

Transcription of an interview conducted 10 May 2018

Interviewee: RAY EADES (RE)

Interviewer: ALISTAIR CARTWRIGHT (AC)

Tolworth, England

Transcription: JAREK ZABA

[00:03] AC: So er my name is Alistair Cartwright and I'm here with Ray Eades. Er we're err doing this into interview erm as part of the ShedX erm project with erm Community Brain and Kingston History Centre. Erm. We are in er Ray's er Ray and Jean's living room.

RE: Lounge.

[00:26] AC: Lounge. Just down the road from Tolworth Main allotments. And it is today the 10th of May. Erm. OK. Er Ray thanks so much for for for for having me here.

RE: You're very welcome.

[00:43] AC: Erm so can you tell me about your experience on the Tolworth allotments.

RE: Well I first took an allotment at Tolworth about yes 1983. Thereabouts. Erm. What the - my allotment at that time was behind the Surbiton British Legion and Surbiton Town Bowling Club, their pavilions. And was the site of the original allotments at Tolworth. But that site now is what is known as the Millennium Ground and there's no longer any allotments there. But I had the advantage of getting the grass cuttings if I needed them from the er bowling greens er - they would very nicely dumped just outside the gate right by my allotment at that time. But it was double edged sword because if you got cuttings at the wrong time when weed killer had been put on you wouldn't want that on your plot or too much in the compost so. It was a thing we had to just take care of. Erm. I can remember my plot number there was Plot Number 50. And my neighbour I had at that time also as it turned out was chap living in the same road as myself. Quite by chance, our plots were adjoining and he is no longer with us, long since gone. But was as gardener absolutely first class, he would grow the most magnificent vegetables. And he as far as I can make out he never used the vegetables himself. He would go to the Red Lion and I have it only as a - information I never - can't say that I ever say him, I didn't frequent the Red Lion. Erm. He used to go down and sell these vegetables but they were showpiece items. Erm. And the story told to me long after he died that erm a- for some reason or other when he died he didn't er - they didn't have a normal funeral for him. He was carted to Kingston Crematorium in the back of a Land Rover or some similar erm estate car. But er whether that's true or not I don't know. But er he was a quite a-a quite a character on the plot.

[03:37] AC: I'm just gonna pause it. But that's all fine. So that was your neighbour who - who had his funeral in the back of a Land Rover.

RE: So I understand anyway. Whether it's an apocryphal thing or not I don't know but er he was - he was certainly a bit of a character.

[03:58] AC: So was that common practice? People selling vegetables.

RE: Oh I don't th- I don't think so. I just think that erm he was a chap who liked a drink erm and that was his local. And he would go - he was growing as far as I know he had no immediate family at home. Just he and his wife. And he was growing vegetables there which were enough to feed a greengrocer, y'know to keep the - the business going. But he was a an absolute first class gardener.

[04:33] AC: And - so you obviously admired his gardening skill. Was there - was there quite a bit of that of people looking at their neighbouring plots and thinking 'oo, that's a good garden, that's not a good garden'.

RE: I think. Yeah. The - the people who were allotmenteer - and I use the term allotmenteeing as a - I don't know whether I've heard it somewhere or coined it myself I don't know but then they were a different erm - it was a different strata of [05:00] society doing it. They tended not to be by and large younger people, lot more retired people. Whereas a-erm - my memory of it then very few ladies allotments. Er - allotment holders. [Clears throat]. The - I say the opposite now. I'm surrounded by ladies on the allotments over there. And er they are cracking gardeners some of them. And er it keeps me on my toes one way and the other.

[05:38] AC: So so - so it's just changed the - the kind of communities on the allotments.

RE: Yep. The people who are doing it - the original allotments probably were of necessity for families. Bigger families locally er then there are now. Erm. Wages so much less. And accepted that people I think far more grew their own food because it was erm cost efficient for them to do so. Plus the fact that at school most schools locally - junior schools - boys had an allotment plot on the school itself. Erm. Not the sort of size of plot we're talking about that local authorities have here. But I was at school at Ewell and I left erm - I left the school in 1940 and in 1939 and 1940 I can remember that certainly those two years I had a plot on the school grounds. And all the boys had that while the girls were doing some domestic science or something else. That was at the age of up to 11. Then going to secondary school, you lost that. But I had always been interested in gardening. So erm I continued it but the through the war erm my - with my elder brother or one of my elder brothers and myself we had an allotment erm quite close to the River Hogsmill at Ewell. Erm. And they were turned into allotments, er part of the old Ewell Court Estate. Simply during the war. And they reverted back to open land erm which is all part of the River Hogsmill open land walk.

