Transcript of Interview with

Lindsay Chapman (Nee Wilkinson)

7th March 2023

Background

Lindsay has lived all of her life at Newbold Heath and is part of the Wilkinson family who have lived at Newbold Heath for over 80 years. Lindsay's father and two brothers owned and ran the Heath garage, and Lindsay's Great-uncle Len had run a haulage company prior to the garage being built.

At the time of this interview Lindsay was living at Corner House Bagworth Road with her husband Graham.

Were you born on the Heath?

Yes, actually it was in Bond Street in Leicester. But yes, this house was built in 1950 and I was born in 1965.

The Wilkinson family had been on the Heath for some time by then?

I can't tell you how long; obviously the garage was here. But my grandma and grandad lived at 29 Bagworth Road, which is next door. He owned all this land and that's why the garage was built on it. My mum and dad lived with them until the house was built, my brother was born in 1950. So, there was my brother Michael, my sister Lorraine and then me. Sadly, Lorraine died outside our house on the junction there, in 1972.

The garage was then run by the family: my dad, Derek and Rex. Derek used to live at 5 Bagworth Road, down the road. And where the two houses were built down there it is where they had the coal lorry garage. It was where the business started. They also moved milk churns.

That would be pre-war would it?

Yes, it must have been. My grandad was in the navy in Portsmouth, and my dad was born down there, Hayling Island. I really don't know what brought them up here. I don't know where Len was.

What was your experience of growing up at the Heath?

Well, it was a very close loving family. You had got your uncles, your grandmas and grandads. Everything revolved around here and the Methodist church. You went to church on a Sunday then all the family would meet here for tea in this room or at grandmas and then it was school again.

Did it feel quite an isolated community in comparison with Newbold?

Well, I was seven-and-a-half when my sister died and from then on, I felt very isolated, in that I (well there was a shop here) I was never allowed to go down to Newbold on my own. If we went we were taken, or I had friends back. There were friends up here.

The thing is, with the Wilkinson's and the Methodist Church that was the link with Newbold. In that the Wilkinson's seemed to run the church. It wasn't true but it was just that there was that many of them every role that there was at the Methodist's there was a Wilkinson that had it. But perhaps that for me was the link between the village and the Heath.

Perhaps for me catching the bus and going to the High School was a big thing for us, because it was the only thing you did on your own.

Did you feel a difference between those of you living on the Heath and those living in the Village?

Not in the primary school, no. The only thing with me is that I used to come home from school at dinner time. I don't know why? It was after my sister died. My dad would pick me up and it was an hour-and-a-half, so I didn't have any socialising at lunch time. That's the only thing that stuck out, but it never bothered me. But I did wonder why it happened.

I used to go to my grandma for dinner, even though my mum was at home. I don't know why. She used to make egg custard which I loved. I never walked home or to school on my own, one of my uncles or aunts would pick me up or drop me off.

When you were young did you have much interaction with the garage?

I used to go in and across the road to my dad all the while. They used to have a coffee break and sometimes I would just go and sit with them I knew everybody. It was a nice place.

Was there a social life for the children on the Heath?

Yes. Our lawn here (***pointing to front garden***) was known as the Heath playing field. Nobody up here had much garden, living on a terrace. So, they used to come here. Michael, my brother, used to play football and cricket, and then the same happened with my boys. We never had a proper fence panel because the ball, cricket or football, would always hit and damage it. Graham was always hammering because they had knocked the fence down again. So that went on every generation: me, Michael and then our children and their friends.

Was there a time when you thought it was too busy on the road for children to play here?

No, not really.

Was there a good social life between everyone on the Heath?

Yes, you would know everybody. Now, apart from those who have stayed here (most have died) its not the same. I can tell you now, who lived in every house. But now you don't see people, just the odd person walking their dog. Apart from going to work and coming back, these roads are relatively quiet.

I believe there were events organised?

We used to go to the pantomime every year at the Concordia, but nothing more than that.

When you were growing up as children, did you have much to do with the farms at all?

I used to be friends with Ellen Bates at Chater Farm. She was an only child. We used to go to her little bungalow for birthday parties. It was the same here in this room, we could have twenty children at a party.

We played in the fields around Ellen's farm. This is a story my grandad told me. If you go by Chater farm footpath down toward Newbold, in the third field from Chater there is a massive hole in the field and my grandad told me it was where a bomb dropped. So, we called it the bomb hole. Martin Bates was cutting the hedges near there during the Covid time and we stopped to have a chat. I mentioned the bomb hole and he said, 'Oh no' . I said 'No Martin. My grandad told me

that story and that's how I am going to believe it.' Grandad used to take us across the fields. Who was I to doubt my grandad.

Tell me about the subsidence.

Well, it was 1970 and I was only five. All I can remember is that we moved out and for quite a few years we lived up there at number 2 into a Coalboard house, while it was done.

NB: The house was subjected to major subsidence and the Coalboard arranged to have the house jacked up and strengthening pillars placed under the building.

The house still has some settlement cracks, but I don't think its going to fall again.

When you left school did you go to work in the garage straight away?

