The Joiner's Tale

Some Memories of Grantham

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Contents

1 Introduction

This article is the transcript of conversations which I had with my father, Vern Edward Sewell, on Easter Monday, 16th April 1979 at my house at 82 Shinfield Road, Reading, Berkshire. This was just a year before he died in Grantham Hospital on 5th April 1980.

The purpose here is to record some of his memories of life in Grantham, Lincolnshire, where he was born on 16th March 1906, and where he lived his life.

A tape recorder was used, and the conversations were transcribed by a typist soon afterwards. My mother Nora Elizabeth Sewell was also present, and some of her comments are included.

The conversations are repeated verbatim here, except for very minor corrections, in order to capture their essential flavour. This means that there are some interjections, repetitions and promptings. The speakers are identified by the letters B for my father (he was always called Ben outside his family), N for my mother, and M for myself.

I have introduced Section headings to identify the changes of topic.

2 Local Manifestations of the First World War

M: So we are going to have Ben Sewell telling us about Grantham in the First World War, are we?

B: I can well remember the First World War breaking out. I can remember walking across wide Westgate and seeing the placards on the 4th of August 1914, outside Twilley's tobacco shop, and they had all the placards on the front and all the photographs of the statesmen - Balfour, Asquith and the others, Lord Grey - on the placards displayed in front of his newsagent's and tobacconist's shop.

M: Where was Twilley's shop then?

B: In wide Westgate.

M: But where was it in relation to where you were living? You were living at 50 Westgate?

B: We were living at 50 Westgate, higher up near the railway bridge. And a few days after that Kitchener made his great announcement that he was going to form an army, and Grantham was one of the places selected for the training of parts of Kitchener's army. There was a mass of tents put up in Belton Park, in the area around Harrowby, and the men were brought into Grantham Station and marched from the Station into their training area.

M: So where did they all come from in the first place?

B: Everywhere, everywhere.

M: Lincolnshire, or further afield?

B: I couldn't say that. They were just recruited from everywhere. And then sent to the various training camps, and Grantham was one.

M: So you just saw them marching past your father's ...

B: They were marching through Westgate towards Belton Park, and one man, I particularly remember, was wearing a pair of baggy trousers, with about six inches of shirt protruding from the rear. He wore a frock coat, a rugby footballer's red and white jersey, and he was wearing a straw hat with the top lifted up as though it had been opened by a tincan opener. From there, from Grantham, after their initial training, they were sent marching by road from Grantham to Melton Mowbray, and this occurred I think on Easter Monday or Whitsuntide of 1915.

M: And so that is 64 years ago today.

B: Yes, I think it is, yes. And they had to march. Marching was a great part of their training at that time. And they marched to Melton Mowbray before they were put on trains to Southampton and then they were taken straight from Southampton on troop carriers to Gallipoli. And there, of course, there was this great disaster where they tried to land from open boats onto an open beach which was covered by the Turks from the hillside shooting down on them. It was said at the time that the sea was coloured red.

M: We are looking at an aerial photograph of the Church from the west, and it shows the playing fields, and Gorse Rise and Alma Park and Princess Drive.

B: Yes, and all that built-up area now, at that time was all open fields, and I can well remember the cavalry being encamped along the river, behind Grantham House and behind the Church.

M: Essentially just outside Wyndham Park?

B: Yes, what is now Wyndham Park. And the mule lines were there, and the various horses belonging to the batteries. And there was a huge ..., a long wooden trough and the cavalry men would fill in this trough by canvas buckets from the river so that all the horses could drink; and the tents of the men, various marquees, were in all the lower fields.

M: What, over the Boys' Central School field, as it now is?

B: Oh yes, yes. There was no Sandon Road at that time. There was no Hill Avenue at that time. These were all open fields.

M: And you said Hill Avenue was the first road built up into that area?

B: Hill Avenue.

M: That side of the river?

B: Hill Avenue was built by the army right up the hillside by General Hill, you see.

M: This was in 1914?

B: Round about that time, yes. And all Harrowby Camp then became the base for the Machine Gun Corps later on. But the Eleventh Division, rather before that, they took over Belton Park first. Belton Park was the first great encampment. And they were in canvas in 1914, but hundreds of labourers were brought in. The fishermen from Grimsby who couldn't go out to fish. They were all recruited to do the labouring work for the builders on this camp, and lots of them came to Grantham and helped to build the more semi-permanent camp with wooden hutments in Belton Park, you see.

M: Belton Park.

B: Yes, that was the first area to be built as a permanent encampment.

M: And is this where your father was barber to the soldiers?

B: Yes. He had a tent just below Alma Wood, and I can remember being taken there before the Eleventh Division marched away and seeing General Kitchener and all his staff, with all the epaulettes and gold and so forth, and they all rode on chargers down the hill from Alma Wood to a big parade ground, a big grass parade ground, and all the battalions of infantry, and there were about twenty thousand remember, of various regiments.

M: Twenty thousand? Encamped on that area?

B: Yes, yes. And they performed various marching evolutions and then afterwards, when they were on their way to Gallipoli, they marched through the town with all their bands. There were a number of regiments, battalions of regiments, you see. There were some of the Lincolns, there were some of the Sherwood Foresters, there was the Northamptonshire Regiment, there were some of the Staffordshire Regiment, and each battalion had its own band, it seemed to me. And as each battalion marched past, it was led by its own band, and followed by its own field kitchen, being drawn by horses behind them.

M: And this big parade ground, would that have been on what is now the 16th tee or the 16th green, or fairway of the golf course, or higher up?

B: It would be somewhere in that region.

M: Or above the Londonthorpe Road?

B: Yes, I think it would. I can remember distinctly that there used to be a shop on that corner as you turn round to go to Londonthorpe and there used to be a big fried fish shop

there in a temporary building, you know, for use by the troops. And the officers were not allowed to walk from Grantham to Belton Park, they all had to go by taxi. So Redcross Street and all that area was crammed by taxis, which were then the only transport the officers had.

M: What, no horse transport?

B: No, no. Very early motor cars, and some of them were very early.

3 A Taxi Driver

M: So this is going to be Nora Richardson, that was, telling us about how her father was one of the taxi drivers. Right?

N: He was probably not a taxi driver, but he had this Darracq car.

M: Darracq?

N: Darracq, was the name of it. Open, no hood, and if it rained you got wet, which he used to transport the officers to and from the town up to Belton Park, where the camp was. And this car was, well, his great joy. He would more often than not go off on a trip for himself into the country, and then come home having had a lift with someone else. And mother would say, "Well, where's the car?". "Oh, it's in the ditch at so-and-so. The farmer at so-and-so, Stainby probably, is going to haul it out for me when he gets finished with his ploughing".

M: It must have been a rather robust car?

N: It was a robust car, because the car would be hauled out of the ditch and would promptly go off again, nothing wrong with it. Very tough cars they were, rather interesting to drive in.

M: So what did he need it for?

N: What did he need it for?

M: Yes, what was his job?

N: At the time he was not doing anything. He did not like too. He did not like regular work.

M: He didn't like doing anything?

N: But this car, well, it was useful for transporting officers, when they needed relief from the camp, into Grantham.

M: Is this was the one that was the poacher?

N: Oh good Lord yes, he was a poacher, among other things.

M: This was his regular work, was it? He was the poacher.

N: Oh no. His regular work was not poaching, no. I think his regular work was following the hunt on the bicycle.

M: Oh well, you inherited this from him didn't you?

N: Oh yes.

B: He was an engineer really.

N: He was an engineer, actually.

M: What kind of an engineer?

B: He preferred country pursuits.

N: He didn't like the engineering very much, he preferred to be out.

B: On the farm?

N: No, he didn't like doing farm work, he liked being out in the fresh air. And of course in this car, there was no protection from the weather at all.

M: So you used to ride in it too, did you?

N: Oh, I did. I rode in it. I can remember we were all sitting in the back once. He nearly tipped us into the river at Boston, by reversing. I can hear mother now saying "Charles!", and we were hanging over the back of this car and we could see the water flowing down.

M: Into the Witham?

N: We were practically in the water. We were practically over the edge, when all of a sudden we made a great leap forward in this car. It was a shock.

M: So you were living in 5 St. Anne's Street, were you?

N: Yes, that was when we had this officer billeted on us, and I think that was why he began, because he could take this particular man to the camp, and eventually took many of them.

4 Early Aeroplanes

M: This is going to be Ben Sewell telling us about the first aeroplanes in Grantham.

B: I saw my first aeroplane at Newark Show in 1911 or 1912. I was standing in Appletongate, and a little monoplane flew over and from it fluttered down some little yellow leaflets. These I presume were advertising the Show. I think the pilot was Graham White. That was the first aeroplane.

