyed them, I suppose?**

R: I enjoyed them. Well, the TA...it wasn't easy *[laughter]*. It was hard.

**I: Maybe enjoyment is not quite the right word for that.**

R: I dunno what made me keep going back. But I mean, when you're sort of sleeping in the field in middle of nowhere, or trying to sleep covered in frost and then three o'clock in the morning you get shaked, your turn to go on stag, why did I do it. We were soaking wet all weekend. But money again, I think money played a big part 'cause when I became a senior rank, it was good wages. And again, you see, although I was working British Farm Dairies, the money was okay. With young children, Penny couldn't work for a while. It's just my income. So again, it was a good income.

**I: You put up with the...**

R: Well, there was one study I had done six weekends on the trial. I mean that poor girl was home here with the kids. Well here, Lakenheath, with the kids and here actually. And it was a handful for her...so no, I'll call it a day. I said, we just amalgamated and reformed. There's another battalion and it's rubbish now compared to what it was. So I'd had enough. But the money, I did miss that money *[laughter]*.

**I: Family time instead.**

R: Yeah. Well it had to be. It is only fair enough. Penny still works. So I do all the ironing, I do most of the cooking. It's only fair. Again, 'cause she's at work.

[00:36:42]

**I: Now, did you mention somebody who worked on the river, looking after the river...**

R: Yeah, Danny Frodsham. But he wasn't actually local. He'd come from Newmarket where he was a colour sergeantin the reserves with me at the same time. And he's gone now. But he worked on waterways.

**I: What did he tell you about that?**

R: Again, sort of different types of fish that he did actually sort of see dead float on top. And he said some of them, real big things, pike and whatever and zander. Somebody released zander in there as well, which is a type of pike predator.

**I: Is it? Is that not a native?**

R: No, not recently. No.

**I: How big is that?**

R: Again, they grow pike size. Got a nasty set of teeth. They used to tell me about them.

**I: Did they prey on the other fish?**

R: Yeah, they would do.

**I: So they were a problem?**

R: Yeah, they were. And I don't know...obviously, it must still be aboutbut well they tried to cull 'em or what? I don't know, 'cause how do you do that?

**I: To do that, it's hard to catch a pike. And so that's his job looking after fish?**

R: Well looking after the rivers. Yeah. Just the condition of the banks and this, that and the other. Maintenance, if you like on the waterways. But Danny died. I went to his funeral about eight, nine year ago.

**I: So did he work on the river nearby? The Little Ouse and that area.**

R: He would work all around there actually. Because I remember he used to sort of talk about it now and again and he'd say, I’ve been near your way Duncan.blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. I think it was Kennet. Kennet or Kenton. That's where he was.

**I: So that must have been quite interesting 'cause you knew the rivers yourself in different times, and he knew them in the different eyes. What period are we talking about when you knew him?**

R: Danny, I think he joined us about 1975. He moved down from up North. '75. I think he must have left '86, '87. He called it a day as well.

**I: And were they dredging the rivers in those days?**

R: Yeah, there was that, the Shilling Bridge between...you come the long way from Lakenheath. Not only come a long way, you go the bridge to approach Mildenhall base. Shilling Bridge they call it. I remember them down there actually dredging the waters. You see the old drags on the side of the bank there and they'd be dragging it out. I mean it's a hell of a mess. You go out Barton Mills roundabout way where it sort of goes round there. It’s a right old mess. All overgrown. It's the same. Mind you, this is the river like now, Lackford, Flempton, just trees in the water. There's just neglected. But they used to dredge 'em. Keep saying, but I think it is an EU thing that stopped all that 'cause it was damaging the wildlife or something like that.

**I: But they were doing it in his day and was he involved in doing that as well or was he sort of inspecting it or keeping an eye on it?**

R: Well, him. Yeah, him. Sort of running maintenance, just keeping an eye on it and that sort of thing. Blockages, I suppose, and that sort of stuff. But then I, like I said, I think the EU putting into that, but now what's gonna happen, I don't know. You can see it does get overgrown in places, isn't it? Really quite badly.

[00:40:27]

**I: It's changed, doesn't it? The rivers have changed since what you will remember, I guess. So, Wilton Bridge, presumably it wasn't as overgrown then in the days you were going down there.**

R: No, it wasn't too bad then, actually.

