

James Anthony Orpin

DOB 13 March 1948

Recording 161020_0042

0.03 Born Crump Meadow, Cinderford, 13 March 1948 in an ex-army surplus square canvas tent

0.43. Parents; Father mostly worked in pits, from Cinderford, no money himself but family background well to do. Mother was traveller, family travelled around.

1.14 Grandfather James Orpin, Father Wilfred Orpin

1.26 Told his family were well to do, his grandfather paid for drinks in the pub during the Depression his father's aunty was governor at St Whites School, Cinderford. Family owned shops and houses in Cinderford.

2.02 Jim's father died when he was 19, both father and grandfather buried St Johns Church Cinderford

2.24 Fathers jobs mainly in several collieries.

2.26 Working conditions. On first trip for new workers knocked brake off winding gear so free fall to frighten them. Took 2 hours walking to get to where working along dram roads 4 foot high to as little as 2 foot where they worked; crawled to get there.

3.21 Father worked at Waterloo colliery then Steam Mills Tar Depot (Burley Wiggins??) working in the boilers, produced tarmac for roads

3.48 Death of father at age 62 following operation for kidney stones

4.06 Mother, Jessie Greenhouse, traveller, moved around with her father, a travelling showman and travelled with gypsies.

4.49 May have had gypsy background, travelled with horse and caravan.

5.10 Ethel Meek, an old lady his father lived with in a caravan in the woods and whom Jim visited.

5.57 Mothers relatives, lived on Crump Meadow in winter months, and moved around. Two sisters and two brothers, eldest lived in Southampton.

6.25 Grandfather worked on the fare, died when James aged 6 and gran when he was 20 –she lived in a bungalow, Bronze Ash, towards Ross on Wye in later life, stopped travelling.

7.13 Siblings – older half-sister; grew up together, and sister 18 years younger grew up in a house not on Crump Meadow

8.500 Death of older sister, age 29, in car accident by Cock Inn, Blakeney.

9.00 Memories growing up on Crump Meadow. Didn't have things like most people. Dislike of school. First encounter of a toilet aged 5. Them and us at school

9.40 Travellers children went to school in winter to get free diner. Travellers stuck up for each other. Often missed school; school bobby knew him well.

10.16 Schools, Bilson then Double view

10.30 Traveller children numbers varied; 3 or 4 per class usually, more in winter to get free dinners when parents working in the woods making pegs, hop picking, pea picking etc.

11.07 Felt different; teachers treated the travellers the same but didn't go up to town, no money for sweets.

11.40 Benefits, had things other kids didn't have - freedom, air rifles, knives

12.08 Travellers work- fortune telling, making and selling carved wooden pegs, crepe paper flowers, made on Crump Meadow

13.13 Mothers work- making pegs and anything, she hardly went to school

13.40 Clothes – bought old jumpers from jumble sales, unravelled and reknitted by mother

14.01 Cooking, usually outside on floor, only on stove inside caravan when raining

14.20 Types of food –cow's leg bones, scrapped out the marrow and ate raw or boiled and boiled and fried brains from sheep, cows, and pigs. Food still rationed when growing up

15.20 Never went hungry. No sweets, cake or crisps; had toffee apple made from treacle

15.50 Warmth – never cold, plenty of wood in forest, always fire outside for heat and cooking. Always something cooked to eat, even when out pea picking. Never sandwiches.

16.40 Shoes from jumble sales, second hand clothes

17.05 Got on with children and families.

17.30 Crump Meadow; travellers mainly stayed winter time, except father who had a job but lived on the site.

18.00 annual hop picking at Much Marcle, Tony Harrison's farm. Ran into September so late back to school and always behind.

18.46 No toilets on Crump Meadow, went behind a tree, taken for granted

19.13 Bath in old tin bath in open by fire

19.40 Aspirations and discrimination; father tried to get council house but not allowed as living on Crump Meadow. Cousin passed exam for grammar school but not allowed to go

20.30 Jim didn't take 11 plus exam, missed school because hop picking and didn't like school. Attended three days per week

21.14 First house in about 1959 aged 11. Moved from Crump Meadow Wood into house in Steam Mills. Description of the house. One electric plug, light in kitchen and front room, tap outside, no electricity upstairs, no toilet in house. . On Crump Meadow collected water from springs, no wells.

22.40 Big change for the better. House owned by travellers and let. Sink but no taps. Range cooker

23.30 Close to Crump Meadow, retain contact with friends.

24.00 Catching the train- drivers stopped to let them on; travelling in brake van with stove and kettle

25.41 Relocation of Crump Meadow Travellers Community by Forestry Commission. Put up boundary posts to block off access and built traveller site with toilet. Gradually as people moved out houses knocked down and wood blocked. Forest bye laws.