M: And you were just five or six then?

B: Yes. I was born in 1906. Some time later, I remember father roused us very early in the morning to come and see aeroplanes following one another and they appeared to be flying from the north to the south and flying along the railway, which ran just at the end of our garden.

M: This was in Grantham?

B: This was in Grantham. There were a number of aeroplanes and that would be, I should imagine, in the summer months of 1913. I very rarely saw an aeroplane. I remember one occasionally flying over the town, but the next time I saw an aeroplane, I was playing below Greenhill Road, with another Granthamian, Willy Pike. We saw an aeroplane flying and landing and then taking off again, and flying round and landing and taking off again. So the following Saturday we went to the top of Spittlegate Hill to investigate, and there was one canvas hanger and I am not sure whether there were two or three aircraft there, and this was the beginning of Spittlegate Aerodrome.

M: So when was this? 1913?

B: This would be 1915. This would be 1915. Just prior to that, Cranwell Royal Navy Air Force Station had opened, and we had seen an airship, it would be a Blimp, one of the non-rigid type, flying past Grantham. That was the beginning of aviation in the war as far as Grantham was concerned. Now later on, the number of canvas hangars grew to nearly a dozen and then the building people came and started to erect more permanent hangars, and eventually it developed into a full scale training aerodrome for the Royal Naval Air Service, for the Royal Flying Corps rather. A little while after that, another aerodrome was started on top of the hill behind Harlaxton Manor, and that was Harlaxton Aerodrome.

M: When was that started?

B: That was started some time later, and was eventually taken over by the Americans when they came into the war in 1917. Shortly after Spittlegate Aerodrome opened, one of the planes got into difficulties over Grantham and had to make a forced landing on the Dysart Road, just below Greenhill Road, and landed in a big field that ran down at a very steep angle towards the Mowbeck. The mechanics, during the weekend, repaired the defect and on Monday morning we went up to see the aeroplane take off. It was dragged to the far corner of the field and it just managed to run down and take off and clear the willow trees alongside the stream, and then climb up the other bank, and just clear the telephone

wires on Dysart Road.

M: And so if the field had not been sloping it would have just crashed into it in the first place. Is that the point?

B: No.

M: Coming down at such a steep angle?

B: Well, the aeroplane had such a slow speed, you see, that it could land in a comparatively small field and by dragging it back up the hill, and the slope of the hill, it managed to gain enough impetus to get off.

M: But when it came down, it was coming so steeply that it would have crashed on to a level piece.

B: Very probably, yes.

M: I see.

5 First Air Raid on Grantham

M: So this is going to be Ben Sewell and the former Nora Richardson talking about the first German air raid on Grantham. Can you remember?

B: Shortly after the German attack on Scarborough and Hartlepool by gunfire there was an event occurred in Grantham. We were at home, as usual, and suddenly the electric light went out. We had one of the very few houses wired for electric light at that time. This was rather surprising. We thought a fuse had gone, so Mother went out and discovered that all the shop lights in the street had gone out. This was rather puzzling, but then we heard the sound of engines and it was a Zeppelin, and this was flying slowly over Grantham [N: quite low], quite low, but my recollection is that it was a dark night, and not moonlit. Anyway, we went into the back garden and we were looking upwards. You could see, suddenly, this dark shape appeared over head. Whether it was looking for the Station is mere conjecture, but the funny thing that happened, our next door neighbour had been working in his shed.

M: Who was this?

B: Mr. er Billy Gouch - had been working in his shed next door - and he suddenly appeared in the doorway, holding a lighted candle aloft, peered out, looked up, pointed and said "There the bugger is!" [Laughter].

M: [to N] Now did you see this same Zeppelin?

N: I saw the same Zeppelin, yes. We were taken from our beds. We did not know what to expect. Nobody knew what to expect. It was so unusual, and we were taken into the

garden and we could distinctly see this huge shape. It was going so slowly.

M: Over towards the Station? Towards Westgate?

N: Yes, yes. but it was so slowly travelling. It was making the most strange noise.

M: And were you frightened of it?

N: No, I wasn't exactly frightened. I don't know what we expected. We expected something horrible to happen.

M: Did it drop any bombs?

B: Eventually, not near us, no. It moved away and dropped its bombs in a harmless little village called Hougham and they dropped on agricultural land and did no damage whatever.

N: [Laughter].

6 Derby Day

M: This is going to be Ben Sewell telling us a King's School story. About Derby Day.

B: I had just been with my daughter and wife to see the Royal Academy Exhibition to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the Derby, and it reminds me of Derby Day in 1920. I had just arrived at King's School Grantham, having been at Dame Margaret Thorold's School at Sedgebrook, down in the Vale of Belvoir. I was very fond of Sedgebrook School. I was very happy there and I rather liked it, but education was being reformed even then and they decided that the School was uneconomic and we were all sent to the King's School at Grantham.

Wednesday of the week was the day when we had a sort of test in mathematics, and our mathematics master at that time was one R.W.D. Lee, Captain R.W.D. Lee. Remember the year was 1920 and these fellows had just been demobbed from the army, many of them surprised to find themselves still alive, and Captain Lee was a peculiar character. He had all the attributes of a Captain, the military attitude, brush moustache and so forth. Very early one morning, took off his mortar board, shied it up onto the corner cupboard and said "Who wants half-a-crown on the Derby?". And of course, the whole form, a third form, sat up and looked, and a few smiled, and he then proceeded to give us the most memorable maths lesson that I ever remember.

First of all, he showed how to reckon up odds - what 2 to 1, and 11 to 4 and 8 to 5 meant, and having done that he then demonstrated how the information arrived in the betting ring by means of the tic-tac men with their white gloves. And he went on and on, and told us various stories about his day, and eventually the lesson came to an end, he retrieved his mortar board and retreated. We went on to another lesson, and from then on I was always interested in what horse had won the Derby. And the year being 1920, the race that year

was won by a horse called "Spion Kopf".

I suppose, that generation, we were rather fortunate in some of the men who taught us. They all seemed to be characters. There was one I remember, a fellow called Sankey, who was also an ex-army officer, and as far as I can remember, he was a brilliant black and white artist on the blackboard. He taught us history but with one or two chalk strokes he could draw anything, from a visor of a crusader to a castellated castle.

As I have said Captain Lee was a remarkable character, because at the end of the year, surprisingly enough, he left the School to enter the church, and after doing his theological training, he became Chaplain of Christ's Hospital, and after that he became Vicar of Horsham.

7 Grantham-Nottingham Canal

M: I believe you've got a little canal story to tell me.

B: The masters at that time, as I said, had just returned from the War and, of course, were surprised to find themselves still alive, and the three masters concerned, R.W.D. Lee, Mr. Sankey and Mr. Smith were the masters in charge of the boarding house at Grantham. Now the King's School at Grantham has harboured some peculiar people at one time or another, and these three were no exception. It was their practice, during the light summer evenings, to hire a boat from Campbell's at the wharf on the canal in Grantham, and row along to the pub at Harlaxton, disembark there, have a pint or two and then row back. And on our evening jaunt along the canal it was rather interesting to see what in the daytime were rather sedate members of the staff having been out on a spree and coming back like three schoolboys singing and so forth for all the world as though they were rarely let out of school.

M: So did you spend a lot of time on the canal?

B: Quite a lot of time, yes. As a matter of fact it was our ambition at that time to build a punt of some sort of our own so that we could use the canal, which was a pleasant place to be in those days. The railway company then were obliged to keep it clear and free from weeds.

M: So it was in regular use then?

B: It was in regular use as a piece of pleasure water.

M: Did they also transport coal from Nottingham?

B: Not at that time. That had ceased, and the railway company had opened their line but they were still obliged to keep the canal open and navigable, so that the bridges, and the swing bridge, and the locks, were all maintained. In the winter, it was a great place for skating. In fact it was the only place near to Grantham where skating could be carried on, and in the hard winters, especially the winters I remember particularly, the winter of 1917

and the winter of 1928, when it was still frozen for four or five weeks at a stretch, it was a great place in those days. I learnt to skate on it, and you could put on skates at the wharf in Grantham and with a bit of luck you could skate right through without having to get off until you reached the lock at Woolsthorpe-by-Belvoir.

M: I think I remember being on it while Grandad was skating.

B: That's right.

M: During the war?

B: Yes.

M: And Horace?

B: Yes, yes.

M: When would that be, then?

B: That would be in the early 1940s, the winter of 1942. It was a very hard winter.

M: I certainly remember that.

B: Yes, you will be able to remember that. You were very enthusiastic about skating.