[07:47] AC: So erm - and that time generally d-during the war do-do you remember how that impacted the allotments and the growing of food?

RE: Well yes. The thing - the wartime expression Dig For Victory erm and the posters that came out at that time all over the country - Dig For Victory. Erm. Eat less bread, use potatoes instead. One of the catchphrases a- sent out by the Ministry of Food. So that people would grow their own food vegetables - people who had only ever had a lawn in their garden suddenly took to gardening. Erm. And probably offshoots of those went to allotments afterwards, I don't know. But erm-

[08:37] AC: So you were a boy then just leaving school.

RE: Yep.

AC: Do you remember the impact of those - of those messages? How did you feel about that kind of idea?

RE: Er. I don't think it had any particular impact as far as I was concerned. I'd always enjoyed being outside and the outdoor life anyway. So gardening was a natural progression and having done that erm I can - as a - as a scout during the war I can remember I only got two badges. One was the housekeeper's badge. Or house orderly badge. And the other was the gardener badge. And er - well I got boys in my patrol got arms full of badges. I got just two.

[09:34] AC: But that - and that - sorry just to return to this but that phrase Dig For Victory which is very famous. Did that er - did that seem er w-what was your impression of that? Did that seem - did that ring true with you or not - or not really?

RE: Well I don't - I don't think - no I-I think as f-for all - as I was when war started I'd - war started I was just 10 years of age. So that sort of thing erm - **[10:00]** it was one of the catchphrases that stays with you as a child. And perhaps not realising what the implications of it were. Rather like travelling on a train erm which had its windows covered in a material to stop them from bomb blast. And there would be a catchphrase there y'know er - something to the effect oh don't touch the glass, don't er remove that and mustn't pull the blinds up or down when the trains were travelling at night because you might be spotted by an enemy aircraft. It's er erm.

[10:41] AC: And er-erm so you - you learnt some of your gardening skills at school and then there was this - there was some more encouragement using-using those skills during the war. D-did you get any - anything from your parents in terms of gardening?

RE: Well my dad was not a gardener. Definitely not a gardener by nature. But loved pottering in the garden.

AC: Mm-hmm.

RE: But he had one great thing that he enjoyed. We had either side of a path down the garden was an apple tree on one side and a pear tree on the other. And that was perhaps about the limit of his gardening and he would take his pears to work and I think they had a show once a year that he was a railway man a- they had a little show at his er Nine Elms where he worked. And he would come home very proudly with a prize card for a some of his pears or his apples. But he really wasn't a gardener but my brothers were into it a bit more than I was. But it's my next elder brother erm - he was quite a enthusiastic gardener.

[11:57] AC: And you used that phrase pottering that your father would just potter in the garden. Like what does that mean? I mean I kind of know what it means but-

RE: Just out there enjoying - the garden was much smaller. It was not a big garden. So the limits of what you could actually put in it were pretty small anyway. Current bushes. Er particularly a magnificent er loganberry bush. Which ran in - on a a - trellis-work which was about eight feet wide and about six feet high. And produced the most magnificent fruit so we enjoyed the - the fruit gardening I think rather than vegetables because the garden wasn't big enough to grow a lot of vegetables. But with our allotment we did branch out more into potatoes and cabbages and brussels, that sort of thing.

[13:01] AC: And the allotment that your family or that your father had was that - was that a similar site?

RE: No this was -

AC: Tolworth?

RE: No, this was in Ewell. Which I mean from Tolworth is only what two miles away. But was virgin ground what was old meadows from the Ewell Court Estate. And erm so that hadn't ever been worked as far as I am aware ever as agricultural land - had always been meadow land.

[13:34] AC: And it was the occasion of the Second World War that that was done?

RE: That - that was it. And when the war ended those allotments ceased to exist some few years after the war and reverted to - back to meadow land as part of the riverside walks.

