Richard Warner interviewed 2022-03-29 by Helaine Wyett

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**Summary**

Richard Warner, interviewed by Helaine Wyatt 29 March 2022

Born 1927 in King’s Lynn, lived in Whittington until age 17 when joined army. Playing in the river with lilos, had a punt. Mother taught children to swim at Salmon’s Hole, Richard fished there, saw grass snake and kept skin. Describes eel babbing. Played in the river at Gooderstone, Carter’s farm, visiting aunt every Saturday, fed the fish. Lived in Cambridge, then Brancaster, visited the area, moved back after retirement when 60. Early school in Stoke Ferry. Described Gooderstone Water Gardens early flood of area then creation of the gardens.

**Transcript**

[00:00] My name is Helaine Wyett, I’m a volunteer working for the Brecks Fen Edge and Rivers Project on the use of the rivers for leisure, recording people’s memories of how they used it. So, Richard – tell me your name please.

*Richard Warner*

And your date of birth please?

*16th April 1927*

And your father’s name?

*Sidney Frank Lee Warner*

And he was a?

*Farmer*

And what was your mother’s name?

*Eunice Annie? Settler Lancaster*

How do you spell that first name?

*EUNICE but she was always Eunicee*

Oh, was she? And so you were born in 1927. Where were you born?

*In, I believe in Lynn Hospital, I’m not sure*

Locally then?

*Yes, King’s Lynn*

And where was your home when you came out of the hospital?

*Whittington. At Grange Farm*

And how long did you live there

*Till I was 17 and joined the Army*

OK. So you’ve obviously got lots of memories of using this River Wissey as a boy

*Yes.*

Tell me about them please?

*Well, my earliest recollection is when we were given lilos*

Yes?

*I think about this time of year and the idea was that we should take them down to the river and float about on them, which we did. But that’s my earliest recollection*

And how old would you have been then, do you think?

*About 7 or 8*

And did you have siblings? Did you have brothers and sisters?

*I’ve a brother who was 15 months older than me. And I had a sister who was 11 years older than me and another brother who was 13 years older than me. So there were two families in effect.*

So your older brother and sister would have kept an eye on you a bit?

*Kept us in order. I think that was more the thing. “Go and find out what Tony and Dick are doing and tell them not to” was the …*

So you’d be messing around on the River Wissey, on your lilos?

*On the lilos, or more often … my uncle had a punt with a friend, a very rough piece of wood but it was very good. We used to spend a lot of time taking it up to Salmon’s Hole. You know where Salmon’s Hole is?*

I do. Now I’m delighted to hear you refer to that because I know it and not many other people seem to know it.

*It was always Salmon’s Hole. I think Ted Salmon owned it, the land near it. I think that’s where it came from*

Did you ever hear any sort of rumour, or myth or legend about a farmer who might have been Mr Salmon driving his horse and cart into the river there?

*I don’t think I’ve heard that one*

That’s what I was always told and when I was swimming, as a child, in the Wissey just down …

*You mean intentionally, or accidentally?*

No, intentionally. My mother taught lots of the local children to swim there. I was always told ‘Don’t go up there’; it’s very deep. I think they might have even said it’s like a whirlpool.

*It is deep, where Stringside comes in. I used to punt*

Yes

*Moor my punt just down from Salmon’s Hole, on the far bank and then fish into that (part). And it was quite good, quite good fishing because the fish seemed to like where the two streams met.*

What sort of fish did you catch?

*Mostly dace and perch. An occasional trout. Just occasionally. Sea trout I expect it was*

Oh, really?

*The biggest one I ever had was about 2lbs, but that was very rare*

And did you take it home to eat?

*Oh, yes.*

But not the dace or the perch?

*The perch we would eat, yes. And you wouldn’t catch eels there, but we used to fish for eels at the bottom of the garden. And they were very good to eat.*

And you were using a fishing line to catch the eels? You weren’t using any sort of ..

*We didn’t use a night line though other people did. Herbert Cater, I think, taught us how to go babbing. Have you heard of babbing?*

I have. Isn’t it a sort of special stick that you use?

