Betty Norris 13 August 2024, Thompson

Interviewed by Imogen Radford

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**Summary**

Born 1929, Thompson, always lived here. Grew up on a farm, later ran the shop, then the post office – still does [at time of interview; retired November 2024] (oldest post person in the country). Played outdoors in the village with siblings and friends, on Thompson Common, which her father rented from the Walsingham estate and farmed, paddled in the ponds, skated when they froze. Spent a lot of time there, raspberries, lots of frogspawn in summer, some different [unusual] frogs. No longer open to the public. Cycled down to Thompson Water, fished, once skated. Skating parties came from Watton, and there were boats on it from the estate. Went to Thetford Grammar School, taken down to the baths but not taught and didn’t learn to swim, but liked the water. Had a pool for disabled son to swim in. Couldn’t go in or through the battle area once it was taken over, Thompson Water, some of father’s land taken, some given back long after the war. Used to cycle around, and to drive through across to Mundford and Methwold. Knew children who came from Tottington to Watton school, were rivals but made up after they had had to leave with nothing, felt sorry for them, many came to Thompson. Been on tours, heartbreaking to see all the houses gone. It was a tough life with poor land, though. Stanford pond [Water]. Lord Walsingham’s sister had wanted to be buried there but wasn’t. Lord Walsingham. Looking back at childhood, it was wonderful with freedom and outdoors, different now. Village life was more active. Fully involved in village organisations, school, fundraising for the new village hall. Now not many get involved and there are fewer people and children, more restrictions. Post Office work.

Key:

**I = Interviewer**

R = Respondent

[00:00:00]

**I: So if you wouldn’t mind just telling me your name.**

R: I’m Betty Norris.

**I: And I'm Imogen Radford.**

**I: I'm just gonna ask a few basic questions. I know your name, of course.**

R: Yeah. Yeah.

**I: Now, somebody tells me you are an MBE. Is that...**

R: Yes, that's true.

**I: Well done.**

R: Yes.

**I: Do you include that on your name when you...**

R: I don't. Very seldom *[laughter].*

**I: Okay.**

R: Some people use it on the envelopes when they write to me and things like that, but I don't normally use it.

**I: Could you tell me more about it in a minute? I just wanted to make sure I'm addressing you correctly. Can I just ask a few basic questions? Your maiden name?**

R: It's Parrott.

**I: How do you spell that?**

R: Parrott. P-A-R-R-O-T-T. Like the bird, except it's got two Ts.

**I: Two Ts. One R? Two Rs?**

R: Two Rs.

**I: Two R's, and two Ts. Yeah. And what was your father's occupation?**

R: He was a farmer.

**I: And your mother?**

R: Well, she did all sorts of things on the farm as well, but she was basically a housewife. I think in her young life she was a schoolteacher, but my father came from a farming family.

**I: And would you mind telling me your date of birth, or if you prefer not to the year of your birth? It's up to you.**

R: I'm quite happy to do that. It's 27th of November '29.

**I: 1929.**

R: Yeah.

**I: Thanks. And your own occupation now, or in the past?**

R: Well, when I was younger I helped on the farm. When I met my husband, he had a shop here, so I was then working in the shop there and post office, and that's where I've been sort of concerned with all my life, really. Except for a spell when we fattened pigs.

**I: And you've got the post office still, haven't you?**

R: Yes.

**I: I believe you are the oldest post person...**

R: Apparently so, yes.

**I: ...in the country.**

R: Yeah.

**I: I forgot to do an introduction at the beginning to say that we're in Thompson, the village of Thompson. And I forgot to say who I was as well. My name's Imogen Radford and I'm a volunteer for the Tales from the River Project.**

R: Right.

**I: I forgot to do the beginning, so I've done it now. So, you always lived in this area, or where...**

R: Yes. I was born just down the road here.

**I: And then you moved to the shop...**

R: Yes.

**I: ...just up the road and then, and now along to that?**

R: And then we had this house built when we retired.

**I: So, always lived in Thompson, so you must know it really well.**

R: Yes. I've never wanted to live anywhere else.