[13:48] AC: Ok. Ok. And - I mean you might not know or remember but the process of turning that that estate land into allotments, how did that - how did that come about? Did the government have to take over the land?

RE: That was the local authority erm - opened it up. But erm people had to do their own clearance of the plots. There was no mass ploughing or anything like that. Y-you did your own plot, that was marked out and you had to do the work.

[14:20] AC: Was it private land before that?

RE: Well n- the particular land where our plots were erm is open to the public generally. And has been for some ooh - since around about the early 30s when Epsom and Ewell council erm - I believe purchased the Ewell Court Estate around about 1930. And then subsequently the land er - they set up a library and clinic in the old Ewell Court House. And then the land all alongside the River Hogsmill **[15:00]** all the way from Ewell up to the Tolworth boundary was designated for an open space. So either side of the River Hogsmill you had this open space land. And erm if you can just cut off for one moment, I think I can show you something immediately just to give you some indication of that.

[15:22] AC: Ok. Do you mind if we come back to it?

RE: Yep. Ok.

AC: Is that OK? So we just keep - keep the flow.

RE: Fair enough.

AC: But no that would be great to see it. Erm. Just changing the subject slightly I mean what - what - what erm - what would you say is the thing you like most about - about having an allotment?

RE: It's a bolthole. No, seriously.

AC: So what does that mean?

RE: And I think the great thing it's - it's an ability to use your garden at home for whatever you want to use it er - my wife likes the garden and you see her flowers in the conservatory with the flowers and this half of the garden. The other half [coughs] turned over almost wholly to fruit. Soft fruits. Allotment you can experiment a bit more. You meet a different erm - people. And certainly the - as I think I was saying to you earlier the multicultural side of allotments now erm quite remarkable - I-I did n- a quick check round and I come up I think it was 15 or 17 different nationalities that I could identify that I knew of on the allotment site.

AC: That's incredible.

RE: And that would have been unheard of 30, 40 years ago.

[16:47] AC: So where are some of those - those allotment holders from around the world? Th-as far as you can understand.

RE: I think it's just a sign of the times that we are living in a -

AC: But they're mostly European or no? From all over really?

RE: Erm. They erm - yes main - th-that's a good point actually. They are mainly Europeans. We got erm a fair number of eastern Europeans, the Polish, Hungarian, Bulgarian. Hungarian. Erm. We've got some of the er north European - Estonian. Lit- erm. Latvian. But we've also got the people - the Chinese. The Iranian. Erm. And the African erm - I can't think which particular African nation it is. But central Africa. We're not talking about North Africa, we're talking well into central Africa but erm fair - brief comments or conversation I had with the chap. And describing to me where he came from. And growing nothing but sweetcorn. This enormous - a variety - which he says is seed brought from his home country. And growing it over eight feet tall.

AC: Incredible.

RE: I've - I've a - I've never seen sweetcorn like it.

[18:24] AC: And do you find generally with the allotment becoming this multicultural space more that - that's reflected in the kinds of things that people grow? Or is it - has the produce that people grow stayed the same really, mostly?

RE: Well I think they probably do bring their own stuff in. Erm. I don't know. I really - I really couldn't say whether I've taken particular notice. But they are by and large very hard workers at it. They come and they work hard at the thing. But I think they tend to treat it more as a erm - a project whereas I treat it is as a leisure activity that's a - there's combination and of course you got those people who spend enormous amounts of time ev- will go over the allotments every day and spend hours over there every day. Erm. Perhaps because er - maybe single people. Erm. Or they just bein-enjoy being out in the open air. Whatever it is I don't know.

[19:36] AC: And you said for you it's a bolthole. Is that about a sense of escape?

RE: No that was just a - I've always enjoyed the physical side of the - the garden. Enjoy that. Erm. But er - no I think no perhaps the term bolthole sounded as if I'm being driven out the house.

AC: [Laughs]

RE: Far from it. **[20:00]** Far from it. We've been in this house now er 64 years. No. Oh how old is it. 58 years. 58 years this year. So.

[20:17] AC: Is the allotment important for you in terms of living here?

RE: Oh I think so. Yes. It's erm - it is nice just to be able to either walk across or as I nine times out of ten I drive across there. But I would walk previously - watch a football on the way or a bit of cricket. Erm.