M: But at that time there was not much commercial travel on the canal?

B: None at all. Apart from those few boats that the Campbell family used to let out on hire.

8 Going to Sedgebrook School

M: So how did you used to get from Westgate, from your house in Westgate, to Sedgebrook School?

B: Well, ...

M: Starting when? In 1912 or 1914?

B: My brother went to Sedgebrook School in 1913 and he left at the end of the summer of 1917, and that year I took what was then called the Free Place Scholarship, which has been replaced by the 11+. And I managed to win a Scholarship and I started at Sedgebrook School in September 1918 and at that time, one either cycled in the summer months or went by train. We used to catch the 5 past 9 train from Grantham, which was due to arrive in Sedgebrook about 9.15. It had only to travel four miles, through Gonerby Tunnel, and down into the Vale of Belvoir, and we would disembark or leave the train, at quarter past

nine, where we should invariably be met by old Jackson, who used to stand on the platform and as the train drew in, you would hear his voice every morning shout "'brook, 'brook".

M: He wasn't the school master? He was the porter?

B: He was the porter, yes. We then crossed two fields from the Station to the School, and we should arrive at the School in the region of 25 past 9.

M: Who's we? How many people? Do you know how many pupils there were?

B: Oh, yes. The total number of boys in the School during the last year would be about ninety.

M: Yes, but how many went on this trip? How many boys went from Grantham to Sedgebrook in this way?

B: Oh, sixty.

M: On the train?

B: Sixty boys each morning?

M: Sixty?

B: Fifty or sixty each morning.

M: Oh, good gracious!

B: The rest of the School were made up of farmers' sons. I remember one, he used to travel on an old pony from [?] every morning.

M: That's a long way.

B: Yes, and another one, nobody envied him, his mother was the schoolmistress at Welby, and he used to live in the village all week and go home at the weekend. Several of the boys ... Sedgebrook actually served a wide are, because there were boys from West Bridgford, and various boys from the different villages in the Vale of Belvoir. Incidentally, I think it would be a great shame if they started digging up the Vale of Belvoir, in order to mine its coal.

M: Now, tell me how you went in the summer. You say you went by bicycle?

B: During the summer, a lot of boys, not all, but quite a number of boys, used to cycle from Grantham each morning, which is only four and a half miles. We used to cycle up Dysart Road, through Barrowby village, down the Hill, and into Sedgebrook.

M: That would be quite a cavalcade of boys going down the Hill.

B: Yes, it was. And on Monday morning, which was market day, stock market day for the farmers, we should invariably be met by a herd of sheep.

M: Stock market day in Grantham?

B: Yes, or a cow, and of course we had to stop, get off and walk, which delayed arriving at School.

M: And that was too bad.

B: Nobody worried about that. Even the staff didn't worry overmuch. Especially during that last summer when the School was closing.

M: 1920?

B: 1919.

M: Oh, 1919. You were there for two years.

B: I was there for about that, yes. The School actually closed in 1919, and all the boys then were transferred to the King's School at Grantham. All those, that is, that wished to continue their education.

M: I seem to recall you telling me that you sometimes did not go quite directly to School.

B: We didn't. There were occasions when it was a very nice morning and it was one of those mornings when we probably had Euclid or French, especially if prep had not been done, it was policy to sort of take an extended ride round by Woolsthorpe or even by Gonerby, and by not going direct from Barrowby you could go via, you could go from Gonerby down Gonerby Hill and then down the bridle road from below the hill to Allington and then on to Sedgebrook. A very pleasant roundabout ride.

M: Or you could go by canal?

B: It could be done by canal, but it was rather a long way, from the canal into Sedgebrook. We used to ... the canal ran by Barrowby to Stainworth and you could get off there, and then it would be a fairly long walk.

9 Early Cricket

M: I would like you to tell me about your first interest in cricket.

B: Well, I first began to take a real interest in cricket and to understand the game when I went to Sedgebrook. At Sedgebrook there were no organised games, and we had to organise them during the lunch hour. So we played in the school field on a very rough pitch, but I really learned the rudiments of the game there. Leaving Sedgebrook I went to King's

School and played there during the summer of 1920, and in 1921 I first joined the Grantham Cricket Club. I well remember going down there in the evening and joining the boys' section as a junior member and paying five shillings subscription to the late George Bennett, who was editor of the Grantham Journal at that time and a very keen local cricket supporter.

M: This was when the ground was at London Road?

B: The ground is still on London Road.

M: Yes.

B: It has been on London Road for over the past hundred years. At the end of the 1919 season there was a charity match played on London Road. Two teams, one representing Yorkshire and one Hampshire. Wilfred Rhodes, Sutcliffe and Waddinton, Dolphin, the current members of the Yorkshire side were playing against a team largely of Hampshire but with one or two amateur local cricketers playing too. This team included A.P.F. Chapman, who at that time was captain of Uppingham School, and I well remember Rhodes coaching Chapman in front of the pavilion before play began. It was a two day match and on the second day Chapman came in to bat for the Hampshire side against the Yorkshire side and Rhodes was one of the bowlers. Chapman's class was very evident for all to see and he ended the day with an innings of 75 not out.

M: Not bad for a schoolboy.

B: It was very good. A.P.F Chapman looked a very mature schoolboy at that time.

M: So he was about as old as you, or a little bit older.

B: He would be much older than me. He would be 18 or 19 at that time. He went straight up to Cambridge that autumn and immediately got a Blue.

M: So now what about ...

B: 1921, of course, was the season when Warwick Armstrong brought his great team over to England and completely swept the board.

M: So when did you first go to Trent Bridge?

B: I did not go to Trent Bridge until the Whitsuntide match of 1922.

M: Oh.

B: I hadn't a cycle or my own cycle had broken down at the time and I hired one, which also broke down at Bottesford and required the replacement of the cotter pin which was done by the local blacksmith.

M: So you cycled to Nottingham from Grantham?

B: We cycled with Bob Austin, who was the son of a well-known local fruiterer and banana merchant and we cycled to Nottingham, through Sedgebrook, Bottesford, Bingham, Radcliffe-on-Trent.

M: So how long did the journey take you?

B: The journey took us from about half-past eight and we just arrived at Trent Bridge as the bell was ringing for the players, for the umpires to come out.

M: So you had to get the bike repaired and then you got there in time?

B: Yes, I had the bike repaired; that did not take many minutes.

M: What was the game?

B: The game was Nottinghamshire versus Surrey.

M: Oh, of course. Yes.

B: It was a classic fixture.

M: Right. Whit Monday. Yes, we know.

B: Yes, we entered the ground, managed to find seats on forms that were on the grass in front of the Radcliffe Road Stand, in the corner where the large scoreboard now stands.

M: That was a long way from the wicket.

B: Well, that's where we sat. There was then almost eighteen to twenty thousand people on the ground. It was a great fixture. They always had a great crowd on a fine Whit Monday, you see, most matches.

M: All the miners would go, would they?

B: Everybody in the area would. There was only one place to go in Nottingham and that was Trent Bridge, on Whit Monday. Surrey were batting and had scored quite a lot of runs on the Saturday. They were anxious for the innings to end in order to get Notts in and the great Surrey bowler Bill Hitch came out to bat against the bowling of Richmond and John Gunn.

M: Was this the occasion when he hit 50 in 11 strokes?

B: He then proceeded to score 50 in 11 scoring strokes in an innings of 60 altogether. He hit three sixes into the Ladies Pavilion and the rest seemed to be all fours and he was in to the best of my recollection for a while less than half an hour.

M: Three sixes and eight fours would do it.

B: Yes, that's right. That was my introduction to first class cricket.

M: Can you tell me about that old pavilion, that was on London Road, because it was burnt down just after the war? I can remember going into it and seeing all the photographs on the wall, and then it was burnt down.

B: Yes, the old pavilion on London Road had been there many years. It was a wooden building and the front, as was usual in those days, had flaps which opened out in the summer with a desk just behind for the scorers and spectators to sit at. There was a passageway behind that and the dressing rooms immediately behind.

M: How long had it been there, because I remember playing at Christ Church in Oxford where they had a similar old timber pavilion, which must have dated from the middle of the nineteenth century? What about this one? How old was it?

B: This one I should imagine was well on the way to being a hundred years old. It was an old timber construction and I have a book which clearly states that Alfred Shaw was a member of the first English side to play a Test Match in Australia, at Melbourne, the Centenary of which was played last year in 1978.

M: 1878 to 1978.

B: Shaw was the professional at Grantham during the 1860s. There was a photograph of him and W.G. Grace and various other great players inside the pavilion.

M: So you speculate that that pavilion was built around 1850? Or before? Or afterwards?