[00:02:53]

**I: When you were young, did you...obviously, you told me you helped on the farm. What did you do for fun? Where did you go and what did you do?**

R: Well, we made our own entertainment, really. We didn't go anywhere much. Us children, we all joined together and played together. And I went to the village school to start with, and then my mum wanted us to go to Thetford Grammar School, so I went to Watton. They had a cinema in Watton, but we seldom went there. We hardly ever went anywhere. We had everything we wanted here.

**I: So, you were very much an outdoors girl?**

R: Yes, yes.

**I: Enjoying the outdoors?**

R: Yeah.

**I: And apart from having to go after school as well. You went down to Thetford School?**

R: Yeah. I went to Thetford Grammar school in the end there.

**I: And what sort of games did you play with you and your friends? What sort of things did you do?**

R: Well, we used to play cricket, and we actually had a tennis court on the meadow outside there, and we had a tennis court here as well at one time. But, I mean, at school we had hockey and tennis and things like that.

**I: Did you go swimming when you were young?**

R: Yes, we did go swimming, but we had to walk a long way from the school to the swimming baths, and so we didn't have much time to swim at. And one thing I never...and I still can't swim. So, I never did learn to swim.

**I: What did you think of it at the time? Did you enjoy it or?**

R: Yeah. I quite enjoyed it, but I don't know. We didn't have much lessons, so we didn't never got around to learning to swim. We had our own swimming pool here at one time, and I even then couldn't swim.

**I: Did you like the water though? You enjoyed it?**

R: Yeah, I quite liked the water. I used to go in with my granddaughters when they were little and help them to learn to swim. And I've got a handicapped son, and one of the things he could do was swim. And they used to have a session in a swimming pool in Norwich for handicapped people, and we found he could swim. So, that's why we had our own swimming pool here.

**I: So, he would swim in that?**

R: Yeah. Yeah.

[00:05:33]

**I: So, when you were at Thetford Grammar School, that must have been in 1930s and 40s. Am I right?**

R: Yes. When war broke outI was still at Watton. And '41, I suppose, I went to Thetford. I can't remember quite exactly.

**I: So, sort of forties anyway?**

R: Yeah.

**I: And you walked along to the river baths there, 'cause lots of people have told us about that as well, people who live in Thetford and so on. And did you go in the shallow end and just hang about?**

R: Yes.

**I: Splash about?**

R: Well, it was in the river.

**I: Yes. It was in the river, yeah.**

R: Yeah. And it never was very deep. I think if you went further into the river itself, it would be deeper, but we all stayed in the pool end.

**I: But nobody taught you?**

R: No.

**I: Nobody taught you, they just took you and then took you back to school?**

R: No. No.

**I: And what about round here? Did you do any swimming or splashing about in the waters around Thompson area?**

R: Well, yeah. As I said, we used to go on Thompson Common, where it is now. And we used to go and paddle there. We didn't actually swim there, but we used to go and paddle down there in the summertime.

**I: Was that in the Thompson Water?**

R: No. It was on Thompson Common.

**I: Thompson Common. Is that in the pingos?**

R: Yes.

**I: Did you call them pingos?**

R: It was a pingo, but we didn't know that it was a pingo. It is only since Wildlife took it over that we were told they were all pingos. We never knew they were pingos in my young time.

**I: It was just somewhere wet and...**

R: Yeah. There were ponds.

**I: Ponds?**

R: Yes. And the frogs and all sorts of things. It was quite fun really.

**I: Was that just in the summer mainly?**

R: Yes. Yeah. And we used to go down there and skate in the wintertime when they froze over.

**I: So, skating. So, they must have been fairly shallow so they froze?**

R: They weren't very deep at all, no. And they were full of weeds and all sorts of things. I don't know what they're like now. I haven't been down myself. I don't know what they're like now.

**I: So, was it in the summer, did they always have water in or sometimes?**

R: Yes.

**I: They always did?**

R: Yes.

**I: So, it was just a way of getting cool and just having fun?**

R: Yes. Yeah.

**I: Was that all of you? All you and your friends and your...**

R: Yeah. We used to cycle down. I've got a brother and a sister, or I had a brother and sister. I haven't now of course, but yeah. We all just skated.

**I: You'd all go down there?**

R: Yeah. We all used to go down together.

**I: And then in the winter, skating. Or did you have actual ice skates?**

R: Yes.