AC: On the-

RE: On the recreation ground. Between my house and the allotments. Erm. So summer and winter I could combine two things. A visit to the allotment with a watching a football match or watching a bit of cricket.

[20:55] AC: And - and earlier you were saying that - that recreation ground which you - which you pass on your way to plot was - was - was dug up during the Second World War.

RE: Well my - I'm beginning to think whether I've told a story here. But I'm - in my mind I'm absolutely certain - I can re-remember this fence around the cricket table all through the war. Because although I was only 15 when I started work erm the road between where I lived at Ruxley Lane to Kingston was a cycle route through to Kingston. And as we travelled and certainly in my early days when I started work I was travelling that route every day on push bike. And can remember that there was no - it wasn't a sport field but that centrepiece was still left. Virgin cricket ground.

AC: Yeah.

RE: The fence then removed and the whole lot ploughed up.

[21:59] AC: So as it- everything except the wicket or whatever they call it.

RE: That's it. Well w-we call it the cricket table.

AC: Was ploughed. Incredible. And so y-you s-you started work at 15. Er which must have been close to the start of the Second World War. W-what were you doing do you mind me asking for work?

RE: I went into local government. Surrey County Council. And I stayed with Surrey County Council all my working life. So. At that time erm - this is April 1945. County Hall had been bombed. And had been hit by a doodlebug. So there was a lot of damage at County Hall. And I can remember going in there and you opened a drawer - I worked in the legal department initially as a junior legal clerk. And going in there and you pulled a drawer open and you'd find bits of broken glass in the plan chests and the files and that sort of thing. Erm - the basement at County Hall had been flooded as a result of erm hoses being used and bomb damage. And later on during the time I was in the legal department as young members of staff we spent hours and hours sorting out files and old papers. In the bomb - on the basements of the - which were the store areas of the county.

[23:40] AC: And then after the war you continued working for the council?

RE: I continued - yes I did my national service, 1947-1949. And then went back to County Hall again.

[23:55] AC: And being involved in - in local government in that way or close to it d-does that change your view of the allot-the allotments and open spaces and the way the town is run?

RE: No I can't think at that time er as a young man - it wasn't - the allotment wasn't then something that I was ever thinking about. It came when I got a - erm my own house. Er. When we moved to erm to Leatherhead. I had a very garden there, had 200 feet of garden. And er that got me interested - that was quite fruitful actually because erm - with the fruit trees I had in the garden I was actually selling apples to the county council staff canteen. I would take 30 or 40 pound of weight of apples **[25:00]** into the office and I'd sell them direct to the canteen manager. But they were getting fresh fruit at better price than they were paying outside probably - I don't know.

[25:13] AC: And how much - do you remember how much you'd get for that?

RE: No I've really no idea. They were enormous fruit trees and er - they were excellent cooking apples. And the er manageress of the staff canteen was only too delighted to receive my fruit and I was delighted to get the receipts.

[25:34] AC: And what were they cooking those apples?

RE: They were - yeah cooking apples. I can't remember the type. A- I can remember the size of some of the apples. And they would be eight to nine inches diameter. Really big cooking apples. And they would keep through from one year through to March the following year. Quite -

AC: Incredible.

RE: They were excellent keepers. That was.

[26:04] AC: And erm - s-so obviously you've continued w-working on the allotments and still - still do it now. I mean what - how wo-could you describe for me a-a typical day of y'know th-that you'd be on the allotment. Do you have a routine?

RE: No. Th-except - the only routine I- I might have is to try if I can to visit the allotment each day if possible. If only to see that things er are alright. We have in the past had vandalism. And that comes in spates erm - you get a little group of lads, particularly young men. Summer holidays, they don't know what to do with themselves so let's go and see what we can er sort out on the allotments. And the destruction sometimes was horrific. Erm. Seen whole rows of leeks just smashed to the ground. Just for somebody wanting to do something. I've had my shed broken into on a couple of occasions. [Clears throat]. One occasion nothing was stolen whatsoever except the horseshoe above the shed door. The shed was broken open. Nothing appeared to have gone. My horseshoe disappeared. So my bad luck was their good luck presumably but er. Erm. Second time - I do-I think they were a couple of tools went but nothing of any great degree. The allotment hut that is there now *[phone rings]* which is yours or mine?