**I: I know the bridge is different as well. There wasn't as much foliage there as well.**

R: No, it is quite, fairly wide there. It's all the way round back of the RSPB. It's wide.

**I: Yeah. It's wide now as well. Yeah. So I dunno if it's changed or not.**

R: No, I haven't been sort of that way for a little while now, actually. So I don't know.

**I: In fact, the floods, of course, in this winter, we've had a lot of floods, haven't we?**

R: Just a bit. Wow. We've been lucky here. Well, the field out the back got a little bit flooded. Got a bit concerned. because there's a ditch where the fence is there, the dog runs along there. Well, he doesn't go after the farmer, doesn't look after it at all.

**I: Yes. It's quite a wet winter. Did you ever come across skating, ice skating?**

R: No. I spoke to, I think it might be my ex-late father-in-law, who worked for Chivers, Chivers had a lot of land out that way. And that's who I worked for in the end as well. He was a beekeeper, head beekeeper. And his wife, she worked on the land there as well. And he used to say about, they used go skating. It is safe because it wasn't deep. It is basically like a mere. It wasn't very deep at all. And he was saying that they used to go fens skating then but he was the only one I think I've ever spoke to about that, getting that long ago. But it did go on.

**I: I don't think we've had cold enough winters for quite a while.**

R: No, probably not. And because just go on somebody's farmland now you can't do that however, can you?

**I: Not unless the farmer agrees.**

R: Agrees to that. Of course. It did go on out the fen.

**I: Is that something as well, that you've seen change? Is that, maybe going on to land for whatever reason, skating or something else is, well, or to fish or something would be something more you would do then and less able to do now or recently?**

R: Probably less able to do it now, I'd say. I think they're like, the Fens, there was a couple of dikes I did use to go fishing on, middle of nowhere. And I couldn't tell you now. I know I had to drive through a couple of farm yards *[laughter]* to get there. And you'd sit there all day and not be told off. Nobody would come after you but now I think if you tried it, a lot of the old farmers with land overs are a little bit more possessive. You wouldn't want strangers walking across your land anyway, would you? Let's face it. I think like that, it's got a lot stricter out there now. You just can't walk across fields and whatever now. Not anymore.

**I: You can't go fishing wherever you like.**

R: No. Because some is owned by this, some is owned by that, or the New Cut, you can't fish anyway.

**I: I think they have fishing in some places, probably just by permit or something.**

R: Yeah. There are places, say Lakenheath, they did own another little bit of water somewhere. And I can't think of where it was. It was on the River Lark, maybe a certain place that you could fish. But again, I used to fish from Wilton Bridge as well. That was a bit of illegal fishing, I think. No, that's right. Lakenheath owns where Wilton Bridge was. Lakenheath Club owned the first 100 metres, one side of the bridge. You could fish that little slot there. But that was it. No more, if I remember right. So that was a long time ago.

[00:44:25]

**I: So you look back on those activities with some nice memories, by the sound of it.**

R: Yeah.

**I: And the only thing that stopped you was really busy in life.**

R: Well, yeah. I got sort of remarried and children started coming along again, you see. Now they're all fled and gone.

**I: They've got other projects to do.**

R: I got sort all the back up, do all the fencing, spray all the fencing, roof repair on that shed, which shouldn't be there. It should have gone years ago, really. So yeah, I've got a lot going on at home at the moment. Place is being decorated again, well upstairs anyway. This is all we do.

**I: Well, thank you. That's really interesting. That's been interesting. You've filled in some gaps there in places. I've not heard that. Definitely not heard so much about Wilton Bridge and Hockwold and so on, so thank you very much.**

R: Lakenheath, it's grown so much now. Again, I think I said to you once upon a time actually had shops in there, Elsie Nielsen's, we had a hardware store. We had a bike shop, seven pubs including the British Legion and the football club I suppose. There was a lot more going on then but now it's all takeaways. Even had a wool shop, chemists. It's all gone now though. It just gradually shut down over the years.

**I: So it's changed quite a lot. You've got fewer shops, but more houses.**

R: Fewer shops, far more houses. And they're still building. Worries me. I hope they don't build over the back there. But I know it's Beck Row, not Lakenheath, but...