**I: You did? Yeah.**

R: Yeah.

**I: Was that a big thing? Did lots of people do it?**

R: No. Very few of us had skates actually. And they were these skates that you fitted on your shoes. We didn't have proper boots and things. They weren't very good.

**I: Were you very good at it?**

R: No, not very.

**I: Did it matter though? Were you just having fun?**

R: Well, yeah, that's right. Just having fun. Yes.

**I: So, was that quite often in the winter did it freeze? Or every winter?**

R: It did, yeah. It always used to freeze. Yes.

**I: And that was mainly when you were quite young, was it?**

R: Yes.

**I: Did you ever stop doing that or did you always do that when it was frozen enough?**

R: Well, I suppose really when my sister went away to college, things like that, we sort of didn't get up to those sort of thing very much then.

**I: And what about the same thing with the paddling in the summer?**

R: Yeah. We grew out of it.

**I: Grew out of it?**

R: Yeah.

[00:09:27]

**I: And what about, did you go down to Thompson Water at all?**

R: Yeah, we used to go down there quite a bit. Because they have a sluice there, don't there? Or they used to have a sluice there.

**I: Yeah.**

R: And we used to go and sit there with jam jars on a piece of string and catch fish. But we never paddled or anything in there. The only time I ever, we went down skating one year and we were busy skating and all of a sudden there's a huge crack where the river actually ran in, and so we hastily came home. We were very close to the edge anyway. But that's the only time we ever went. I think they used to organise skating...

**I: Really?**

R: ...things from Watton at one time.

**I: Really? That's interesting.**

R: Quite a lot of people came skating there. They used to have boats on there as well each year.

**I: Do you remember that yourself?**

R: Yeah.

**I: Whose were the boats?**

R: Well, I don't know who they were of. I presume it belonged to the estate, doesn't it?

**I: Yes, I guess so. I mean, now of course, as you say, it's the Wildlife Trust, so yes, I suppose...**

R: I mean, during the war, of course we weren't allowed to go...weren't supposed to go down there, but it belonged to the Walsingham Estate. And they sold it all to the Wildlife Trust.

**I: Right. So, in the war, it was banned to go on the Common, was it?**

R: Yeah. We could go down the common, but weren't allowed to go down to Watering, 'cause that was in the Army training area then.

**I: It was then, was it?**

R: Yeah.

**I: I see. That's changed since then, hasn't it? I think that's now gone, as you say, back to the Wildlife people.**

R: Yeah.

**I: I see. Right. So, until the war, people would go skating and there was organised skating.**

R: Yeah.

**I: And you went once for the skating yourself?**

R: Yeah. Yeah.

**I: Was that the last time because you were scared by that?**

R: Yes.

**I: But you didn't ever, in the summer, you didn't paddle there?**

R: No. No.

**I: Why was that? Is it 'cause it too deep, or?**

R: We never even thought about it. It always was quite deep, I think. Really.

**I: But you were enjoying the fishing anyway?**

R: Yeah.

**I: And what did you do? Did you catch the fish and then bring them home?**

R: No. No. No.

**I: No?**

R: No. No.

**I: And everybody did that? You, your brother, your sister, your friends?**

R: Yeah, kids. Friends, we always used to go down together.

**I: And that was a distance you would cycle down there, wouldn't you? It's a bit too far to walk, isn't it?**

R: Yes. Oh, yes.

**I: Okay. And you were saying in the...I'm going backwards and forwards. It's a bit confusing, isn't it? But between the Thompson Water, and I keep thinking of things to ask you. So, at the Common, that was a bit slightly nearer, but still cycle distance, wasn't it?**

R: Oh yes.

**I: Yeah. And there you did the paddling, and you had the frogs and so on. Did you collect frogs spawn or anything like that?**

R: No, 'cause we already had a pond here that used to have no end of frog spawn. For some reason, there's never any now. I don't know why. But usually, they were different sort of frogs over there, weren't they?

**I: I don't know.**

R: On Thompson Common, yeah.

**I: Okay. So, you didn't catch them or anything, you just sort of looked at them and enjoyed them?**

R: Yeah. And I don't ever remember seeing frog spawn there, but obviously there must have been somewhere. Yeah.