AC: Oh that's mine, it's ok.

RE: Ok? The allotment hut which is known as the Ernie [Comenance] Store. Erm. I don't e-if my memory serves me right was not the original hut there. The original hut was - or there certainly was a hut which was there duri-and after the war. On the driveway in but not on the site of the present hut. And it was quite close to my allotment. Or the allotment I have now. And some of these laddos going back - I'm talking now about 20 years. Had gone onto my plot and removed a number of sections of wire netting which were purposely designed for penning erm game birds, partridge and pheasant. Which had been given to me by a farmer and these lads had taken it and into the hut where they were having their odd smokes and drinks. And using my wire fencing to make furniture out of. They were using it for furniture - over boxes and various things. And when I tackled them about it - oh they said we found it laying about. I said well you didn't find it laying anywhere except on my allotment and back it comes, I - I got it back most of it. That was usable still.

[29:32] AC: So that - I mean obviously that's er - one of the kind of errr - annoyances I guess of allotments. And you talked about k-y'know checking in on it every day. Are there other things that annoy you or perturb you?

RE: We occasionally - you do occasionally get the odd pilfering. Erm. And tackling people about that when you have a good idea that they are somebody **[30:00]** who's pilfering - erm saying oo, where's your plot then, y'know you've got a plot here, didn't know you've got a plot. The- you can't go in like a bull in a china shop. You've got to have some good grounds to know that they are but you can have a pretty good idea that people come in with an empty bag, go out with a full bag. Erm. That's one little sad thing about it. Erm. The other thing is - is dogs. People taking their dogs on the allotments and allowing

them to run free. Something I object to strongly. A) Because they don't clear up after their dogs. But the dog doesn't know whether an allotment is er cultivated ground or uncultivated ground. And er unfortunately I have had a run in - not recently but in the past with people just allowing their dogs to foul wherever they fancy. Just going about wherever they fancy. And even people erm - a number of them the people are those who actually back onto the allotments. People in the local roads go out - they have access to the allotments through the gates. Which the local authority has accepted as one of those things and although they've no right of way onto the allotments, unless they are allotment holders they use the gates and er - they take their dogs out and then bring them back. To. You have to take the rough with the smooth. But then - they say oh it's the foxes. But anyone who knows their fox is a - knows their dogs. They're not so simple minded as to not know the difference.

[31:57] AC: So in terms of those - those people with houses backing onto the allotments. Do you have contact with them?

RE: Very rarely. The worst contact that happened usually is if you've got a bonfire. And the people in the houses are unhappy about the bonfire if it's over - over the top. And the allotment holders if they've got any sense they don't light a bonfire when it's in the direction of the houses. But one particular gentleman whose no longer with us er - used to - or came and complained to me on a number of recent occasion. The most recent occasion erm about my bonfire which I had only just lit. But the smoke was coming from a fire 200 yards away which was nearly choking me. Erm. But he was er - he was going to settle me. He was going to take punitive action. But there you are.

[33:03] AC: And so we've talked about the - the y'know much earlier history at the time of the war and - and I've seen the allotments just now.

RE: Mm.

AC: Which - and they seem thriving. Just wondering about that - y'know the period say 20 to 30 years ago, d'y-do y-would - how was it then compared to now? Or compared to earlier?

RE: Erm. Well certainly thi-er my first allotment on this site was - was as I say 19-1963. And people then - a-difficult to say. I was working then and probably my access to the allotment was much less than it is in retirement. Erm. I was playing cricket still, still playing cricket and football. Two young children. Erm. I was involved in scouting. I was a scout leader, my wife was a guide leader. My children both belonged to at least three organisations. Erm scouts, guides. Swimming club. Sports clubs. School activities. Your - the emphasis changes once the kids grow up and do their own thing. So that er my allotment then - it was - it was a different er- the whole time factor was different as well.

[34:42] AC: Did y-did you ever take your kids over to the allotment?

RE: Oh yes. I have a photograph somewhere amongst my souvenirs of my son with me - a-not with me, actually my work colleague erm - what we did initially we shared an allotment. **[35:00]** Erm. My immediate colleague erm - we shared this allotment and then when he moved. Erm. Dropped the allotment because it wasn't a practical thing. But er - for the first couple of years we - we shared the allotment. Which was fair - fair enough for us because we worked as a team and shared the proceeds as it were. Good.

