**Clinton Lambert** interviewed by Helaine Wyatt 310322

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**Summary**

Clinton Lambertinterviewed by Helaine Wyatt 310322

Memories of walking by and playing and fishing in the rivers, swimming, wading, catching fish including Tom Thumbs and sticklebacks in jam jars and with bait and tackle, playing on a raft or inner tube, stories of fish including sea trout caught by an otter, pike, lampreys. Lived in Oxborough and Foulden, father originally a gamekeeper then farmer at various places. Mentions ‘Park river’, Oxborough moat, Gadder and sawmill, Wissey near Oxborough Ferry, Eastmoor River.

**Transcript**

[00:00:00] My name is Helaine Wyett. I’m a volunteer for the Brecks Fen Edge & Rivers Project, specifically looking at the leisure use of the rivers, ie swimming, boating, fishing. I’m interviewing Clinton Lambert whose name actually is John Clinton Lambert and he’s going to tell us all about himself.

So you were born when, Clinton?

*20th September 1947*

And your father was?

*John Sidney Lambert*

And what did he do?

*He was a farmer*

And your mother?

*My mother was in domestic service before she was married and her name was Dora Daisley, Dora Martha Daisley.*

And when was she born?

*She was born 1909, February 1909*

And what did her father do?

*He was a gamekeeper*

Where?

*At Didlington and later Foulden, or both. They both belonged to Lord Amherst at the time.*

And what did you do?

*I ended up as a flour miller, 50 years*

Ok, right. And do you have brothers or sisters

*I had a brother, Henry, 3 years younger than me. That was all*

So it was just you and Henry?

*That’s right.*

And where did you grow up?

*I grew up in Oxborough, with bits of Foulden in between*

So where did you live in Oxborough?

*We started off, when they were first married, when I was born, we lived down – at the back of the pub really; there were some cottages at the back of the pub*

What were they called?

*I think they’re called … I can’t think of it at the minute.*

Were they near the river?

*That first bit, what we called the Park River – the diversion bit that goes to the moat – we weren’t that far from there*

OK. Were they on the left or on the righthand side going down that road?

*As you went down the village street, where the old shop used to be, they were off to the right.*

OK.

*There were about 4 or 5 cottages then, there’s only 2 now.*

Ah. So you’re heading to where the old Post Office is, was?

*That’s right. Not the Foulden road.Not the Foulden road, no.*

So you’ve gone past the Chantry?

That was one of the Chantry cottages. There were about 5 … there’s perhaps about 3 now. You know, they’ve been knocked about …

And did the gardens go down to the river at all?

*No, no*

Not that far?

*We weren’t there very long and then my Dad – I think his mother was still alive at the time – he went to Foulden, as a sort of farm manager for Lord Amherst*

Where were his parents living ….his mother living?

*His mother was at Hall Farm, opposite the Hall gates.*

[00:03:45] Right. So he went to Foulden?

*He went to Church Farm, Foulden, till – it would have been – around 1952. And then his mother died. There were a load of complications because when my father’s father took on the farm, which was about 1910, that was the Oxburgh estate and they were tenants. He lost his father – he left school early – he lost his father at 14 so he left school early. So he left school at 14. Somewhere along the line he farmed with his brother Alf, it must have still been in his mother’s name. They got Church Farm as well so they were tenants of 2 farms in Oxborough and then, this went on – we then reached the war and, I think, about 1940-time, Sir Henry Bedingfield died and a whole load of death duties became due and that sort-of finished the Bedingfields off and then, at the end of the war, the estate got broken up and they bought Hall Farm. That must have been in the mother’s name and then, when she died … Father and Alf had two sisters as well – Hall Farm was left to the four of them. And then Dad packed in at Foulden and moved back and farmed at Hall Farm with his brother and they bought his two sisters out eventually. After that we lived in Hall Farm*

Is that opposite the gates to the Hall?

*Yeh, yeh*

And so you farmed a lot of the area all around there?

*Yeh, yeh. I think Hall Farm has something around 600 acres*

[00:06:00] So you were 5 when you were living in Oxborough? Is that right?

*I was probably still a baby. We weren’t down at Chantry Cottages very long. Probably months*

So there’s definitely no memory of using the rivers at that time

*No, no*

So then you came to Hall Farm?

*We came to Hall Farm .*

How old were you then?

*I’d had one term at Foulden School, so I was 5.*

At so at that point perhaps you started going off, paddling in the rivers

*That’s right*

Whereabouts did you go?

*I remember walking around even when we were at Foulden, I can remember walking around riverside walk with Dad. I’ve done a lot of walking all my life. I think I had a little dog for my birthday when I was 7, so after that I used to stride out a lot, taking him on the riverside walks*

And did you use the rivers? Did you go fishing?