B: I couldn't say the exact date.

M: When was the ground first used for cricket? Do you know?

B: Yes, it was used in the 1860s, the early 1860s.

M: But before that, significantly?

B: I couldn't say, I couldn't say. It would belong to the Earl of Dysart, and it formed part of the Dysart Estates who owned a good deal of land in Grantham.

M: But you don't know when it was first built?

B: I couldn't say when it was first used for cricket, but it had certainly been in the hands of the Grantham Cricket Club for many years. And I remember an old friend of mine, John Bullimore, telling me that he had seen cricket played on there in the early 1860s, and he was first apprenticed at Hornsby's in 1868.

M: That's a long time ago. and you can remember him telling you this?

B: Oh, I can remember him telling me this.

10 Parks the Builders

M: So do you know anything more about John Bullimore?

B: Oh, I could tell you quite a little bit about him, but that would be to do with my apprenticeship when I eventually started work.

M: Do you want to tell me about this now, or later?

B: I'll tell you a little bit about it now. I started to work about this time. I joined Major Parks' firm, the builders and contractors.

M: So now we are talking about 1920?

B: We are talking about 1921.

M: 1921, when you were 15?

B: Yes, I joined the firm as an apprentice and ...

M: Where did they have their yard?

B: It used to be in Swinegate, directly opposite the Parish Church.

M: Oh. Oh, really.

B: It was an old stone built house, and years later when we were doing some alterations in the house itself we discovered an old window that even looked out onto the Market Place.

M: Yes, but it would look out onto Watergate from there.

B: It looked out over ... well, there were a lot of buildings around it then, but in its original state it was a very old stone house with some mullioned windows and this one we discovered looked out towards the Market Place from the position of the house.

M: So this had been blocked up?

B: It had been blocked up, yes. But the house itself was very old. It was a general builders. We did quite a lot of the building work required in Grantham. But at that particular time they were busily engaged on the first Wheatley housing scheme, and they were building houses in Dysart Road and at the top of Gonerby Hill, and some at Carlton, the village down in ...

M: Wheatley, did you say?

B: Wheatley, was the first ever housing, the first government sponsored housing scheme after the First World War.

M: This was the name of the scheme?

B: That's the name of the scheme. He was the Health Minister, I think.

M: To provide cheap housing. Or cheaper housing.

B: To provide housing.

M: What did you do? When you went to Parks', what did you do? Everything? Or did you ...

B: I was an apprentice joiner.

M: So you were an apprentice joiner. So how long did you have to serve an apprenticeship?

B: Seven years.

M: You were there for seven years?

B: I was there till I ... I was there for nine years all told.

M: Oh, so you worked out your apprenticeship?

B: Yes.

M: And then continued to work for them?

B: And then continued, and I left in the May of 1929.

M: So you must have been building roofs and window frames and things of this kind all around Grantham.

B: Everything. It included everything from making coffins to pieces of furniture. And there is a bookcase in the Parish Church that I made, while I was there, and also the reading desk on the left, on the pulpit in Grantham Parish Church.

M: Did you make that?

B: I made that.

M: I never knew that.

B: And, we worked in all the great houses there. During 1923, I remember we ... 1923 or 24, towards the latter end of 23, or perhaps the early part of 1924, Walter Parks and his family, they were great Methodists and we had been brought up in the Wesleyan Sunday School too, and Walter was the local preacher, and they gave him the job of gutting the Wesleyan Chapel.

M: In Finkin Street.

B: In Finkin Street, yes. And entirely reseating it, putting in a new gallery and re-decorating the Chapel, which was a very good piece of work. All the seating was made in pitch-pine and during the time ...

M: So you were involved in making the seats?

B: Yes, everything to do with it. All the constructional work and then eventually making the seats. And Walter Rowarth and I redid the pulpit and cut new stairs into the pulpit which included pieces of continued hand railing.

M: So the furniture that was being taken out of there, must have dated from the eighteenth century?

B: Yes, it was.

M: Was it interesting?

B: They were all old box pews made of pine and the boxes were capped with a little mahogany rail all the way round.

M: Did you notice when that was made, that earlier furniture?

B: I think that the ... there were two chapels in Finkin Street, the earlier one was turned into an auction mart.

M: Yes.

B: And, I think I am correct in saying that the Wesley brothers actually preached in that one, but the later one, a much better and more imposing building, was built in the early eighteenth century.

M: But which one was it that you were demolishing, the second one?

B: We were doing the second one, the one which is there today.

M: Now, you told me at one stage that you also built or helped to build the manor at Waltham-on-the-Wolds.

B: Not the manor.

M: What do I mean then?

B: It's a very big house. It's called Waltham House, I think. It belongs to Sir Gilbert Greenhall.

M: Just on the Melton side.

B: Well, it's ... , yes, yes.

M: Where the hounds meet.

B: Well, they meet in all the villages round about. We built that, along with many others. But I was going to say that while we were doing this Wesleyan Chapel in 1924, I made another memorable visit to Trent Bridge when I took a day off in the middle of the week and went to see the South Africans in 1924, led by H.W. Taylor and including Dave Nourse and Bissett, E.P. Newton and a famous outfielder R.H. Catterall, who was reputed to be able to do 100 yards in even time. And on this occasion, David Nourse scored 180 in the whole of the day's play.

M: You watched all that?

B: I watched the whole match.

M: Did you cycle or go by train that day?

B: I went by train on that occasion.

M: Who did you go with?

B: I went alone. I couldn't find ... nobody could afford to go midweeek in those days. so I forewent ...

M: You took a day's pay off.

B: Yes.

M: Lost a day's pay?

B: Lost a day's pay.

M: So tell me about some of the other places where you built or helped to build part of the roofs or the woodwork. Some of the bigger houses. In the villages, for instance.

B: Well, before we built Sir Gilbert Greenall's house, we ... Captain Fielding had bought a farm which he wanted for stud purposes to breed ponies and horses. And after he had bought a farm, he decided to have a house built and they engaged a London architect, I forget his name, who designed this house. It's a very nice house down Freeby Lane and it's thatched with Norfolk reeds. And this house was built of old stone. They wanted it to look

antique, and as old as possible, and so the house was built of old stones and they bought old cottages that were ready for pulling down, and ...

M: So, it was the local limestone, was it?

B: It was local stone, yes. And the house was built and then thatched with Norfolk reeds. I remember people coming up from Norfolk to do the thatching. Incidentally, I made the front door for that, which included a small iron grill with a sort of look-out in it.

M: I see. And can you tell us about any other things which you made, which are still visible, in the area?

B: After that, the same architect was approached, Sir Gilbert Greenall and his family must have seen the house. They contacted the same architect, and had Waltham House designed by him and built on a site to the ... , on the Melton side of Waltham looking out towards Melton Mowbray. And now this house was, looks, rather fifteenth century.

M: Yes, it looks quite an old house from the road.

B: Yes, well it is actually built from old stone. I think I am right in saying that part of it was the stone from Stonesby churchyard wall, or one of the villages in that area. And its roof was old pantiles, which were part of a range of old maltings that were being pulled down in Grantham. But the general effect is a very old house.

M: So it dates from 1923 or 24?

B: It dates from around 1926, I should think. Yes, 25 or 26. Round that period. Now at that period, we also renovated and built a large stable yard and built a number of loose boxes for the Duke of Rutland at Eastwell Hall.

M: Where is that, in the Vale of Belvoir?

B: This is just below Waltham, nearer Belvoir.

M: Yes, I know.

B: Towards the Vale of Belvoir, and that took us quite a time. And eventually from there, we went into Melton itself and built some stabling for the Duke of Gloucester.

M: So you ranged quite a long way out.

B: He and the Prince of Wales were hunting around that time. Surprisingly a lot of my youth was spent either going to school or working in the Vale of Belvoir, even though I lived in Grantham all that time.

M: So how big was Parks' firm then, at this time?

B: As far as buildings firms go, it was comparatively small. They took on more men when they had a very big job, but they had a permanent staff of very good craftsmen ... who were ... there ...

M: And you were one of them?

B: ... more or less permanently. The oldest member of course was John Bullimore, who had started with the original founder. Now the firm was started around 1870, because at the time I went they began to advertise that the firm had been established fifty years. And it was started by the late Danny Parks and I never knew him, but I knew his daughters and Walter was one of his eldest sons.

M: Yes, I see. He was the boss ...

B: Walter Parks took over the business from his father, you see, and I worked for him and was apprentice to him.

M: So Bullimore was what then?

B: Bullimore was generally regarded as the senior member.

M: What, a kind of foreman?