[35:25] AC: So someti-now and then you'd take your kids over to the allotment or-

RE: My son in particular erm - not so much my daughter. They would come across erm probably on their trike or bike or something like that. But it's a boring thing for a small child. If they're not able to do what they want to do. And this is one of the little problems that still manifest itself on allotments now. Family comes down with three children, say, and a dog or a couple of dogs. The kids want to run around and the dogs want to run around. So for old stages like myself, you're not very happy about - I certainly - well I wouldn't be happy about my own children let alone any other people's children and the dangers of allotments with glass and stakes in particular. And the sort of furniture that's on allotments - it's not a place for children to use as a playground. And as we get recreation ground and swings and a - a very well appointed area as a recreation ground facilities for children, small children in particular. I don't think they're the quite the right place for kids to come just to go - to be allowed to run within i-where they want to go. That's er - but that does happen unfortunately.

[37:02] AC: Mm. And erm - er - obviously you've - yeah you've talked about changing er over the years. C-wh-when you think about the future of the allotments, what do you imagine?

RE: [Pauses] Mm. I think they'll keep going for quite a while. The people are - not so much brainwashed but are affected by modern communications much more than they used to be. So if somebody on television - and you think of the number of gardening programmes on television - is saying this or that about growing your own food. Erm. They would now be growing foodstuffs which never even heard of 20, 30 years ago. They're trying those out. I'm very much a dye in the wool traditionalists with what I grow. I tend not to grow lots of fancy herbs, A) because I'm not keen on them anyway. Erm. But people will grow 20, 30 different varieties of er - a thing on their plot. Which they may have grown only 10 previously. So they - that sort of thing is going through our society now. Erm. They know more about foreign foods and customs. And you have a greater er number of foreigners actually holding allotments. So that emphasis is going, it-it's widening all the time. Erm. People I suggested about having rhubarb have never eaten rhubarb. One or two of my er foreign allotmentees never had rhubarb. And when I given them some and they've tried it they came back, I said well - you know you don't have to eat it but at least try it. If you don't like it, well you don't have to eat it. But er - had a bit of a sad face, rhubarb. I think they may have tried to eat it raw rather than cooking it but er. Anyway. They tried it.

[39:27] AC: Erm. Thank you so much. Erm. Maybe we could look at some of those photos - if there's time, I don't want to - I don't want to keep you too much longer.

RE: No I was just thinking it's - it is a I mean my immediate neighbour were a gentlem- the same slightly older than me, a couple of years older than me. Tom Studham. His name was, Tom Studham. But he was a national vegetable society judge. And he used to show in the local show here at Tolworth - which we used to have in the local church hall. **[40:00]** And on the very last show that was in 2010 he scored top points in the show and I was next.

AC: [Laughs]

RE: So our adjoining points had the two - first two places amongst them.

[40:15] AC: So maybe he learnt a trick from your or [?].

RE: But he - I mean he was a good teacher. He was a genuine gardener. Yeah. Anyway let's just [*Papers rustling*].

[40:33] AC: Is he alive today?

RE: I don't know. He moved away, he had erm - he had a stroke. And moved up to Leicestershire. Erm. Some - oo I suppose four or five years back now.

[40:50] AC: Just thinking otherwise we could try and contact him but.

RE: I think the-

Cross-talking

RE: I think probably that - erm. Just a minute, these are just some o-

[41:05] AC: These are great. So we're talking at some photos for the record. Erm.

RE: Yeah.

AC: Fantastic beetroot.

RE: Yeah.

AC: About the size of a person's head it looks like.

RE: Completely inedible.

AC: Really?

RE: Yep. I mean as far as the beetroot was concerned I think it weighed something like three, four kilos. That one beetroot. But it was like a - I just let it grow and grow. And why that one choose to do that I never found out. The cauliflower here which you can see by the size of the colander beside it is quite - that is er-er-erm - that's about 12 inches across there. And the cauliflower when it was whole was three feet across. The foliage with it - and that was simply one of seven that I grew in a greenhouse as an experiment. That when you get seven greenhouse grown cauliflower all at the same time, what do you do with them? So neighbours and friends-

AC: Lots of cauliflower cheese?

