Mary Saunders interviewed by Helaine Wyatt 310122

[Voice filename 2022\_01\_31\_MS001\_01\_A]

**Summary**

Mary Saunders (maiden name Greef, first married name Saunders, later married name Worman, prefers to be known as Saunders), interviewed by Helaine Wyatt 31 January 2022, 7:35 minutes long.

Memories of growing up at Oxburgh Hall, daughter of gardener. Mary was born in 1950, lived there until 1976. Memories of childhood and of playing, swimming and fishing in the rivers in several places in Oxborough, including in My Lady’s Wood, the moat, the Wissey at the ferry, and the ‘second bridges’ on Foulden Road.

**Transcript**

[00:00] This is Helaine Wyett. I am now recording my first interview for the Brecklands River Project and my interviewee is Mary Worman\*, nee Mary Greef, and she’s going to tell me a little bit about herself. So Mary, where were you born?

*I was born in King’s Lynn Maternity Unit in 1950 and taken home to my house, Church Lodge, Oxborough, where my father was a gardener at Oxburgh Hall.*

And how long had he been gardener there?

*He’d been gardener there since 1945*

And where did he meet your mother?

*He met my mother at Oxburgh Hall as she worked there. She came across from Ireland and first worked in London and when the war came, she was sent home to Ireland, but after the war, she came back looking for another job and Lady Bedingfield, being a Catholic and Mum being a Catholic, I think she was recommended to her so she got the job there and met Dad and he’d lived in the village all his life, he’d worked previously on Lambert’s Farm and offered him a job with the house because, obviously, he then had a wife to support.*

[01:35] When did they get married?

*They got married in 1945, the 1st December 1945, just after the war.*

And, you are the second child, the first eldest daughter?

*I’m the eldest daughter. My brother was born in 1946 and, unfortunately for him, I was born 4 years later and took the centre stage.*

And what other siblings have you got?

*I have, I had 4 more siblings. I had twin brother and sister who were 6 years younger than me, and I had twin brothers who were 9 years younger than me. So by the time I was 9 years old I was a little Mum, and vowed to have no children of my own as I grew up.*

And so you lived in Church Lodge, which is a sort-of turreted, looked like a turreted tower on the wall of Oxburgh Hall.

*It was the gatehouse originally. It was converted into the lodge, I don’t know exactly when. We do have photographs as it was before.*

[02:50] And so, you lived there until you married?

*No. I lived there until Dad retired. Because they didn’t have another house to offer him, he had to move house when he retired in 1976. So in 1976 he retired and in early ’77 he moved to Swaffham and I moved with him and I lived there, not for that long, because then I was engaged to be married and I married in 1977 and came back to Oxborough to live again, in one of the farm cottages on the Stoke Ferry road. And I lived there for another 17 years.*

[03:40] And so what are your childhood memories of growing up at Oxburgh Hall, basically.

*Growing up at Oxburgh Hall was idyllic. We had the run of the grounds. We had the rivers – not the rivers – the woods, which included the river – don’t exactly know which river it was called, was it the Gadder? That came, obviously, from Gooderstone but in My Lady’s Wood there’s a tiny little stream the we used to paddle in as children. We used to fish in the moat for eels and my brothers and I* *used to do this on a regular basis and the grounds were our playground and, because Dad was on hand, we used to spend a lot of time with him in the greenhouse; it was just like a part of our home.*

[04:30] Did you used to take the eels back for your Mum to cook?

*Yes. Mum cooked the eels. She cooked everything She cooked the trouts, she cooked the roach. She had to have everybody’s - everything we caught – we had to have an attempted feast on, not always the best but that was what you did in those days.*

Now, I know you don’t swim, but did any of your siblings swim in the moat, or in the river?

*I don’t remember any of them swimming in the moat. My brother, Steve, who we lost in 2012, up to the time he died he never swam. And I never swam. I don’t swim now.*

[05:10] But what about in the river?

*We didn’t actually swim. We played. We played in the ferry river. We played in what we call the ‘second bridges’ which was down the Foulden road and we played in there because it was a sandy bank and it was clear and you could see the bottom and we paddled, we caught tiddlers and had lots and lots of fun. And lots of the children used to. There used to be a watermill there and where the watermill was, there was a (big) tree cut down and people used to actually jump off the tree trunk into this. It’s a wonder they didn’t break their necks. There was no health & safety by the riverside then.*

[06:00] And did you used to go down to the old ferry then?

*We used to go to the old ferry. Um, used to cycle down there and we used to play in there. As I say, I never swam. People who were with me, my friends, probably would have swum, cos it was clear there then, it wasn’t weedy.*

Which side of the ferry?

*Oxborough side. So we would have gone down the Ferry Road.*

[06:25] Ok. And do you remember any cottages there?

*No. There were no cottages there at all. I don’t remember seeing anything there and there wouldn’t have been. The cottages were derelict from, um, 1952, I think. I think it was ’52 and I suppose they were knocked down.*

[06:55] Thank you Mary.

*I’ve just got one story. At the river, we went down to the river. I was quite fair skinned and we went down to the river. I had my swimming costume on and messed about on the river and it was great fun and I got home and I was completely burnt. My skin was burnt all over. And I remember that my maiden aunt was staying with us at the time and she had this visitor who came to see her. Don’t know how he found her but he was a very strange man. He as a spiritualist. She didn’t even want to talk to him …*. [*Phone rings so story unfinished]*

[07:35] End of recording.

**\*After the interview, Mary asked that she be referred to as Mary Saunders (her first married name) and not Worman.**