27.24 Saw the changes himself. C??? Tree Lodge where old lady who looked after him and then his cousin lived. Knocked down as became empty. Shut off areas of wood. Some house were owned so couldn't be knocked down but made roads private access such as Brierley

29.09 Location of traveller camp –near Steam Mills, tram road, railway bridge and tunnels where brook ran and roads collapsed. Travellers didn't like it, some lived in the toilets

30.54 Travellers camp closed around 1963 when new site opened

31.28 School. Double view school – not too bad. Later moved from Shapridge Farm House, near Green Bottom, to Newnham then went to Abenhall School. School life - all kids wore uniform, but he wore leather jacket and jeans. Mr Ellis School bobby knew him well - checked for those not attending school. Didn't understand lesson, cane for smashing a window. Rode motor bike to school. Bullied by head boy until showed him a bowie knife – no more trouble

34.15 Left school at 15. First job – Liston Joinery Works, Mitcheldean, odd jobs, floor sweeping. Company made door, cabinets etc.

35.00 Move to a Saw Mill age 15 at Cinderford. Left after few days because no transport

35.35 Unemployed, helped dad at work. Motor bike and independence

36.00 Working at the Saw mill at Cinderford –'Mills' .working in yard, stacking the cogs, cutting pit timbers of various sizes to hold up roof etc. Types of pit timbers -all named, cogs, lids cover boards, sleepers etc.

37.24 Working on saw bench, two people on the bench. Two saws – 32 inch and 48 inch

39.04 'Mills' - number of employees – 6/7, owner's sons drove the lorries

39.40 Moved to Newnham from Shapridge, got job making glass thermometers at Zeal's in Newnham near the clock tower (*G H Zeal Ltd, Old vicarage then Manor House*). Pay at Zeal's £2.50 per week, gave £1.50 to mother and kept £1.00 himself. Later earned £4.00 per week at Mills – hard work

41.10 Offered jobs at several saw mills, including Bert Coleman, Ruardean Hill. Mainly worked for 'Mill's'.

42.03 Source of timber for the mills. Originally from the Forest but with Dutch Elm disease came from everywhere.

42.25 Destination of cut timber – Wales, collieries

42.54 Changed jobs to earn more money, switching between saw mills. Mills, Bert Coleman, Sidney Smart. Got on well with Mills owner, treated him well, his wife gave him extra pay

44.31 Crane driving at Mills saw mill, unloading lorries, and picking up timber from fields cut due to Dutch Elm disease which was sold. Stopped driving them because distance. Old army lorry slow to drive – 35 mph down to 15 mph uphill and long distances such as Droitwich, covered took a long time to get there.

46.04 Four years at Waterloo Mill driving crane. Got job because of accident caused by crane driver who was death and dumb, put steel rope across road, car hit rope and cut top off car and killed the driver. Crane driver moved to another job

47.15 Cranes difficult to drive, lorry drivers didn't like them, poorly maintained, tough gear boxes. One drive had accident at Crickely hill went into a garden, due to air breaks failing

48.09 Moved back to saw mills. Piece work at saw mills – 4000 cube of timber, no regular pay, sometimes finished at 2.30. No unions. Could earn twice typical wage in 1978

49.27 Gave up work. Worked on own; mending cars and other things. Lots of skills but no qualifications, self-taught, did not do well at school.

50.38 Parent's lived at Shapridge, The Paddocks at Newnham which was sold then to, Green Bottom.

51.21 Left parents' home aged 19 after father died. Mum and her younger sister lived with him for a time. Married 1966. Private house then council house.

52.40 Mother stopped keeping in touch with travellers when got old. Brother a traveller. Visited him on travellers site by Evesham, suspicious of outsiders, would tell him but recognised his mother and told her – Coventry

54.25 Lost contact – most people from Crump Meadow wood now died. Regrets not finding out more about his life from his father.

55.00 Fathers brother William, died at Waterloo pit in 1937, overcome by black damp (gas). Kills very quickly

55.45 Strange story associated with Uncle Will death. Difficulties in finding death certificate. Recorded in ledgers. Read it in records at Gloucester records office, recorded in paper. Buried 4 days after death at St Johns church, Cinderford before death certificate. Pit owners covered up

59.09 Fathers had other brothers and sisters but no contact. One sister also lived in the wood

1.00.06 Hopewell colliery owner, Robin Morgan, died last year, has newspaper reports of uncle's death – William Orpin – to remember him. Robin knew his dad.

1.01.44 Importance of passing on family memories. Younger sister born at Gloucester when living at Green bottom, lives in Mitcheldean

1.02.30 Misses the Forest - only place really misses is in the wood where he grew up. Home is not in any house. Would be happy in a caravan in the wood. Childhood taught him how to do without. Remembers days very fondly and would go back tomorrow