RE: Lots of friends had cauliflower cheese as you say.

[42:09] AC: Cauliflower's good in curry actually.

RE: Yeah. Cauliflower's good anyway. Those two are the last flower show we had at Tolworth which was 2010. And those are my exhibits on the day. That put in the show. Though I think-

AC: So I can see tomatoes, parsnips, marrows. What else have we got there?

RE: Amongst that lot there are parsnips. Shallots. Tomatoes. Redcurrants. Blackcurrants. Grapes. Crabapples. Another variety of tomatoes. Potatoes. Beetroot. Courgette. Ooh, there's a - something there I - ooh, watermelon. And I can't remember what the name of that is - that fruit - aubergine. That was it, yeah.

[43:08] AC: So was this a special crop in a way for the entry for the prize? Or would you normally produce this kind of variety?

RE: These were what I was growing normally f-for our family use. But that is the stuff which on the day that I put in the show and y'know if you got for example that's something that a show card - best exhibit in the show, whatever - or in that section. I can't remember what that was now, it could have been grapes, it might have been potatoes. And they would dish the cards out. And each one would have its

erm er - card one way or the other. That is the actual last programme of the s-of the last show that we had. That is the -

[44:02] AC: So this is the Tolworth District Leisure and Garden Society Annual Produce Show from 2010 pamphlet.

RE: Yep. Yes that was - but you can see the - the show also took in other things. Erm. Flowers. Erm. And there were people who exhibit nothing but flowers. Others would do domestic science. Photography. But the flower show was the main basis of the thing.

[44:35] AC: And there seems to be in this programme as well classes as well as prize giving. There are workshops.

RE: Yep. It was er - it was very well - it was a very well organised show erm. Even to the last one which was a disappointment in so far as erm the secretary for that show erm who **[45:00]** er - and it was the last one - was a man who took on the job and because nobody would - else would. But he didn't have the expertise and he made a - a vital mistake in so far as the show date was altered from the 1st Saturday in September to the 2nd Saturday. And that was for - I-I - there were some domestic reasons I'm not 100% certain, I think it was something to do with the wedding. For whatever reason erm and it altered and nobody else was then prepared to take over the running of the show. And the thing in 2010 just stopped. Just ceased to exist. And there'd been the show going there since I think 1920 or thereabouts. So all those years and people who used to do the show were very very dedicated people. Erm. The secretary was first class. The chairman. And they got good gardening knowledge as well.

[46:07] AC: So you'd just get the very keenest gardeners at that show?

RE: Al- well you would get the k-the keenest would be some of the answers to it. But erm I got interested in showing because my local scout group decided some years back to run a flower show and ran a very successful flower show on the opposite side of Tolworth Broadway. I mean not 200 yards away in the - as the crow flies virtually. From where this show was held. So that we had two shows a year. One in July, early summer show. And one in erm September. And there was the a-another erm greenhouse society I think ran a show in late September so there were three shows locally in Surbiton at that time. That's my early photograph-

[47:06] AC: So this is a photograph of you and-

RE: No. This is a photograph of my colleague at work. I took the photograph, my son here probably about five years of age.

[47:17] AC: And what's he standing on there?

RE: That's a spade actually. He's standing on a spade dug in the ground with his two feet on the spade and Bernard is standing beside him. I think - well I'd rather keep showing you stuff that you've seen. That's- that's the sort of scorecard which each competitor in the show would have one of these. So he put in one item in one class - he just had w-a card exactly the same when you put in 20, 30 items. And then they total up at the end of the day who your prize money there I think - well I did alright. Got 15 pounds, 25. In prize money.

[48:03] AC: And what year was that?

RE: This was 2010.

AC: OK. Not bad.

RE: So at the end of the day not only that did they get the prize money, but if I tell you that in the raffle I won a bicycle.

AC: [Laughs]

RE: Brand new bicycle.

AC: So 2010 was your lucky year.

RE: It was a lucky year. That was er - a donation from [pause] I can't think who the donor was for that. But I had already got a bicycle. I didn't need the bicycle. I then put it in a raffle for a charity which was the following two weeks later. And it raised - ooh, two hundred and something pounds. And the person who won it in the raffle immediately put it up for auction.