*My idea of it was to thread a lot of worms, on a piece of coarse thread, coarse yarn, and just throw it in and leave it. They’d get their teeth caught in it. That was catching eels. Never did it.*

[05:28]

And I assume you could swim?

*Oh, very much so, yes.*

Where did you learn to swim?

*Just in the river. We never went in … I really can’t remember when. We could only dog-paddle*

So you used to go swimming, fishing, boating, alongside the Wissey at the bottom of your garden basically.

*Yes, particularly up to Salmon’s Hole. It was much more fun going upstream and then coming back than going downstream for some reason.*

Yes, yes

*You could go upstream, occasionally, take it further upstream. When my brother got married, he lived in Turnagen*

I know where it is, yes

*And there was a canoe which we borrowed and you could go right upstream, almost to Northwold, using that.*

And could you go down Stringside?

*We never went beyond the bridge. It was too boring. It was much more interesting going upstream.*

And do you know of a place on that side called Porter’s, that was referred to as Porter’s?

*No. It doesn’t …*

I think this could be later. I discovered that yesterday actually. So you were here until you were 17 and then you joined the Army? When did you come back here?

*Well, my parents still lived here so I’d come back on leave and things like that.*

And they lived at Grange Farm?

*Yes. And when I came out of the Army, I had 3 years a Cambridge and then we went to live in Brancaster. So we were coming and going. And then when my parents died, my brother inherited the farm and the house so we’d still see them … and my sister had been teaching in London and married a Norfolk man who was a policeman in London and they’d retired to No3 Church Lane*

Was her name Mary?

*Yes*

I knew her.

*You knew Mary Dewing?*

Yes. Briefly I suppose. She had a very good reputation as an organist, I believe, didn’t she?

*She could thump it out. She could play a very good tune.…*

I wondered if she was your sister. It did cross my mind. And then you didn’t come back here to live until ?

[08:32]

*Er …I was working in Syria until 1987 and then the firm I was working for suddenly decided to bring the retiring age down from 65 to 60 and they said ‘Right, you’re 60. Finish what you’re doing and go on a pension’. And then we were looking for somewhere to live and … we were living in Cambridge, had a house in Cambridge then. We were visiting my sister and Harold (?) and walking along and this house was for sale so they said ‘Why don’t you buy that?’ so we put in an offer for it*

Yes, so that was around ’87 then?

*Sounds like ’87 and Grace, by that time, decided that she didn’t want it. I’d put in an offer and they phoned us on a Saturday morning, wherever we were, and said would you give us £90,000, whatever it was, £95,000? And I said, no, that was my final offer. And that was the end of that. And on Monday morning they phoned up and said your final offer, we will accept it afterall. So we were rather stuck with it then. I’ve never regretted it and I think Grace has got used to the idea, though she’d rather live in a town, in a place where there are shops. There aren’t many shops in Whittington.*

Where did you go to school, Richard?

*King’s Lynn Grammar School*

But as a boy, did you not tell me that you went to a Dame School in Stoke Ferry?

*In Stoke Ferry from the age of 4 to 7 we went to Miss Barker’s. Do you know The Dell?*

Yes, I do

*OK. So we went there and then at the age of 7 my parents thought we needed some rough edges knocked off so we had 2 years at the school in the Lane here.*

Oh yes Who was the teacher there then?

*Miss Brighton? Laura Brighton. Miss Hinde was the Junior teacher. We were in Miss Brighton’s class.*

When you were at The Dell, did you know, can you recall anybody called John Kett?

*No. How old is he? Not anybody I can remember. There were a couple of Parkers. David Parker and …*

It’s just that why I ask about John Kett. He was sometimes called Jack Kett

*He would be, wouldn’t he?*

He was born in Flegg Green and he then, ultimately, became a headteacher in a primary school in mid-Norfolk but he wrote poetry. And he wrote poetry about the fen. In fact I’ve given Roger [Warner, Richard’s nephew], a poem all about the River Wissey that he wrote. And, I don’t know if you knew, but there was at one point a seal went to live in Wereham pond

*I can remember seeing about that*

And he wrote a poem about that too.