*I did, we started out … and Oxborough, because of who my Dad was, and of course I was very pally with Bob Greef, Mary’s brother, so really the whole farm and the Hall were our playgrounds. We had total free range and nobody thought about ‘stranger danger’ or that in those days. It was a sort of free range in those days*

I think Mary (Greef/Saunders) has said that Bob used to mess about in the moat on occasions

*He did, yeh. Yeh. And he used to fish in the moat a bit. I think I went with him once or twice, yeh. And there’s the little river that flows round the back that feeds the moat and goes off. We call it ‘Park river’ and in those days, this is probably where I start with, where we started, it was probably a couple of miles long, flowing into the Wissey; never more than 2 or 3 yards wide, never more than 2 feet deep*

[00:08:50] Where would it flow into the Wissey then?

*It flows into the Wissey – it doesn’t show it very big on the map – if you know the Oxborough farms, do you know Wilson’s farm? Ferry Farm?*

Oh, I’m with you now. I was thinking of the other way. I know where you mean

*Yes, It’s a it of an obvious thing. It diverted water from the Gadder, and feeded into the moat*

And did you play in the Gadder

*We played in the Gadder as well. I started with the river, that was sort of jam jar stuff, sticklebacks and a fish we called Tom Thumbs, probably Miller’s Thumbs, they’re the same size and shape as a thumb; the water was lovely and clear, sandy and gravelly bottom a lot of it was. You found a big stone and put the jam jar in front of it and raised the stone, you’d catch this Tom Thumb with a bit of luck. We all caught things like water beetles and made sort of aquariums out of, I think they were old accumulator cases like a glass thing; they weren’t proper aquariums but they served the purpose for a little while.*

And then you graduated to the Gadder?

*We graduated to the Gadder, which is another couple of yards down the road from the first bridge. That was a similar river, a bit bigger then. It was very wade-able, nowhere much higher than here, nowhere much above your thigh and that was where we started splashing about. And we started bent pin fishing and graduated on to bait and tackle; you could get fish hooks from the village shop in those days. We caught, you know, very small pike and trout, dace and gudgeon, nothing very big*

Anything edible?

*The trout, we did catch a trout or two*

[00:11:45] I think Richard (Warner) told me that he had an Aunt Kitty, who lived at Gooderstone, and they would go and visit her every Sunday and she would show them the trout that lived in the river but she wouldn’t allow them to fish because they were her pets.

*Oh yeh! I think later on, I think Michael Parker of Favor Parker’s, he stocked quite a lot of trout up the Gadder there, that runs past his premises.*

And did you ever have a boat or anything like that?

*Well, on the Hall river, the bit above the river, it was wider and then muddier than … we made a bit of a raft, tried to ride 40 gallon oil drums and a couple of sticks, things like that. I remember somebody … a pram material and we tried to make a boat out of that; it weren’t particularly successful.*

And could you swim them?

*No, I could never swim, no, no*

But you didn’t need to?

*No, no, the river wasn’t deep enough. No. When you know you can’t swim, you’re careful*

So you’ve never learnt to swim?

*Little bits. I’m not very comfortable with it, I can swim about 5 yards and what not; I used to spend a bit of time in a swimming pool. I did use to swim in the Wissey, I say, one of the things about the Gadder, from the Foulden road bridge, about a 100 yards up to the left there was an old saw mill and this had – huh, health and safety would go mad these days, it would have a cage build round it and all sorts – that had about 3 foot high waterfall, we could crawl about behind that, clamber over these bits of machinery, it was all connected to the old water wheel; there was a sort of mill leet, a little tunnel round the side that sent a diverted flow onto the mill wheel. And for a couple of hundred yards above that, you could never call that swimming, because that never came above waist height.*

So was there any other part? You went to the Wissey down at Oxborough Ferry?

*We did, yeh. I’d probably be double figures before we started going down there, swimming and what not. The bit we used to swim in was actually where we had that Ferry walk to, the actual site of the ferry. I suppose it probably came up my armpits; it was deeper when you got down towards Whittington. Nobody used to swim that way, whereas I think that people in Whittington and that did, I think. If you went from the site of the ferry a couple of hundred yards there was a stretch of the river which was less than waist deep, had a gravelly riffley, you could wade through it, and that was within a hundred yards of the Ferry.*

Was that towards Whittington?

*That was towards Foulden, Northwold if you like*

Yes, yes.

*From where we stood that day on the Ferry site, it was within a hundred yards of that, cos that was wade-able through. I’d say, I was more – cos this was a summertime thing, somebody would get an old inner tube, and that would materialise …And then we had more serious fishing attempts in the Wissey than in the other bit. There was more sizeable fish, we could catch some nice perch down there, some chub and some small fish called ruffe. Sort of right down the Whittington end there used to be some nice shoals of bream, but they were a bit of a job to catch; we weren’t very successful with them.*

And you had a bit more than a bent pin then?

*Yeh, we had more serious …*

 [00:17:15] Somebody told me about catching sea trout in the Wissey, somewhere around there?

*Well, I was going to come to that. I never caught one but – I’m probably talking about 1960-ish -cos, these were the days there was a lot going on in farming then. There’d been the ’47 and then the ’53 floods and every ditch and river and that had been dredged out. You know, the Wissey banks had been built up. You take Oxborough. When you take the boundary streams up and all the field drainage ditches, you’re probably talking about 5 or 6 miles of watercourse in Oxborough, without exaggerating, probably more. As I say, walking along there one day, my dad would take the dogs and must have disturbed an otter and this otter had just caught a sea trout and we weighed it at home and it weighed something about 16lbs.*

The otter had left it behind?