AC: [Laughs]

RE: At the meeting of this erm - is my bowls club. Went up for auction, another £80 was raised. In the auction. And I felt that was terrific. Yes. Oh that's the - that it is the print of that one of my grandson painting.

[49:11] AC: So this is a photo of you - no, your grandson sitting at your sheds on the allotment. And there's a painting version of that.

RE: That's the painting my grandson did of - of the thing. This is a - you can see my shed there. That was moving the shed. From the adjoining allotment.

[49:34] AC: So how did you do that? Move the sheds.

RE: Brute force. Brute force and fortunately this gentleman here, Tony [Trinkwon]. He is the man who was very much involved with the setting up of the Millennium Park. Millennium Ground. And he was the chap who had the tractors and the bulldozer and did an enormous amount of er retired police officer

[50:00] if I remember rightly. And erm - in-excuse me.

[50:06] AC: So did you slide the shed along?

RE: Oh there's the bulldozer. We got it off its base, humped it onto the bulldozer, which you can just see the edge of it there. We got the bulldozer in a position where we could do it. And moved it to my shed, I already got the base put down where we're going to do it. And there it is in position shortly after the shed had been moved. And that was made - that shed - when it was on that site - was made by the man who had that site. He didn't buy that shed. He built it.

[50:42] AC: So you inherited that?

RE: I inherited that shed from my neighbour and he built it, did all the construction work at home. In sections. And then brought it there and built it, put it together. But it's - it's - when you look at it it looks like a erm proper commercial shed. But he was a clever chap, he built it at home.

[51:07] AC: W-were exchanges like that between neighbouring plots quite frequent?

RE: He moved away erm - the - that particular chap moved away to Shropshire. So that erm - he couldn't take his shed with him. Or wasn't going to. But he not only left me the shed, he left me the contents.

One of which items was a case of 48 cans of Coca Cola. Which I loathe and detest. And which was so old as it turned out they were blowing the actually things were disintegrating. So they had to be ditched. But a complete case of Coca Cola. These are mainly with my grandson whose been er- enjoyed coming over there, helping me here to put in the base for the greenhouse. Mixing up the cement. And that's one of the other joys of over there on a fine day. Bit of picnicking.

[52:10] AC: Barbecue.

RE: Barbe-well. Not strictly bar-this is scout barbecuing. This is cooking on an open fire, bangers and beans and sausages and what have you. Winter's days.

AC: Wow. That's beautiful.

RE: Wet days.

AC: So it flooded?

RE: Flooded. Erm. I think that's my adjoining - no. That's er one next to the beekeeper. That plot. And the character erm who owns - who is the er user of that plot - still around. When he came down the next time, brought a lifebelt with him.

[52:55] AC: [Laughs] Can't have been that bad.

RE: Big Jim is how he's known to me. Big Jim and he brought a lifebelt which I think is still on the plot somewhere. But that's my immediate neighbour's plot - you can see it, how the rain's affected - you get those sort of situations and... *[Pages turning, mumbling]* Oh there's more of my showing off. One day's crop from a crop of strawberries on the plot.

AC: It's good.

RE: It's just how well the thing works at that time. It's erm - I don't know. Ah. You mentioned about how do we move the plot, how do we move the thing, there's the one on top. Chap with his-

AC: [Laughs]

RE: And these are all - Big Jim. Tony *[Trinkwon]*. Martin who is a neighbour up the road. Great chap. Artist. Art teacher as well. Great but a good gardener. And if you don't know the name of something you go and ask Martin. Martin's-

[54:12] AC: So he knows the name of all the seeds...

RE: He - if he buys a plant I think he gets it embedded up here in his head. He's bought such a such a plant and he remembers what it is. *[Mumbles]* Talk about tame foxes. In the garden. These are the joys, my grandson and I - we enjoy a bonfire. That's our f-robins. No these are all odds and ends I've - I don't know that there's a lot more there I can... Of any real import. And these- I take thousands of photographs at times. But if you're talking about **[55:00]** showing that's real - that isn't our local show. That is a show in Wales. A national show. And that's the sort of quality food that allotmenters can still produce. They really are quite remarkable some of them. No - that's all - they're all show off photographs, it's er - stop talking *[heeds?]* and get on with some. Or allow you to get on with-