B: No, no, he was just the senior man. They also had another foreman, a man called Jim Cook, who had also been apprenticed with Danny Parks. But he did most of the running about from one job to another to see that the materials and things arrived at the right place at the right time. He was a sort of under manager to Walter Parks, but John spent most of his time in the workshop, and being the oldest retainer, and well known in Grantham, he used to do all the jobbing work in the great houses, such as Grantham House and all the houses round about that wanted indoor repairs done and things of that nature. Now, John also had another apprentice, Ernest Nidd, who had been apprenticed to Walter Parks too. And he was the second oldest inhabitant and he was a great bell-ringer and I remember long after I retired that he told me that this year he was going to ring in his fiftieth Mayor of Grantham.

M: That would be when? In the early 1970s then, I suppose?

B: Oh, much earlier than that.

M: You say fifty years ...

B: In the fifties, in the 1950s.

M: You did not retire until 1971.

B: Ah, yes.

M: Oh, you mean retired from the firm?

B: I left the firm in 1929.

M: Oh, I see, retired ... I understand.

B: I left the firm in 1929, and Ernest Nidd continued to work for the firm right up until the Second World War, and I used to see him occasionally. and his son was the Parish Clerk for many years, Arthur Nidd was Parish Clerk for many years.

M: So you were an apprentice for seven years, till 1928?

B: I was an apprentice for seven years till 1928.

M: And two years you were a journeyman?

B: Two years.

M: Was it called a journeyman at that time, was it?

B: Yes, and then left in May. I left in May 1929 and took over the Inner Street Handicraft Centre on the 30th May 1919.

M: Took over what? in what sense took over? As Head of Department, in effect?

B: I took over the Handicraft Centre, belonging to the Education Committee.

M: So you were then working for the Education Committee.

B: That was the one Handicraft Centre in the town.

M: So why did you move from Parks' to this educational establishment?

B: Oh, obviously it had certain advantages.

M: And what were they?

B: The advantages were, I suppose, that it was ... I was getting a bit tired of the sort of work we were doing. I wanted to get wider experience, the opportunity arose to take over this Handicraft Centre. Before that, we had just completed building a new school, the new Central School.

M: So you built the Boys' Central School?

B: We built the Boys' Central School. We had just completed that when I left. And the Boys' Central School was going to have workshops and so forth. And it was suggested to me that I might like to be the new Handicraft Instructor there. I had already qualified as

a handicraft teacher, by virtue of passing City and Guilds Certificates.

M: But you did not go there directly, you went to Inner Street first of all.

B: I took over Inner Street first, and I took charge of Inner Street for three years until Christmas 1932, when I handed that over to someone else and took over the whole of the handicraft in the Boys' Central School.

M: How long had the Boys' Central School been operating then, before you arrived?

B: Oh, the Boys' Central School had been operating since 1920. It was only moved into its new premises round about this time, round about 1927.

M: So where was it previously?

B: Previously it was in a building behind the Town Hall.

M: Was this the so-called Central and Day Continuation School?

B: This was the so-called Central and Day Continuation School, and it was remarkable because on the Headmaster's room, underneath the paint, could plainly be seen the words, "Female Prison" [laughter]. The buildings behind the Town hall had previously been part of the local gaol then. And Mr. Thorpe, the Headmaster, was greatly amused and used to tell this story every year on the School's birthday that when he went in to take over his room he was met with this notice on the door: Female Prison.

M: That's hilarious. So it was a brand new school in 1920, then.

B: No, no. It never was a brand new school until the new Central School was built.

M: No, I mean the institution as a school. It was a new school in 1920?

B: Yes.

M: When was it founded as a school?

B: It was founded as a school following the Haddow Report.

M: Which was dated when?

B: Well, it was the first reorganisation of education. It was the result of the first reorganisation of education, following the First World War.

M: I see, so it was just immediately after the War.

B: It was a move in the right direction, when they ... The School continued in premises behind the Town Hall for some little while, until one winter, and I was attending a wood carving class with several local youths, one Walter Dickinson, and through a door, in the

cellar was the boiler room. Well, we finished the lesson that night round about a quarter to nine and left, and the next morning I was astounded to hear that the Central School buildings, at the back of the Town Hall, had been burned down. And apparently a fire during the night had started in the boiler room and had burned most of the premises at the back.

M: Yes.

B: So the Central School was faced with the problem of finding new premises. They solved this fairly rapidly, by taking over Middlemore House, in Castlegate.

M: Oh yes, I know.

B: Is it Castlegate?

M: Yes, Castlegate.

B: And they continued there for two or three years, and the evening school work was all done there and the day continuation work was all done there. And the Education Committee seemed to hang fire over the provision of new premises, but eventually they had bought this plot of land at the corner of Sandon Road and Hill Avenue as a playing field for the Boys' Central School, and they decided to build, put a new building on that.

M: Oh, they already had the land, then?

B: They already had the land then.

M: They were already using it as a playing field?

B: And were already using it as a playing field. Major Parks managed to secure the contract ...

M: Yes, I see.

B: ... so that I helped to build the School, became the Handicraft Instructor there, I eventually became the Deputy Head and was Deputy Head for the last twenty years of my time.

M: So you actually made the School with your own hands and then ran it.

B: Built the School. I remember helping to build all the roof trusses and the doors round the corridors. There used to an outside corridor all round Central School.

M: A cloister, a cloister you mean?

B: Not a cloister, no. It was a corridor that opened onto a lawn.

M: Well, that's called a cloister.

B: It could be a sort of cloister.

M: It's called a cloister. In a higher class school it's called a cloister.

B: We didn't call it that there.

M: But I had no idea you'd built the School in that way. So what's this about this fire. Was there anything special about this fire, or was it just a normal accident?

B: One of the firemen on the occasion ... Mr. Thorpe was roused from his bed, dashed down to the fire, saw one of the firemen up the ladder, one of his old boys, and shouts "What are you doing, Willers?" Willers says "I am trying to put the fire out", and Mr. Thorpe said "Well, let it burn! We'll get a new building then." [laughter].

M: So what did Willers reply to that?

B: I don't know - that was Geoff Willers' father, you know.

M: Oh, really. That's interesting. [Geoff Willers and Michael Sewell were contemporaries at the King's School thirty years later.]

B: Oh, yes.

M: That's a good story.

11 John Bullimore

M: Can you tell me a few things about John Bullimore?

B: Well, he was the senior joiner when I was apprentice, and he was a very interesting individual. He used to talk about things way back. As far back as 1860, 1868.

M: When was he born then, 1850? Was he born in 1850 or thereabouts?

B: No. He would be 13 or 14. 12, 13 or 14 in 1868, which was the year he went apprentice to Hornsby's.

M: So he was born in 1855.

B: At that time, he lived with his mother, who was a widow in Barrowby and to get to Hornsby's they used to walk from Barrowby every morning to be in Hornsby's at 6 and they used to leave again at 5 and walk all the way back to Barrowby to be home.

N: Three miles?

M: Three miles.

B: Easily. In the middle of the day, in the middle of the day, they only had a 50 minute break and this was in order that the 10 minutes that they gained each day, they could leave work at 4 o'clock on Saturdays. This was before the Act which required everybody to have a half day holiday each week.

M: Yes. But in principle, they had no lunch hour, then. They had to make the lunch hour out of these bits and pieces.

B: 50 minutes. They had 50 minutes break. That was their lunch hour.

M: Yes, I see. Can you remember anything that he would have told you about what life was like around about 1870?

B: Yes, he told me that his mother was a widow, and that she used to do part-time work at the Rectory in Barrowby, which at that time ... the Rector at Barrowby at that time was the Reverend Stephen Gladstone, who was son of William Ewart Gladstone, the Prime Minister, and life for them must have been quite hard. All the work that John did at Hornsby's was to do with the wooden construction with threshing machines, and parts of agricultural machinery. He was not apprenticed to a builder as such. See, Hornsby's employed a number of woodworkers, joiners, to build up the wooden bodies of the various machines that they made.

M: So that's how he learnt his trade.

B: He learnt his trade and all the work at that time - all the wood - was sawn in pit saws and planed up by hand. In fact, the modern Welby Street in his day, was known as Sawpit Lane, and there were a number of sawpits occupying the space which is now occupied by Lee's, the ...

M: The fur merchants?

B: The fur, the rags and fur.

M: The rag merchant.

B: Yes. And he served a full apprenticeship there, and then went to work, for a time, on the building of Wellingore Hall, which is near Lincoln. I remember him telling me that he helped to lay a mahogany dance floor, in the Hall, that was built, and then ...

M: When would that be? 1880?