**I: Maybe that would've been earlier.**

[00:13:17]

R: But we used to spend quite a lot of time on the Common walking about, and there used to be wild raspberries and that sort of thing as well. We used to go pick those. We used to spend a lot of time down there. My father had, in the summertime he had stock there, and used for grazing. And we used to have to go down every so often and make sure they were still alright and still all there. So, we used to spend a lot of time on the Common, although when we got a bit bigger, we didn't go paddling then.

**I: But the helping your father, that was different times?**

R: Yeah.

**I: And so, did he sort of rent it or he just had a permit to be able to graze on that?**

R: yeah. He rented all that then from the...all the farm around here belonged to the Walsingham Estate at that time, and all the farms were rents. Rented farms.

**I: I see. So, the whole of his operation was rented?**

R: Yes. Yeah.

**I: Including the Common area?**

R: Yeah.

**I: I see. So, that was basically part of the land on which you lived, wasn't it?**

R: Yes.

**I: It's not somewhere else, it was actually part of...**

R: Yeah. It was...

**I: Although he didn't own it.**

R: ...part of the farm, actually.

**I: Part of the farm, yeah. I see. Whereas Thompson Water was a little bit further and separate.**

R: Yeah.

**I: The same estate, but...**

R: That wasn't anything to do with us at all. We didn't go that far down. No. Our farm was all this end.

**I: I see. Okay. There's been quite a bit of change then, hasn't there, over those...**

R: Tremendous.

**I: Tremendous change. Yes. Yes. So, we're talking about before the war and then at the time of the war.**

R: During the war. Yes.

**I: During the war, the Common, you were still using it for farming in the same way?**

R: Yes. Yes.

**I: Because it's obviously not Thompson Water.**

R: Yes.

**I: And then after the war, did that carry on?**

R: Well, not for long. I can't remember when the Wildlife took it over. I can't quite remember when they did that.

**I: Okay. But it was a little while after the war?**

R: Yes.

**I: And then what was your father doing then? Was he still farming?**

R: Yes. Yes.

**I: But not that area.**

R: Yeah.

**I: That area had been sold on.**

R: Yeah. Well, my brother was then also farming with him at that time.

[00:15:45]

**I: And when did you marry and go to the shop?**

R: 1955.

**I: Not much later then, really? No.**

R: Yeah. Yes.

**I: So, a long tradition of working in the shop and the post office then for you, isn't it?**

R: Yes. Yeah.

**I: And presumably then you had children, so you'd been far too busy to go off paddling...**

R: Well, yeah.

**I: ...even if you hadn't grown out of it.**

R: No.

**I: Did you take your children to the Common or anywhere like that?**

R: No. It didn't belong to us by then but I had children.

**I: It didn't belong to you, but also, was it public or not public?**

R: No. They say it's public, but I don't think that it is really. They have what they call the Pingo Trail, but that's right at the edge of it, and it comes down at the Watering or somewhere. Goes along the old railway there, to Wretham and then back up the path to Watering, which is public, but I don't think they let people walking on the Common themselves.

**I: Right, okay.**

R: They do organise trips and things like that, I think, but that's only for special people who want to go, I think.

**I: Right. When did that sort of come about as far as you can tell?**

R: When they took over.

**I: When they took over.**

R: Norfolk Wildlife.

**I: So, as soon as they took over, obviously it wasn't your land, but it also wasn't somewhere you could go.**

R: No. No.

**I: I see. Right.**

R: No.

**I: So, you wouldn't have taken your children there 'cause you've got...**

R: No.

**I: ...basically.**

R: No. I have a handicapped son who's been in a wheelchair all his life, so I couldn't take him anyway, no.

**I: Okay. And the same would apply to Thomson Water. Again, it's that distance and the difficulties as well.**

R: Yeah. We couldn't go down to the Watering then at all. Yeah.

**I: So, have you had any other connection with water in the area at all yourself?**

R: Not really, I don't think. No.

**I: But your son, as you say, your son liked swimming and went swimming. But that was usually in a pool, wasn't it?**

R: Yes. Yeah.

**I: He wouldn't have swum in an outdoor place so much, perhaps.**

R: Yeah. Yeah.

