Newbold Heath

Transcript of conversation with Clem Petcher about his life at the Heath

15th. February 2023

Transcribed by Roger King

When did you come to the Heath?

1978. I used to go up there before I moved up. I delivered firewood for my dad, so I knew most of the people before I moved in. I only moved there because of coal subsidence where we lived in Barlestone. My dad had a coal delivery business also selling firewood.

What were the things you remember about the Heath before you moved there?

Not a lot. I would only be about 15. I can remember the shop. My dad, before he became a coal merchant, actually worked for Wilkinson's. He used to fetch the milk churns or move potatoes - once down to London.

It must have been a lot quieter, then?

Yes. Merrylees Road got through to the pits . It had been an old cart track but when the pits opened up they made it into a proper road sometime around the war.

When did you move in? Was it your first marital home?

Sort of, but I actually moved into number 2 owned then by the coal board. They moved us into there before they decided what they were going to do with our house in Barlestone. They moved us in there rent and rate free. Eventually they decided to knock the house down in Barlestone. It was where the conker trees are now just passed Statham's potatoes – almost opposite their house.

There has always been the story of the subsidence on the road going up to Barlestone. Were you around when that happened?

Yes, I can remember it as a straight, flat road – we used to call it the prom – we used to walk up to the Dragon for a drink with my grandad. We used to go with him and play outside. It was basically flat. I can remember the subsidence at my house. It was 4 inches over at the top than the bottom. And my house was six inches nearer to Barlestone at the top than the bottom. The subsidence didn't actually go under me but a house further down the road. They went straight down with no subsidence, no cracks or anything. We slipped into the hole.

So, when you got to the Heath who were the people around you?

Most of them were retired by then. There were the Poole's at 17, next door was a Mrs Kind. Next to us was Mrs Bell. Number 4 was a chap known as Chunky. The shop was there, and the show room was there when we moved up.

It always felt like quite a busy place when we went up there. Was it?

Yes, with the garage. We have had some fun up there. I used to run bus trips to places like Skegness, the American Adventure, Alton Towers. I ran mystery trips. I still run a tote up there. Free draws on a bank Holiday. Easter free draw for Easter Eggs and the same at Christmas. We had treasure hunts and a barbecue at John Robin's house. Opposite, there was a piece of land.

Would you call the 80's the Heath's heyday socially?

80s and 90's. From 1992 up to last year I ran a trip to the pantomime at the Concordia Theatre but I am not going to do that anymore now. I still have people in the tote who live at Newbold now but once lived at the Heath. I have seen some changes with the new houses. The row of houses at the end, the chap who built them built our trough for free. The parking is bad. To be honest, they all have parking spaces at the rear, about two each, though it is not necessarily them parking there.

When we did the neighbourhood plan we came up to the Heath to interview people and what was striking was the number of people who said they wanted as little as possible to do with the village. Not because they didn't like the village but because it was quiet up on the Heath.

People don't move a lot to be honest. Most of the people who have moved its mainly because of work.

Has the hamlet had much to do with the farms?

Not really. Mouncy used to let the kids play in the field at Pool house as long as they didn't do any damage. At one time the kids used to be able to play outside the house on the road. It was lovely up there, but the only problem was there was no place for the kids to play.

How did the people take to the wind turbine when it went up?

There was a bit of concern from the start, but you don't hear anything now. We are getting advantage from it. We should be getting somewhere around £3000 for 25 years. That's what paid for the speed sign. I was hoping that eventually we could get enough money together to buy a bit of land for a play area, but I don't think there is much chance of that. The money is ringfenced within the parish council budget.

We did have some fuss about the chicken huts going up. What worried me was the smell. We put up a good fight to get it stopped. We got it stopped at the planning, but he appealed and got it. When you employ a barrister what chance have you got?

Do you sense now that there is less of a sense of community?

I would think so, yes. One or two of us say that the townies come in from work and you don't see them again, but a lot of it is work related. It's not too bad. I go and meet people when they come. I try to get them in the tote and I tell them I am their representative on the parish council. With me running the tote I get to know more people than anyone. My neighbour said this. She said they come home from work, go in home, shut the door and that's it.

I do know people that are not in the tote, I try to get around. I can remember how it was when I got up there. What it is is that the world has gone faster. Everybody seems to be in a rush. At one time there was me, next door, some from across the road, we used to come out and have a chat. You don't do that now. They look at you funny if you do that now.