B: That would be ... no ... that would be somewhere about 1874, 1875 and then he came to work for Danny Parks, who had started in business as a builder, as a joiner, etc.,

round about 1870 and he seemed to remain with him for the rest of his working life.

M: I see. So he had a relatively short period with Hornsby's then - in the order of ten years.

B: He served an apprenticeship there, that was all, and then became a journeyman and left, you see.

M: Oh I see, and worked the rest of his life with Parks?

B: The rest of his life with Walter Parks, Major Parks. And Danny Parks.

M: So what else did he do in these late years of the nineteenth century? Can you remember anything that he told you? In the 1880s, 90s?

B: Well, he was the general factotum of the firm. If anybody wanted to know anything, they went to John. It there was a coffin to be made, it was John that made it. If there was a big house requiring somebody to do some inside work in it, it was always John, and one or two of the other apprentices, who went to do it.

M: But he must have had some stories to tell? As well as instructions to give?

B: Well, he was the most trusted member of the community. Oh, he had many stories to ... He would never, he could never understand, for instance, how a boy from the Grammar School did not become a "clurk", in his words. His own son had been educated at the National School and he was very proud of the fact that his boy was a "clurk". He'd been a "clurk" at Hornsby's and he left Hornsby's, and at the time I'm speaking of, his son had become a clerk at the firm of Lucas at Birmingham, who make motor parts; and another thing that I can remember, he was very impressed with the fact that when they were working out the cost of the various parts that Lucas made, they even took into consideration that rent that they had to pay for the piece of ground that the machine stood on that was manufacturing this particular part. He had two daughters, one was in business as a dressmaker, and he lived with his wife at the end of Sidney Street. He was a great churchman and he was one of the pillars of St. Saviour's Church. It's been pulled down now.

M: Where was it?

B: In the Manners Street area, just off North Parade.

12 Some Small Grantham Businesses

M: Oh yes, I know. Now tell me about these sawpits in Welby Street. Were these all different premises owned by Hornsby's? Or small private concerns?

B: Oh, it would be a private concern, you see.

M: Just a lot of small private businesses.

B: Where in these days you will have a saw mill, in those days they didn't have mechanised circular saws, and it was a pit, more or less like a pit in a garage.

M: But these were individual businesses?

B: Yes. And the sawyers, they all went about in pairs. There was the top sawyer and the bottom sawyer. And they had a big blade, a two-handled saw.

M: Yes, I have seen photographs.

B: And the lower one, of course, he had the worst job, because he had all the sawdust falling into his eyes

M: Did they ever swap round?

B: I suppose they would occasionally.

M: Didn't they wear goggles?

B: Goggles didn't exist in those days. They were also, I gather from John, great drinkers.

M: Because it was hot work?

B: It must have been, yes. Well, it was all physical work.

M: Well of course, of course. But, that area of Grantham must have been quite interesting at that time.

B: Must have been, yes, yes.

M: And this is why there are lots of pubs in Welby Street, for example.

B: Well, it could be. Talking about pubs in Welby Street, my great-grandfather kept one at the bottom of Welby Street - "The Peacock".

M: This is a Sewell, great-grandfather Sewell?

B: This is great-grandfather Hughes.

M: Oh, Hughes.

B: Great-grandfather Hughes, who was the father of my grandmother, who married Joseph Cook, whose family owned a brickyard at Langham, in the neighbourhood of Langham anyway.

M: Yes, we have a print of that. We have a map showing where that is.

B: Yes, actually it's in the parish of Cold Overton, if you look at that map.

M: Yes, well, we've been there, we know it. So did we, did we run any more of these pubs among the family?

B: Various relatives. I can remember there was "The Three Tuns".

M: Where? Where was "The Three Tuns"?

B: It was off Wharf Road, one of the streets towards the Station.

M: Yes, yes. Who ran that?

B: One of Granny Cook's nieces.

M: Oh, I see. Name of what?

B: Dodsworth.

M: I see, and are there any more?

B: And Dad's brother Tom, Tom Sewell, with the help of his elder sister, he ran the "Shepherd and Dog" in wide Westgate, opposite the end of Welby Street.

M: Yes, I see. Any more? Your father had several brothers.

B: Yes, but they did not keep pubs. His brothers, there were two hairdressers, two house decorators and two butchers.

M: I see. Where was the butcher's shop?

B: The two butchers ... when their father, who owned the butchers shop in Welby Street, when he left Grantham, the two, the brothers, went to work at the tannery.

M: Bjorlow's?

B: Well, it was Shaw's in those days.

M: So your father's father ran a butcher's shop in Welby Street. Whereabouts in Welby Street?

B: Next to the sawpit section, at the top of Welby Street.

M: So what was his name?

B: His name was Lawrence Sewell. Generally called Loll.

M: Now, where did his father come from? Was his father a Grantham man?

B: I don't know. I think his father came from Bourne.

M: His father came from Bourne.

B: They had connections with Bourne.

M: And what was his father's name? Was it also Lawrence?

B: I'm not sure.

13 Killing and Eating the Pig

M: You were going to tell me about killing the pig.

B: Well, they were all country people, you see. Everybody kept pigs in those days and I remember Grandfather Cook, he, at the time that he kept "The Peacock" in Welby Street, he had a large allotment in the Grange Gardens, and it was his habit every morning to go there early. He'd always been an early riser and he would feed his pigs and do his gardening between 6 o'clock and 10 o'clock and then come back and get cleaned up, have his lunch and then it would be time to open up the pub and at 4 o'clock in the afternoon, he would have a cup of tea, and then he would proceed up to the Grange Gardens to fed the pigs again, do a little more gardening, until about half past 5 or a quarter to 6 and then it was time to return and open the pub for the evening session. And periodically, I can't remember the exact time, I rather think it must have been in the early Spring, annually they used to kill a pig. He always had at least two in the sty, one of which was probably sold and the other was killed and salted down to make bacon. Well, on the days the pig killing was due to take place, the huge copper was got ready with boiling water to put the carcass - the carcass had to be scalded in order to remove the hair from the pig. Granny, of course, she'd been used to doing this all her life. She was quite an expert. Who actually killed the pig I can't remember, but I think it was one of the local butchers or probably somebody that Grandfather knew who was an expert, because they were killed by cutting a vein somewhere in the throat, I believe, and the blood was then collected into buckets and that was used to make black puddings - they call them black puddings in Lincolnshire, and in other places they call them blood puddings. The carcass then, was cut up, and all the offal taken out. The main portions, the hind legs, were cut off and cured to make hams, and the bacon sides, they were all salted and laid in a big salting trough and cured for bacon, but the rest was cut up. It was, I know it was one of my jobs on these occasions to take round to all Granny's sisters, cousins and those that lived within reach what was called a "pig's fry". This consisted of part of the pig's intestines and so forth, a piece of liver, and kidneys and so on and that was something of a delicacy, I suppose. It was fried, then of course there would be all the pieces of fat would be rendered down to make lard, which that would leave a lot of pieces of very crisp fat which were...

M: Chitterlings?

B: No, no, the chitterlings were the actual intestines, which were very thoroughly cleaned and then boiled and then the skin from them was used for making sausage and the fleshy part was the chitterlings, and that was eaten, you see.

M: So this pig was owned by your mother's parents?

B: Yes, oh yes.

M: And every year they killed one?

B: Every year, yes, as long as I can remember.

M: This was during your boyhood? So this was 1910, 1915?

B: Yes, yes. 1910 to, well, up to and during the First World War.

M: Did they sell it to butchers, or what did they do?

B: No, it was never sold, it was just for the family.

M: And did lots of families do this, or was ... ?

B: Yes, lots of people did it in those days - everybody who'd got a spare piece of land and it was one way of getting rid of the household waste.

M: Oh, I see.

B: They all had little gardens, or allotments and the small potatoes and all the other stuff was all boiled up and made into cake, mixed with barleymeal and fed to the pigs. It was a part of the economy in those days.

M: Yes, sure.

B: Granny could ... Granny was quite expert. It's amazing what you get out of a pig.

M: How long did it last, then?

B: Oh, it lasted rather too long to my recollection, because it ... after a pig killing, there were no refrigerators. After a pig killing we were living on pork for breakfast, dinner, tea and supper for what seemed to be, in retrospect, several weeks.

M: It's like our pears, which we have until Christmas.

B: But Granny was quite an expert and of course there were lots of sisters and brothers and nieces and nephews living in the area and when there was a pig killing everybody had

a little bit you see. It was got rid of in that way.

N: If somebody had a pig and ... Everybody had a pig. You got back what you were given.

B: Yes.

M: You had large families, so there was quite a lot ...

B: Yes.