[00:18:15]

**I: Okay. What more can you tell me about the battle area? So, it was when the war started, that's when that area became off limits, isn't it?**

R: Yeah.

**I: And then later on some of it went back to the estate or to other people, but...**

R: Very little.

**I: Very little.**

R: Yeah.

**I: Most of it stayed within...**

R: Some of my father's land right down the end there, they took that over as well. And that came back to him, or back to my brother then, after war. Well, a long while after the war, I think really.

**I: Took a while.**

R: But very little. And of course, all the rest of it is still there.

**I: That's right. Did you know people who were affected by that?**

R: Yeah. Quite a lot moved into empty property that was in Thompson, and others were all housed in somewhere in Watton and various places.

**I: Did you know them before the change or just after?**

R: Yeah. Quite a lot of them, yeah. Because I went to Watton School, children from Tottington also went to, and we used to sort of meet up on the way, some of us. Although Tottington and Thompson never really got on together.

**I: Didn't they?**

R: No. There was great rivalry between Tottington and Thompson for some reason.

**I: Is that just amongst the children or adults as well?**

R: Yeah, I think the children really are the...especially any of the sports and that sort of thing, cricket and that sort of thing, there was always a lot of rivalry between them.

**I: Did you each have a team and then play each other?**

R: Yes. Yes.

**I: So, you didn't really meet them, meet up with them because they were rivals?**

R: Yes.

**I: Unless you met up to have battles, did you?**

R: Yes.

**I: Did you?**

R: Yeah.

**I: Right. But you knew them, 'cause you were at...**

R: Yes, of course. Yes.

**I: Anyone you remember it affecting, you know, that they had to leave their place?**

R: Well, they just had to leave everything. All they could come away with was the clothes and that they would be wearing. And I think most any of them could move their furniture if they had somewhere to put it. I don't really know.

**I: Right. But that affected, well, people you knew. Maybe not friends, but people you knew?**

R: Yes. Yeah.

**I: And then they came and lived here in these areas, and you got to know them there as well.**

R: Yeah. Yeah.

**I: Was that comfortable? Because if you said that the villages didn't get on before, and then they came and had to move here.**

R: We had to make up then didn’t we*,* yes. Yeah. Yes.

**I: Yeah. But it's...**

R: I mean, we just felt sorry for them really, more than anything.

**I: Yes. Yes. Yes, it was a big upheaval, wasn't it?**

R: It was dreadful. It really was.

**I: Yeah. Is it still remembered by a few people?**

R: Sorry?

**I: Is it still remembered by many people?**

R: Lots of the older people are obviously no longer there, but there are people who've got people buried in Tottington,family is there. And every so often they have tours. I haven't been for several years, but I have had been on a coach tour round and you visit the churches and that sort of thing. We used to have a guide to explain where everything was, but it is quite pathetic, really.

**I: Yes. Yes. In what way is it pathetic?**

R: Well, I can remember how it was and when you saw these houses all in ruins and things like that, it's heart-breaking. The only thing they did have to keep up was the churches, although they were empty, but they did actually look after the church yard for a while. Whether still do, I don't know, haven't been for quite a while.

[00:22:38]

**I: Yeah. So, you'd seen the houses before it all changed. You'd actually been to the villages as well?**

R: Oh yeah. I mean, my grandparents lived atMethwold. And my dad had a car and we used to go on a Sunday and we had to drive through Tottington and Stanford and those places to get to Mundford and to get to Methwold. We used to cycle around as well. We used to go around Tottington and around to Wretham on a Saturday and go for long bike ride *[laughter].*

**I: Yes. It's quite hard to appreciate that now, isn't it?**

R: Yes.

**I: 'Cause you just literally can't, can you?**

R: No.

**I: Only skirt the edges, whereas it would be just normal for you to just drive through and that was a short way to get to Methwold. Whereas now that's completely impossible, isn't it?**

R: Well, yes, you have to go to Watton and Mundford that way to get to Methwold.

**I: It was just like normal villages you would cycle around and now it isn't.**

R: Yes.