*The otter had just taken it, that was obviously fresh. The otter had only taken a couple of bites out of the back of its head. We took it home and weighed it. And after that I found out the sea trout – I presume this had been going on for days immemorial –had come up, they used to come up the Stringside river and then up, what we call, the Eastmoor river, which was only about 2 miles long and they spawned up there. At the back of Oxborough Beachamwell. We found sort of like spawning beds; they obviously liked sort of gravelly sandy bottoms. I never caught one, apart from that one.*

And did you eat it?

*I think we did!*

I would hope so really.

*I think we did, I think we did!*

So, just remind me, where did you find that otter? Which bit of the river was it?

*That was on the Eastmoor river. The Eastmoor river flows into the Stringside river.*

I know. And that must have been quite near where Henry (his deceased younger brother) used to live?

*That’s right. Out the back of – you know – where Bernie Chapman lives. Really at the back of his. Yeh, that river, I think that starts at Shingham, it’s only about 2 or 3 miles long.*

 [00:20:25] That’s very interesting.

*So we found that. I mean, I didn’t catch one but a boy I was at school with. Actually he came from Barton Bendish. I remember he caught about an 18lb pike in the Stringside river in those days …*

I don’t think it was ever very big, that little bit of river.

*No, no*

It was quite deep in places

*Yeh, yeh*

And quite narrow.

*Yeh, yeh. Of course – I don’t know if you ever go down there in this day and age – for a long time there’d been a sort of weir in there to keep the level up. There’s another one above Eastmoor bridge and I think for a long time there wasn’t a fish pass on that weir so I can’t imagine sea trout getting up there these days. They’d have to find somewhere else and go up Didlington and beyond and that sort of thing. I think about 7 or 8 years ago they put a fish pass in.*

There is one, certainly on the Wissey, between Stoke Ferry and Wretton, near the sluice gates and the aqueduct where the Wissey goes over the New Cut.

*And I think there is one now on that Stringside weir, probably about 5 years old or something like that. It’s a long while since that was built.*

And would that be on Chapman’s land, roughly?

*Which is that?*

Where you’re talking about. Where the Stringside is. Whose land is it there? Would it be Chapman’s? It’s not Lambert’s any more, is it?

*No, that was never Lambert’s.*

And it’s not Gilmour’s is it?

*I think Gilmour’s has some this side?*

I would say so.

*In the days we’re talking about, that was farmed by – I think his name was Ted Brand? He had Cornerways and I think he had land out at Swaffham Prior; they were a big outfit. I think that, they didn’t bother … yeh, that was who owned it at that time. Cos that was really black peaty land. They grew carrots. They used to get a regular fen blow, in March … big black clouds of peat blowing away.*

So a lot of fun was had, sort of messing about on the rivers.

*Yeh.*

Even though they were really quite small? But it didn’t matter did it?

*No, no. The only boats I remember at all, I think it was Mr Warner had a punt down there. Somebody kept a punt down there, with an engine. The only other boat I can remember coming up there– the old Ouse Catchment used to send a weed cutting boat, cos the river would get really full of weed; when you got July August time there’d be – I suppose there were a lot more than one - there’d be tons of weed floating down the river for weeks*

I think on very rare occasions they do it in some places, but not much

*No, no. I bet not.*

Well, I think that’s excellent. Thank you very much.

[00:24:22] [ Original Track 1 Ends]

So you were talking about a piece of land just the other side of the Eastmoor bridge?

*Yes. Always been a meadow. There’s some, what are marked on the map ‘tumuli’ about 500 yards above there. Actually, it was frequented by adders, so if we wanted to see an adder, that was where they were. Nobody ever came to any harm with these adders and in the river – we called them the ‘black hills’ – in the river beside them, that was another gravelly shingly piece, there used to be sea- I think there used to be two or three different kinds of lamprey, whether they were all sea lamprey, we used to wade into the river and catch these with our hands. And they had a – I never knew anyone to catch them with a crook.*

How big were they?

*They were about eel size.*

Oh, right.

*Yeh, they were about eel size. They had a sucking disc thing in place of a mouth; the kind of thing that you see that attach themselves to sharks and what not. I remember Reg catching one and it fastening on to his arm, this great sucking noise. He got it off anyway*

Sounds horrible.

*Yeh, yeh. And I think we used to catch the odd one or two in the shallow bit of the Wissey as well. They’re another thing, I think, they come up from the sea to spawn and whether or not … you never hear of them these days, whether they still exist, whether they get up there these days; I can imagine they must get up there somewhere, in the Wissey somewhere.*

I think there was a king of England who died …

*There was*

From a surfeit of lampreys

*An early Henry wasn’t it?*

I think it might have been, yes. I’ll look it up one day. Excellent. Thank you for that.

[00:26:37] Ends.