**I: Hopefully they won't join the two up.**

R: Let's hope. So my youngest daughter-in-law, youngest son, she comes from Undley, which is Lakenheath. Her father's a farmer, Shimmer. I've known him for donkey’s years. When he brought her around here two years ago for the first time, got chatting to her, said, "Where are you from?" She said, "Well, Lakenheath, Undley. So I said, "Your father to another family, said she's a Flack 'cause it's all Flacks, Morley." But they call him Shimmer. Well, I nearly fell off the blinking bar stool because I said, I used to drink with him 28 years ago and Lakenheath...so he got a lump of land out of Lakenheath, so he does potatoes and stuff like that. This used to be a potato field here, actually by way. So she's Lakenheath as well. She's a school teacher now.

**I: There's a place where families seem to stay around, don't they? With the same names, related.**

R: Flacks, Morley, Alsop, Butcher. There's so many...they're all local. Built local.

**I: It seems to be quite a close-knit community still there, part of it.**

R: Yeah. I think when I moved into Lakenheath all those years ago, it was quite cliquey actually. It took a couple of years to, how can I put it? Sort of not integrate but be accepted 'cause it was still quite a cliquey little village thing, but now it's just so big.

**I: So after 28 years you were finally accepted?**

R: *[Laughter].* Yeah, it was local. It was a funny place when I first moved there. So it was very, very close knit.

[00:48:03]

**I: Is there anything else you can think of that might be of interest?**

R: No. Then the Warren got early warning, second World War jobbie. What they used to call them when they used to plop the aircraft, it's a bunker up there, actually at the top of the hill. Observation. Like an observation post, OP. There's that stuff there still. But I think that's privately owned. But I remember being with Ron Morley that day. He said he found a Roman kiln up there. God knows whereabouts on there, but he discovered that. But I can't really...it's all...

**I: See, the warren up there, when you knew it back then, was it all covered up? 'cause I understand you could walk across where the base is now. Now it's all tall fences. I think in those days you could walk across.**

R: You could. And I think you still can. 'Cause used to have the old dump was down there, it was two or three skips down by the base fencing, actually by the perimeter fencing. But it's sort of like sand pits. I dunno what it was used for. I dunno, for sand or what...I don't know. But we used to live literally where Jack was born, literally 100 metres away from the Warren. We were so lucky. It's nice. Nice place to be. Nice bungalow. I mean, that's used a lot for dog walking, stuff like that.

**I: I've heard of people talking about sledging in the winter on there.**

R: You have some nice, decent slopes you would have done that. But me and Penny one night, the kids were in bed, so should we go for a walk? And I think it was a Christmas night where we actually had snow. So we just go for a 10-minute walk and we walked out the front door, turned left up straight onto Warren. It was fairly deep with snow. We had to be very careful where we walked, in the dark as well. And it was just nice though, walking that Warren, I must admit. And years and years and years ago, we had the peace campaigners there, CND. They all camped on there, actually, it's coming back to me now. And they all camped up, tents and all sort campaigning, CND. And they were there for quite a little while. There was one guy there, *[laughter]* this again, this is down where the pit used to be, the tip. Tip used to be, in the dump. He built it, looked like a greenhouse. And his actually wife gave birth to a baby in this thing in the middle of the bloody winter. And he got taken to court or went to court. CND guy. And, his wife gave birth in this thing. It was like a greenhouse, honestly. It was made out polythene. And after a few, well it got to be a couple years, they eventually all disappeared. Now 'cause they're gonna start moving nuclear stuffback into Lakenheath. I don't think he ever left. But it's gonna start again. You're going get CND campaigners in the village again 'cause they used to go down to local pubs. They were there for quite a while.

**I: Was that quite interesting, different people?**

R: Hippies, if you like. Sort of hippified tree huggy and whatever.

**I: So did the village people not think a great deal of it?**

R: No, they didn't. No. Didn't have any time for them to be honest *[laughter]*. Because they used to get in the pubs and they weren't the most hygienic of people. *[Laughter]*. Sorry about that.

**I: Well, I suppose it would've been quite difficult living in a tent.**

R: Yeah. I mean, I've done it so...

**I: As you know.**

R: Well, yeah.

**I: You know what it's like *[overspeaking]*.**

R: *[Laughter]*.

**I: Didn't even have a tent.**

R: No, a ground sheet.

**I: They had luxury.**

R: But other than that, I'm just trying to think of anything else I can...

**I: I didn't know that happened. That would've been, when would that be?**

R: 80s.