**I: Yes. I can see that would be quite hard for people, especially if people had actually lived there or at least knew it like you, to go on the coach tour would be quite tough really. Yes. Yes. I have been on those and I think it might depend on the group if it was people who used to live there, they might speak slightly differently but they do talk about how they've done a good thing for wildlife which is perhaps that's true but...**

R: It has its good points, obviously, doesn't it? I mean, it was very poor farming land. They had a firm that used to have a lot of ducks there, which helped the farm, helped to fertilised land, but it was very poor farming land anyway, the majority of it. And I think that's one of the reasons why the army took it over because it was poor land anyway. We saw heathland on quite a lot of it.

**I: So, the life for the people living there, I mean, some were farming and some were doing other things, I suppose?**

R: I think most of them were conducted with the farming, and I know they had a farrier, people like that. They had their own post office. They had their own school at Tottington as well.

**I: Yeah. So, it must have been quite a tough life for people living there?**

R: Yeah, of course they had a lovely old pond at Stanford.

**I: Oh, right. Yes, yes. That's almost a lake really, isn't it?**

R: Yeah, it is quite a big place. Someone just said there was a stream connecting Thompson with that. Whether there is or not, I don't know.

**I: Yeah, I've thought that, but I don't think it goes that far. Yes, I think they're both tributaries. Dunno if it's the same one or not. I'm not sure.**

R: No.

**I: But did you see the lake there at Stanford, the pond?**

R: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. We used to go drive past it.

**I: Did people play there, do you know?**

R: I don't know whether anyone did.

**I: That was just somewhere you went past really?**

R: Yeah.

**I: It's a bit further away, isn't it, from here?**

R: Yeah.

**I: Yeah. So, we don't know whether...I mean, local people might have done, but we don't know really.**

R: Yeah.

**I: And there aren't many people around to ask now, are there?**

R: No. Afraid I don't know.

**I: No.**

R: No.

**I: Gosh. Such a change. Such a big change. And still some people still affected even now, aren't they? At least, if not they themselves, their relatives?**

R: Yeah.

**I: Some people go back to the graveyards I think sometimes, don't they?**

R: Yeah.

**I: But I think some people can even be buried there, can't they? If they...**

R: They can be. Yeah.

**I: I dunno if there's many people left for that.**

R: No. No.

**I: Have you ever been to a funeral there or anything?**

R: No, I haven't. No. No.

**I: No. They're probably quite rare.**

[00:26:48]

R: Yes. Yeah. Even more so now. I mean, a friend of mine who was Lord Walsingham's sister, she always said she was gonna be buried there, but she wasn't in the end. I shouldn't think they've had a burial there for a long time.

**I: Right. Why wasn't she buried there? Was that a choice?**

R: I don't know why in the end.

**I: Just didn't happen.**

R: Yeah. Yeah.

**I: He's still around of course, isn't he? Lord Walsingham still?**

R: Sorry.

**I: Lord Walsingham still.**

R: Well he is. Yeah.

**I: Still around apparently? Yeah.**

R: Yeah. I haven't seen him for a long time.

**I: But yes, there's not many people left, but apparently he's writing books and so on*.***

R: Oh, alright, good.

**I: I don't where he lives or if he goes around and about, but perhaps not.**

R: I imagine he still lives in the Hassocks.

**I: Oh, in the big house, I suppose**.

R: Yeah, Hassocks in the village, not the Hall.

**I: Okay.**

R: His son lives in the Hall.

**I: Right. Oh, okay. It would be good while there's still people around to talk to, isn't it?**

R: Yes.

**I: To find out a little bit about it. When I met you at the thing at the village hall, they had lots of photos, didn't they? Did you see those?**

R: Yes. Yes.

**I: Or maybe you'd seen them before perhaps as well.**

R: Yeah.

[00:28:10]

**I: Alright. Anything else that you think might be interesting to me? I'll ask you a question, how do you feel looking back at your childhood, thinking about your childhood and what it was like living around here. How would you sum it up?**

R: It was marvellous, *[laughter]* really was wonderful. Yes.