*I can remember*

[12:12]

So, when you came back, when you were 60, did you take up your leisure activities using the river?

*I did 7 years with CAB in King’s Lynn*

But using the river, did you go boating and fishing again?

*I was thinking I’d like to go fishing again. I got a rod and I went down and I suddenly thought ‘I hope I don’t catch anything’. You know, it’s totally different. I don’t want to catch fish any longer. So no, I haven’t been so much near the river since then. I think if we’d lived on the other side of the road (from here), I’m sure I would have done.*

And have you been out in one of Roger’s boats at some point?

*No. My neighbour across (the lane) I’ve been with him. He’s got a little motor boat. We’ve been out with him a time or two but never been in Roger’s*

Ok. Is there anything else you can think of? Oh, you mentioned the River Gadder, using the River Gadder

*Oh, the Gadder at Aunty Kitty’s house which is probably gone, long gone. It was right on the Gadder. We used to go there*

Whereabouts? Can you remember where it was? It wasn’t near the Ferry at Oxborough, was it?

*No. You go through Oxborough. You turn right to go to Gooderstone*

Yes

*You go over the (bridge), into Gooderstone. Carter’s Farm is on the righthand side. Their house, with a little meadow down to the river, was one of the first houses on the lefthand side of the road.*

But you don’t think it’s still there?

*I’m sure. I think somebody bought the land and knocked the house down*

Oh, what a shame! So you would go and visit your aunt

*We’d go there regularly, every Saturday and when we’d had lunch we’d go and see them. Saturday afternoons was a regular thing, drive over with Father and Mother, have a time with them. Bring them home for tea and take them back again. That was a sort of routine*

And you, as children, would be playing in the river then, would you?

*Yes. And we would always go feed the fish. We decided we would go fishing. She (Kitty) said you can go fishing. But they were so tame, we were just hauling them out. She said ‘No, no, no more’*

What sort of fish were they?

*Little trout. Little trout, and she used to sit – they had an arbour down by the river – and used to sit there and throw chunks of bread into the river and big trout used to come up*

And did she eat the trout?

*No. No they were her pets. Not to be caught.*

[15:43]

I think that the river now flows what is now Gooderstone Water Gardens.

*Yes, and down out the other side, and then down ..*

Down towards Cockley Cley? [Looking at Faden’s map] Yes, that’s the Hythe. It goes past Oxburgh Hall then, at the back of Oxburgh Hall. Here it goes, doesn’t it? Through there and there to Gooderstone. There are mills along there, or there were mills, in the time of 1797, of Faden.

*Did you … oh gosh. Trying to remember the name of the man who … developed all that area?*

Is that Chris Knights?

*Knights. It was his father. His father. We were walking along there once and he said he knew who I was. He was telling us that at one time, I suppose it would be in the early 30s, there was a lot of rain and the boys knocked on the door and said ‘What are we going to do with the cows?’ He said ‘ put them out on the meadow’. And they said, ‘Come and look at the meadow’ It was, you know, bits of island sticking out here and there and the rest of it was under water because the Gadder had overflowed. So he – I don’t know what made him do it – he got a whole load of sticks and he put them round where the water had come up to and when that went down, that told him where the low land was and they went ahead and created the Water Gardens, from having seen where the water levels went.*

And the lakes near where to what was the Iceni Village, were they also man-made? Along the way to Cockley Cley from Gooderstone. You can see them from the road

*I think they are* [calling Willow, his niece] … *on the way to Cockley Cley* [again, looking at the map].

We’re looking at Faden’s map of 1797 which shows us high ground and low ground and the rivers.

*It’s more or less the same on this one ( OS? Map) 1830.*

Maps are fascinating, I think. Excellent. So, is there anything else you can think of? I think that’s covered your fishing, your boating and swimming.

*One day when I was fishing up at Salmon’s Hole a grass snake came swimming past …*

Oh, and you’ve still got the skin!

*Not this skin, but one like it. And I found it in the garden. There’s lots of grass snakes around. Still are.*

OK, I think we’ve covered most things.

[20:32] Recording ends