**I: 80s?**

R: Yeah. 80s, I think. All going on before I met Penny. Yeah, 80s.

[00:52:32]

**I: Did you ever do any sledging or did you see people doing sledging?**

R: No. I did, but when we lived in Germany. But not here, no. I think I probably had a sledge with the kids when they were younger, the two oldest boys when they were young. But probably used to drag them around and that when we get snow. Not me. I'm just trying to think. Say a lot of it's been built over. Now you've got an article about the Land Army. My ex’s late next-door neighbour when I lived in Lakenheath, that's how she ended up in Lakenheath. She was with the Land Army. And another friend of mine, Marilyn, was a good friend of my ex. Her mother was Land Army as well. But now I can't really think of anything else more, sort of any interest really. 'Cause you had where we went to on that walk, the first stop. We started going down that lane, there used to be a large hall down there once upon a time. And I can't think of his name now, but he used to open up once a year and had a little mini fete. That's when it was a nice little village. I can't remember his name. Major somebody, I think Major or Captain, but I think probably First World War guy . But he'd open up once a year and there's a little fetes there and that sort of thing today, long gone. 'Cause I think that's been knocked down since. But in the graveyard, there, there's some relations of, now is it Kitchener or is it Hague? One of those two, First World War generals, relatives to him actually in St Mary's graveyard in the church yard there. But I can't remember if it's Kitchener or Hague. One of the other.

**I: It seems like quite a well-connected place in some ways. People seem to, like I was talking about the Wesley connection, so it's further back, but seems to be a place that draws people in.**

R: Yeah. Where was that place in the church or chapel or whatever it was?

**I: The chapel, the original chapel was behind where the opticians is now, which is near, not far from the post office or just around where. But that's long gone now. Went in the 60s or something. And then they went up to the Methodist church where it is now.**

R: Where it is now.

**I: Yeah. So that was way back. But it was said to be the first in Suffolk.**

R: I didn't know that actually.

**I: Well, until I looked it up but it interesting to read it and to see the picture, I put on the handout there.**

R: My oldest son, Tim, the one who was in Paris, he actually got married in St Mary’s Church.

**I: Amazing church. We went in there afterwards, a few us...**

R: Did you see on the wall, the paintings? I mean, I haven't been in there since, to be honest, but the paintings. Yeah. Yeah.

**I: Yeah. We met somebody in there who helps look after it and he was telling us about it. They're very proud of that. And quite rightly, it's quite important stuff. You followed up on all the things we talked about when I was chatting to you on the walk. It's been really interesting. So what's nice, I was saying at the beginning really, it's a bit like a jigsaw you're filling in. *[overspeaking]* Something there and somebody else has told me about another thing there. So it's all coming together quite nicely. So appreciate that. And your, well, friend Mickey Tusk.**

R: Mickey Tusk, sure. Imagine. Remember me? He might remember me. I don't know 'cause it was a lot of years ago. Early 70s.

**I: Well, Cyril's memory is pretty sharp. I think. I haven't really been in touch with him back since I talked to him. Gosh, it must be a year ago now.**

R: Where does he live now?

**I: He's still in Lakenheath. I can't describe where it is up Mill Road. Somewhere up that way.**

R: Mill Road.

**I: Yeah. Somewhere up there. So, no, still going strong.**

R: Wow. *[Laughter]*. See what I'd done was before I could go to college and whatever, and I used to work for actually a chicken processing company in Bury. And, 'cause we used to go out to Lakenheath, collect chickens from the farm, his place, and eventually, as I say I moved to Lakenheath. So I knew him anyway for that. And then somehow, I got a job with him. Just part-time.

**I: Yes. Well I imagine he employed quite a few people over time.**

R: Obviously when the shop opened, I imagine. Yeah, because I don’t know when he stopped keeping the chickens. I can't remember now, but...

**I: Yes, I don't know. I think it might be when you read his story, it might be in there. Because he goes into quite a bit of detail about how he built everything up. I imagine once the Garden Centre got going, he didn't have time for chickens.**

R: He didn't have time for chickens, no, because they are time consuming. Because they had to be mucked out.

**I: Every single day, don't they? *[Laughter]*. Not much fun.**

R: Ammonia. He probably didn't have time for it actually.

**I: He probably would remember. So if I speak to him, I shall certainly say so. Well, thank you very much.**

[00:57:34] End.