M: So the pig killing was staggered around the neighbourhood so that not too many pigs were killed at one time, otherwise there'd be a surfeit of pork. That's right?

B: Yes, but to the best of my recollection, there was a season - when it was best to kill the pig, though I can't tell you what it was.

M: You used to hang them, you mean. Yes, well, whole sides.

B: Everybody had hooks in the ceiling and these huge hooks had half a side of bacon hanging from them, a couple of hams you see, and probably one of the hams at Grantham Fair time, in mid-Lent you see, when a lot of relatives and cousins from away who were visiting and they all used to come to the Fair and one of these had to be brought down and boiled.

M: It sounds almost like Saxon time.

B: It wasn't Saxon time. The times of Edward VII, of the early years of George V.

14 Grantham Mid-Lent Fair

M: What was this Fair you just mentioned? The Mid-Lent Fair?

B: This is the Grantham Mid-Lent Fair.

M: Going on at that time?

B: It's been going on since the twelfth century in Grantham.

M: So it was still going on in wide Westgate?

B: In wide Westgate and the Market.

M: At this period?

B: This period too. I can remember the roundabouts and the steam yachts and the hooplas and the "Try Your Strength" machine, and somebody with a huge mallet would

bang a little peg that stuck up from a sort of little barrel, and then beyond that would be a thing that would slide up on a long plank and the harder you hit the peg the farther the thing would slide up the plank.

M: I recall that the Big Wheel used to be outside your house, when I was small.

B: Yes, the Big Wheel used to be there.

M: You had a Big Wheel at that time?

B: Near the railway Station, near the railway bridge. That end of Westgate, apart from the Big Wheel, was rather full of little shows - the Fat Lady, or the dwarves and things of that sort.

M: It really didn't change very much in content that Fair, over 40 or 50 years, by the sound of it.

B: It hasn't changed to the present day, except that the, to my eyes, the riding machines and things seem cheaper and more common. In those days they were really beautifully painted and carved. They were really gilded.

M: Each one had been hand-made?

B: They were hand-made and hand-carved and really gilded. I can remember Pat Collins' roundabouts and the great gondolas and scenic railways and the cake-walks and things of that nature.

M: I suppose the Moonrocket was relatively recent?

B: Oh, much, much later, that came in with science fiction. Lovely organs, and those big steam traction engines.

M: That's really the classic era of mechanical contrivances, I suppose, before ...

B: Round about 1912.

M: Before electrical control mechanisms came in.

B: Well they were just ...

M: They relied a lot on steam.

B: They were just coming in then. You could ... the big steam traction engines that they used to draw all the waggons, they all had a dynamo on the front and that stood at the side of the roundabout and was working all the time, to provide electricity for the arc lamps, because they were lit, not by bulbs, but by electric carbon arcs, that used to flicker and spark. They gave a very good light, but that also used to be the power that drove the

gondolas and the motor cars round the scenic railway.

M: Electrical power in fact.

B: Yes, but generated on the spot, from their own big steam engines.

M: I see. So you would see what, I suppose, one doesn't see quite the same now, big steam engines. Generating engines.

B: So you see them now driven by a diesel engine on a trailer.

M: Yes, sure, sure. That's right.

B: Very different. The early cinemas - I can remember round about 1910, when there used to be a big show, with a stage in the front, sort of theatre, and inside they had two or three girls dancing on the stage with bells twanging and a sort of master of ceremonies exhorting everybody to come in.

M: Where was this, for example?

B: And when you went in, you sat in a miniature cinema and you saw the first flickering cinematograph.

M: This is still the Fair?

B: This is still the Fair, yes. This was the attraction round about 1910, but that didn't last long, you see, because round about that time they were beginning to open cinemas in every town. Permanent cinemas, I mean.

15 Grantham Cricket Club

M: Now I would like you to tell me something about Grantham Cricket Club.

B: Well, I first played cricket in 1921 for the Junior side. The Boys were playing the local Scouts. That was my first appearance on London Road and it took some time to gain a place in the Second Team, but I eventually did.

M: When did you first play for the Second Team?

B: Various times between 1921 ... I gained a regular place sometime about 1926, 1927.

M: Oh, it took as long as that?

B: Oh, yes.

M: I see. This is the Saturday side?

B: This is the Saturday second side, yes.

M: Is that the side you were Captain of? Later on?

B: Yes, but that was much later. I remember playing at Peterborough in one match and batting right through the innings and being astounded at the end to find that I had only scored 29 runs.

M: Good gracious. So, how, what was the total score?

B: I can't remember the total score, but during the match, the funniest thing happened. I was fielding in the long field and I had to cover quite a big area. The area that I covered, behind cover point was ... the boundary was very short on that side, and there was a very tall hoarding and one of the Peterborough batsmen hit the ball clean over the hoarding and there was a great crash of glass and there was a little doorway in this hoarding and I had to go through there and approach the householder to get the ball back, which he refused to give me ... [laughter] until the Secretary of the Peterborough Club and been across and pacified him with promises of payment for damage done.

M: Presumably this was quite common?

B: This had happened on numerous occasions before.

M: That is like on our ground where we hit it across the road.

B: Oh yes, yes, but the funniest thing was that Hammond was just coming into prominence as a Gloucester cricketer. Northamptonshire were due to play a match on the ground the following week, and everybody said "Well, Hammond, he'll make thousands on this ground" ... the boundary and so forth. And, of course, Hammond batted I think for the greater part of the day, for about 80 runs, very slowly.

M: Why so slow?

B: I don't know, it must have been the state of the wicket, I suppose, but the funniest thing that ever happened, in a match that I can remember, was on the occasion ... to do with the umpire, a very well known local umpire.

M: Who was that?

B: No names, I wouldn't mention the name. There were ... we had quite a band of barrackers. They were prepared to barrack both sides, and whatever displeased them they were sure to let you know in no uncertain terms and on this occasion, the umpire must have displeased them in some way because one of the opposing team (he was our umpire, incidentally) and one of the opposing batsmen had missed a ball which hit him on the leg. There was a loud appeal for LBW and the umpire's hand was slowly rising to give him out, when there was such a bellow from the stand, such a great roar that he was not out, that

the poor umpire turned towards the stand, looked rapidly at the batsman, scratched one ear, and said "Not out". [Laughter].

M: Well, he was intimidated.

16 Wartime Cricket

M: Tell me about some of the cricket that was played during the war.

B: I remember the Grantham Thursday side playing Spittlegate R.A.F. This team turned up and the match proceeded, one of the older sprightly members of the Grantham Club went out, played a rather rumbustious innings for him ...

M: Who was that?

B: ... of 37. Jack Poole. When we came in, we discovered that the bowler against whom he had hit most of the runs was the great Keith Miller who, just before, had started his career, you see, in Australian cricket. Nobody had any idea that he was in the side, I mean, he was completely unknown to English cricketers. But there was quite a lot of Service cricket during the war. Of course, the war made a lot of difference to the Cricket Club. In the first place it meant that the members had to prepare their own wickets and do all the work on the ground themselves, and of course the old pavilion, the old wooden pavilion that had stood for so many years ... on one Sunday occasion, we lent the ground to a local firm who used it and they must have left some lighted cigarettes or by some means the whole pavilion was burned and we lost all the gear. A lot of members lost their gear and everything. Fortunately I played on the Saturday and had taken my gear away.

M: That was after a guest match of some kind then, it wasn't a Grantham game.

B: It wasn't a Grantham game. It had been lent to a local munition factory for a game.

M: So did you have any other notable cricketers playing on the ground during the War?

B: I don't recollect any, in *this* War, but as a boy at Sedgebrook, we used to catch the quarter to three train home, in 1919, and the Machine Gun Corps at that time had a very very strong amateur side. They were captained by Major Black, and in the side was a Captain L.H. Tennyson, so that we saw some very good class cricket on London Road. The proceedings used to be that we left Sedgebrook at a quarter to three, arrived home about three o'clock, walked down Launder Terrace, into the cricket ground and saw the greater part of the afternoon's cricket.

M: That was very nice.

B: It was very, very enjoyable. We saw some great matches, but on one occasion I remember being there and there was a fellow who afterwards played for Yorkshire, a man named Dyson. And the rations, for these Service sides, used to be brought in a transport

waggon drawn by two mules and there was a mule on either side of a central shaft. They were not in ordinary shafts. Now the transport waggon had delivered its load and was pointing towards the double gates at the football end of the ground, when Dyson hit a tremendous skyer that went right over the ropes and dropped bang on the centre rail of the transport waggon between the two mules [laughter]. Well, that was like the starting gun for a race [laughter]. The mules shot out of that gate along London Road, past the Town Hall [laughter], along the High Street and were eventually brought to rest at the bottom of Watergate [laughter].