First my Dad didn't want me to come and work at the garage he wanted me to go and do all the things that I wanted. But the college at the time I was there it was very bad. There was a lot of girls in my class who were pregnant, and it was sort of if you wanted to learn they would teach you, but when you have a majority of the class who didn't you couldn't. The teachers were probably young, I don't know. Looking back at that now I'm thinking I wasn't getting on very well.

It was Easter I think. I'd stayed on to do the exams and I wanted to (it was typing then, not computers) do my typing exam. The teacher was only putting us in after April or something. I said look can I do my typing exam because I think I'm going to be leaving. She said no I can't do it. Anyway, I insisted and in the end she let me do it. My dad said it was the year ending in the garage and Rex did all the stock taking, he was the parts department. And he said look leave there and come and do the stocktaking here and then I'll send you to either secretarial college or on a Vauxhall secretarial training course. So that's what I did, and I came and worked in the garage. And then Rex said, well you can't go anywhere now because you're in. And I didn't.

And then my dad died. I was getting married on September the 5th. We always used to go on holiday and take Michael's children to Great Yarmouth in our caravan and everything for the wedding was planned and sorted. You couldn't do anything more and this was like the August bank holiday before and so we went on this holiday and came back on the Sunday and my dad had a heart attack driving the car. We crashed into a ditch. I broke my shoulder; my mum had crushed bones in her back. She was in Kings Lynn hospital for week or a fortnight. Then they had to bring the caravan and the car back. Different men from the garage went over. It was rally, rally, rally round.

I then got married in the October and we came and stayed here with my mum, and we didn't move out because she needed our help. She couldn't walk for a while.

And then Derek and Rex decided to retire. Derek used to work in the body shop. He used to spray cars. Rex was in the garage and my dad was in the office doing all the accounts, but my dad was always the brains. So, I don't think they could carry on. My dad was going to retire a couple of years after I married, but anyway, so they decided to retire and they were going to put the garage up for sale, but Michael begged my mum to leave my dad's money in and carry the garage on.

Then in 1994 Michael had a heart attack and he died. Then my mum, twenty years before had been diagnosed with a bone marrow disease, myeloma, and they didn't give her more than two or three years to live but with chemo and everything she came through it. But after Michael died, the cancer came back and she died in 1996. So, then it was just me with Graham carrying it on. We were just left with it really and it was hard at the time.

Vauxhall then came and pulled the plug, because their vision for the garages they had was that they wanted them to be these big glasshouses in town. Big showrooms. If you wanted to stay you had to invest so much money. We didn't want to do that. In 2002 we closed and obviously these houses have been built.

Did you ever think you wanted to move away at all?

Not at that time, no. Graham's dad came round one Sunday and said, "I'll bet you will want to pack up and move now." And I said, 'Why?' and he said, 'Well, how are you going to feel when there are all houses are built.' That didn't bother me at all, and it never has.' We did think about it when Graham's mum was unwell and needed help and his dad was struggling. Graham said, "Do you think we ought to move to Sapcote?' He was originally from there. I always said that if I was ever to move it would be to go abroad to live, because I couldn't bare the feeling of driving past this house with other people living in it.

We put the house up for sale and we sold it. It took two years before we could sell it because of Covid. We were going to take it off the market but then somebody from Peterborough wanted to buy it. So, we went to look for a house to buy and we couldn't find anything we liked. So we took it off the market.

I am happy to sit here and look out at the trees and the clouds. And you see the squirrels running up the tree. I am fit enough to walk to Newbold and I do every day, whether it's across the fields or just down the road. It doesn't bother me being isolated up here at the moment.

Others at the Heath have expressed a similar feeling about being close enough to Newbold to access it's amenities, but far enough away to enjoy the isolation. Is that how you feel?

Yes, I can understand that. You see I have never lived on a housing estate, and I don't know what it feels like. I don't know whether I would enjoy that at the moment. I know since Covid it has changed me. I am happy to be at home all day doing my knitting or my cooking or cleaning. If I don't see everybody it doesn't bother me.

We have four grandchildren now and they are dropped off in a morning and I have them four times a week.

So I had Albert when he was three months old and right up to Covid and he's four next week and then he lived in Birstall and Sophie was born in the November. I was going to have her in the September but I couldn't because of Covid.

And I couldn't see Albert and that was awful, and it was his first birthday on Good Friday and he wanted a sandpit and we bought him one with the sand and all the tools in the bucket. Graham was off work, and I sat here on the night before Albert's birthday and I said to Graham, "I'm going to get up early in the morning and I'm going to put some shopping in the car, and I am going to take the sandpit to Albert.' Graham said, "Oh you can't. You can't go on the A46." I said, "I am going because it's his birthday and this child needs his sandpit." We went about 7:00 o'clock in the morning and if anybody had stopped us we'd got food in the boot and lots of stories in our head about needing to take the food. And do you know there wasn't a sole on the A46.

We put the shopping at the front door and the sandpit, and Albert stood on the windowsill with his hands on the window and it broke my heart. I drove back sobbing and I said I can't do this. So, I swore, no matter what, I was going to have the children. I couldn't go through that again.