**I: And you've loved the area?**

R: Lots of freedom, and now we have got a few more children who moved in quite recently. But, I always say, I mean like today, I dunno whether you see any children when you came into the village at all, but we were never indoors, we were always outside either climbing trees or on bicycles or playing on the meadow over here, which is now theVillage Green that used to be one of my father's meadows. And we used to play on an awful lot of football, cricket, and we used to play together and...what we call the shop corner, which is the four crossroads up there, we used to meet up there nearly every night, just stand there and chat. We was all together. But you'd never see children playing out together now, it's awful. All they're doing is pressing knobs and *[laughter]*...I mean, my granddaughters are just the same, they come weekends quite often and I have my little room on the end here and they're in this, when I look there and they sit there and they're both...

**I: On phones.**

R: Pressing knobs...and it makes me so cross *[laughter].* It really does. They're missing so much. I mean, there's all this wonderful area and all freedom and everything like that that they don't appreciate.

**I: Yeah. But you did?**

[00:30:20]

R: I mean, it is the same with our new hall. I mean, I always wanted a new hall in Thompson and we started several times raising money. And I don't know if you...you obviously haven't been to the old hall,it was facing the green there and I was secretary of that for 60 years *[laughter].*

**I: Were you?**

R: We used to have lots of fun though. We used to have dances, whist drives and bingo and all that sort of thing. And we had kids parties and old age parties and all sorts of things there. The village all came, but they put on things at that hall there, and I look around and I think, "Well, how many of you live in Thompson?" And very few of 'em do. They don't come. They have a film night there once a month. And I go every Friday not 'cause I wanna go and watch a film, but I just think I need to go. I look and I think there's about half a dozen village people, the others all come from outside and that does bother me quite a lot. I mean, we have the money given to us. We should never have had it otherwise, but I think all the money that we spent on building that hall and providing all the facilities throughout there, they don't appreciate it. I often think the only time they come in the village is when they put on something free.

**I: I suppose it's all these other changes you've been talking about as well like the freedom to be able to go out, places you can go, it's probably not just here I suppose...**

R: No.

**I: ...it's not just here.**

R: No, it's not. No.

**I: It's probably happening elsewhere.**

R: Yeah.

**I: So, you ran the committee for 60 years?**

R: I was treasurer for 60 years. I used to organise all the events there and I was on the committee to this one, and the day we had it officially opened, I resigned and said, "That's me finished." *[Laughter]* I achieve what I wanted to achieve and that was all that worried me.

**I: So, part of the time was as well as putting on the events, you were busy raising funds and trying to get a new one. Was the old one, was it one of these...did it use to be an army building of any sort?**

R: No, no. It was attached to a couple of houses. You know where the Green, entrance to the Green is?

**I: Mm-Hmm.**

R: it's opposite.

**I: Okay.**

R: It's just a building on the end of two houses. It was just that we had a kitchen built on the end, and, but it was very small. It was a lovely little hall, it really was. In fact, we sold it for a lot of money, but it's empty now. We sold it to a Chinese man. Someone said he was growing drugs in it. We thought he is probably still in prison, but whether he is or not, I don't know, but he hasn't been for several years now.

**I: How unfortunate.**

R: Yeah. *[Laughter].* And it's just standing there looking very sad and very...

**I: Yeah. It must be tough for you having 60 years of it being a vibrant place. You knew it was...**

R: And that's why I got my MBE, it was for the time I used to spend in the village. I always used to say I was born in this village, it is my village, and it's up to me to do what I can for the village and I always tried to do that. Yeah.

**I: It's not the only thing you did is it, you did other things as well in the village?**

R: Well, I belonged and obviously had an office in all the organisations in the village.

**I: You started doing that about the time you started in the shop, work and you got married?**

R: Yeah.

**I: About then, was it?**

R: Yeah.

**I: A real connection to the village, isn't it really?**

R: Yes, absolutely.

**I: Strongly connected.**

R: Yeah.

[00:35:08]

**I: Yeah. No, it's an interesting thing is why don't young people go out into the outdoors more and what can we do about it? It's a big question, isn't it?**

R: Yeah.

**I: Lots of other temptations and maybe less freedom, I suppose.**

R: Yeah. A lot of it is all due to health and safety. I wrote an article in our Wayland Magazinea couple of months ago, after we had that thing on the hall and said how nice it was and people did come and I said, and it made me remember what we used to have. We used to have cricket club, football club, and we used to do all sorts of things you see, but then health and safety came in and you couldn't have a visiting team, we hadn't got a toilet for 'em. I mean, things like that. It just spoilt village life completely. Well, you see, we used to have cricket on somebody's meadow and the same with football. We used to have that on somebody's meadow. You see? There weren't any toilets or anything.