M: That's about a mile and a half.

B: It's a long way and nobody could stop them. We just saw them disappear through the two gates and it could have been a serious accident, but fortunately there was very little traffic about and being 1919, there was hardly any motor traffic, and of course the town was used to seeing unruly mules and things like running away like that.

M: Oh, that's hilarious.

B: Yes ...

17 Gentlemen and Players

B: After my first visit to Trent Bridge in 1922, when we saw Hitch play his great innings, we were rather disappointed not to see Hobbs batting, but he'd already batted on the Saturday. But during the whole of that decade it was the thing to do, on Whit Monday, to go to Trent Bridge in the hope of seeing Jack Hobbs. Well, not only Jack Hobbs, there were other great cricketers playing, but everybody hoped they would see him batting and during the whole of that time I only went once when he didn't get a century. And on this particular occasion, he was caught at square leg by a young fast bowler called Matthews and, as far as I was concerned, as far as the crowd was concerned, I think the light went out that day. But it was always interesting to see Surrey, because they had the great P.G.H. Fender, people like Strudwick and Hitch and Peach and oh ... [Michael once saw Jack Hobbs, by then long retired, walking round the Trent Bridge ground among the spectators, apparently unrecognised, with his trilby hat and walking sick, in about 1947].

M: That was high class cricket.

B: It was top class cricket. Because Notts and Surrey in non-Test Match years was regarded as one of the leading fixtures. It compared with Lancashire and Yorkshire, and almost with Gentlemen and Players. And there were always quite a lot of amateurs playing. Notts were led by an amateur, A.W. Carr, and they always stood head and shoulders above the others literally.

M: And this was the time when, of course, they used these distinctions on the field. Tell me about these different doors, for example.

B: Yes, of course. There were four dressing rooms at Trent Bridge. There were two on the ground floor for the two groups of professionals on each side, and there were two immediately above, with balconies, for the amateurs in each side. On the first occasion that I went to Lords I distinctly remember seeing F.T. Mann come down the centre gangway at Lords, through the members' seats and wait there and Patsy Hendren, who had played for England, he came from round the back, round the corner of the pavilion, along the rail at the front to join his Captain before they walked out to open the innings for Middlesex. And in those days, of course, professionals, they were just ..., their names appeared on the cards say as Hendron. H., and it would be F.T. Mann or Mr. F.T. Mann. The amateur always had the Mr. before his initials, and his full initials.

18 Thompson Cup Cricket

M: Well, tell me about these, going back to Grantham, tell me about these Thompson Cup matches which began just after the Second War, did they?

B: No.

M: When did they begin?

B: They started just before the Second War.

M: We're moving on 20 or 18 years, are we?

B: Yes, we're moving on to the period round about 1936.

M: And the Cup was given by a man called W.E. Thompson?

B: Well, he was the great friend of Grantham cricket. He'd been Captain, he'd held all the offices. He was President. He'd been Captain of Lincolnshire, and he was a very, very good Minor Counties cricketer and at this time, of course, the Cricket Club were in need of funds - well, all cricket clubs were. This system of playing evening matches and inviting all the local teams to come and play, gave a great fillip to the game, both ...

M: So this was a knockout competition, among all the surrounding village sides?

B: Everybody who cared to enter would send a side.

M: And the grounds were packed as I recall.

B: And they would be drawn, and we would get two and as many as three thousand spectators on an evening.

M: For an evening Overs Match.

B: An evening match of 20 overs each or 18 overs according to the light. The entrance fee was, I believe it started off, the entrance fee was three pence, three old pence, and of course the money it brought in was very acceptable, and, it produced some very keen and exciting cricket. Rivalry was intense amongst the local fraternity. Well, all the local teams looked forward to the ... It was the highlight of their season, because very few of them previously had had the opportunity of playing on the London Road Cricket Ground, on Grantham's cricket ground.

M: So tell me about some of the incidents which you might remember from some of these games. Can you recall any incidents? There was one I know that you ... when you played for the Grantham Tradesmen, who had a side.

B: Well, yes. This was during the War, actually.

M: During the War?

B: Yes, it would be in the 1940s when it was rather difficult to fill the Fixture List, but on summer evenings when everybody had been busy on War work and so forth, it was a light relief and we tried to keep the competition running with as many teams as possible and this particular year we, the Club itself, well Harold Leek, who was a member of the Club, he recruited a team amongst some of the Grantham members and called "The Tradesmen" and of course one of the better teams was Aveling Barford, the team put in by Aveling Barford, and we happened to go right through the competition until the end.

M: "The Tradesmen"?

B: "The Tradesmen", yes, we managed to win all our matches until we came up against Barford's.

M: In the Final?

B: In the Final. And the first time it was rained off and then in the end, I think we lost, we just lost, and Barford's won the Cup that year. There was a little bit of grumbling but they thought it was hardly fair that Grantham should put a team in, but the real reason was to ... , I think there were an odd number of teams and we made this team up in order to provide a full programme. The Competition is still running.

M: Who were the Tradesmen who played? What Tradesmen played for the side? Can you remember?

B: Well, it was tradesmen.

M: So who played?

B: Well, I know who they were.

M: Well, tell us.

B: There was Harold Leek.

M: And what jobs did they do?

B: Well, Harold Leek kept "The Barley Mow". Bert Pulford, he had a sweet business and ran the kiosk on the Bus Station. Len Simpson, he had a fruiterer's business in Westgate.

M: Oh, he was that very fat wicket-keeper.

B: That's right, yes. Bill Skerritt when he played, if he was home from the War and he played in one or two matches, although he was in the Air Force for a time. He played. He was a fruiterer, yes, and Cyril Hatton, he was a newsagent and also a first class footballer for Notts County and ...

M: Who else played? Did Eric Wilcox play for them?

B: No, no, there was a man ...

M: Charlie Smith?

B: No, no. There was an official of the Electricity Board. And I played. I was a school master, but I was a Tradesman on this occasion and ... there were quite a number of people who would fill the team up very nicely. Harry Sellors.

M: Harry Sellors?

B: I think he played.

M: He was a plumber, wasn't he?

B: Yes, yes, and Ben Dunk, he was a railwayman. He played and we had quite a ...

M: Can you recall any incidents? In the game? Or any crowd incidents?

B: Well, it's a long, long while ago. I can only remember the first time we played, there was such a crowd there it was almost a Test Match atmosphere. It was so different from the twenty or thirty that gathered for a Club match on Saturday or Sunday.

M: Oh, you mean ...

B: When Barford's were playing us there was such a crowd, you see, it was quite a local Derby.

M: What was this business about Bill Skerritt bowling?

B: Oh yes, of course. Bill Skerritt being a fruiterer, we reached a stage, a very quiet period in the game where ...

M: Against who?

B: Aveling Barford's.

M: Oh, this was in the same ...

B: Yes, oh yes, when ...

M: What year would this be - 43?

B: It could have been. I'm not sure of the years.

M: 1942 - 43?

B: 43, 44 perhaps.

M: Anyway, go on.

B: May have been. Anyway, on this occasion there was a quiet period in the game. Bill Skerritt kept on bowling and the batsmen kept pushing the ball back and suddenly there was a voice from the stands "Skerritt, why don't you bowl him a banana?" [laughter].

M: That brought the house down, did it?

B: Yes, yes. Great hilarity.

M: Did you not get crowds on Saturday afternoons before the war, to watch you?

B: Never, never.

M: There was that Stand which must have been quite ...

B: Yes, but that Stand actually belonged to the Football Club. The ground was ours. We were the lessees of the ground and we sublet it to the Football Club, and that Stand belonged to the Football Club.

M: But at Thompson Cup matches it was full.

B: As far as spectators were concerned the Cricket Club was never very well supported. The number of cricket enthusiasts in Grantham, as far as watching was concerned - there were plenty of players, always plenty of players - but watchers were, well, they were somewhat meagre. If you got a hundred on the cricket ground you'd got a lot and even when the County played there, if there were five hundred there, that was a big gate. And that is one of the reasons, of course, why the County almost ceased to play there. I don't think there's been a County match on London Road for a long, long time. And the wickets we had, they were ... the Chairman of the Ground Committee at that time was very, very knowledgeable

about wickets and they were as good as could be found anywhere.

M: Really. Who was that, then?

B: Mont Appleby.

M: Oh, Mont Appleby was the Chairman of the Ground Committee. Who was the groundsman?

B: He was the Ground Secretary. The groundsman, he always chose the groundsman and trained him and taught him and he knew quite a lot about the preparation of wickets.

M: I see.