**I: No. So, basically you got very happy memories of your childhood. You've worked really hard through the village. You still love it, I think. Yes?**

R: Yeah.

**I: But you've got some reservations about how things are now...or maybe reservations is the wrong word. You wish things were a bit lively basically. You said there's some new people with children come in though, so maybe that'll liven up a bit.**

R: I mean, we still got a very good school, but the amount of people who come from other villages and the traffic is horrendous at school finishing time. Fortunately they have after school clubs, so some will stay till four o'clock and sometimes till five. So, there aren't quite so many cars all at the same time at three o'clock but, they all come past this way but *[laughter]* they haven't got any allegiance to this village at all 'cause they...or they come here to school, but they don't want to take part in any village events or anything because they've got their own village haven't they?

**I: Yes. Yes. Yes. I should have realised, 'cause we went to the school and did some of the storytelling there and it seemed like a lot of people for a small village. I didn't realise. I probably should have realised a lot of 'em must come in from elsewhere. And presuming the people who live in the village, their children go there, but they just aren't many of them.**

R: Oh yes. Yes. Yeah.

**I: I mean, there aren't enough, are there? So, enough children for a school in the village presumably?**

R: In fact, there was somebody who moved back into the village with two girls and she couldn't get hers into this school...

**I: Really? Oh dear.**

R: ...at that time. I dunno what it's like now 'cause I don't have anything to do with the school now, but...

**I: Did you used to?**

R: I used to be a governor. I went there to school, you see?

**I: Of course. Of course.**

R: I was all concerned with all the building that went on, because when I was there, there was only that little bit in the front, two classrooms, outdoor toilet *[laughter].* It was so funny. All we wanted was to have indoor toilets built on and we ended up with all we've got now *[laughter]* which is lovely really.

**I: Yes. It seemed very nice when I saw it. Has it got a place to play or do they play on the green?**

R: No, they've got their own field.

**I: Field as well.**

[00:38:48]

R: It joins onto our field. And it was so funny because when we were having a hall built and put in planning application, they said we've got to plant trees all along there so that people who used the hall couldn't take photographs of the children on the field. And that's one in the paper this week, the same thing that someone wanted to put a glamping thing field and they said it was too close to school because they could take photographs of the children, just as though anyone would want to really.

**I: You're probably quite pleased you're not involved in the organising of this now.**

R: Absolutely. Yes.

**I: You've done your bit *[laughter].***

R: Yes. Oh yeah, absolutely. I just go along. I'm looking forward to the time when I give up being a post office so I can go to coffee mornings on Tuesdays morning *[laughter].*

**I: So, you have to work every morning basically do you?**

R: I don't work Wednesdays.

**I: Not Wednesday. Except Wednesdays?**

R: Yeah.

**I: When are you going to retire? When you...**

R: I don't know. I think about quite often though, and I think they don't really deserve a post office in Thompson, the amount of people who come, but then you can't blame them because nobody wants money and very few people posts, no. Nobody posts parcels, hardly anyone post parcels. Less and less people post letters and postcards now. They all use emails and things like that, you see. You can't really blame people for not coming. I've got a few regulars, you see, and when I think about, it's getting time I retired, I'll catch somebody come in and I say, "If I weren't here, you would have to go to Watton." You haven't got any transport. So how do you get there?

**I: So, it's up to you when you decide they're not gonna close it. It's just...**

R: They won’t open another one.

**I: They won't open another one if you finish now?**

R: It was one of the reasons I keep hanging on, *[laughter]* and I mean it's no problem to me. I have a little room at the end, you see, and I sit there and the post office is there, and when the front door is open, I'm open. When they shut, I'm shut, and people just walk in.

**I: It's just your coffee morning that you can't go to *[laughter].***

R: Yeah.

**I: You could get them to change that to Wednesday *[laughter].***

R: Yeah.

**I: Well, thank you very much. It's been really...**

R: That's okay.

**I: ...really nice. Really interesting. Thank you.**

[00:41:26 End of recording]