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Transcript:

Speaker 1- Marsha O'Mahony (MOM)

Speaker 2 – Mike Andrews (MA)

MOM: OK Mike, thank you so much for coming along today, you must be so busy. Um, if you could just tell us who you are, um, how long you've been in Found hope and how long you've been involved with the club walk.

MA: I'm Mike John Andrews and I've been involved with the club since I was about 5 years of age, and I've lived in the village all my life.

MOM: Wow! What's your earliest memory of the club walk?

MA: I think when I was a boy and I first got onto the banner of the ropes, carrying the ropes – because we used to have four children on four ropes, which we still use, on the banner for steadying it if there's a gale or high winds – and I got onto that and I was on that until I was 17.

MOM: What happened at 17?

MA: Well, I then started carrying the oak tree.

MOM: You're gonna have to tell us that story about Mr Haines, aren't you?

MA: Yes. Yep, that's with the Chairmanship though.

MOM: OK, so – oh OK, so tell us about how you came to be carrying the oak bough, an 80 year-old-gentleman.

MA: Well, an 80-year-old gentleman, Mr Donald Watkins – I used to – who helped to cut the tree, and I used to walk the side of him to hold the tree for him when we went to the guest places and that's how it started. Then – I – he w 'come, were getting on towards 80, he said to me at the New Inn one day: 'I'm gonna walk to the church with the bough' and he said 'I want you to carry him after' and he said 'I'll sand the side of you and I'll hold him while you haves a drink' he said 'at the people's places'. And that's what we done and we went and I carried him all through the village, everywhere we went, we come back to the Green Man which – we used to go to the Green Man for lunch in

those days, and he said 'you didn't make a bad of that, boy! He said, I think you can do that every year now.'

MOM: So tell us about the time um, you were telling me just now, about the time you wer c- you got - it was the in rain and you're carrying the oak bough, what happened?

MA: Well, you used to get red white and blue from the ribbons running and you used to carry on just the same as if it was a sunny, dry day, we used to - never used to stop - and the band used to still kept coming behind and the banner. We went to -erm - the Green Man once, we was invited there, and we got there and it absolutely poured, it did, and he had a barrel of beer and everybody run away and there was nobody there to drink it. So there was me and another couple, it was Arthur from the Green Man what was doing - hosting us, he said 'welcome boys, you better drink some of this beer up!'. So we drunk as much as we could and then we had to go down to the Forge and Ferry to finish off after. So we went down to the Forge and Ferry and that's where we packed up, wet through!

MOM: There's a lot of drinking, isn't there Mike?

MA: Yep there is a lot of drinking, not so much nowadays as it used to be, because I can -I was the one what drunk the most drink in a day which was recorded in the whole Club Walk. From 10 in the morning, 'til 12 at night - 42 pints.

MOM: How come you're still standing, here...

MA: I was still standing. I was. And I was up early the next morning because, that year, the Salvation Army Band was playing and they wouldn't walk so we had to have John Norman's Arctic Lorry from Holme Lacy, dress him all up and put chairs on there for 'em to sit on the play following me and the banner round the village and the rest of the people with the club sticks.

Julia Goldsmith: 42 pints!...
(laughter)

MOM: 42. Pints.

MA: Yep.

Julia Goldsmith: That's amazing.. and-

MOM: God, yeah - how old were you then?

MA: Ooh... I suspect I was between 30 and 40.

MOM: God, did you feel that the next day?

MA: No - 'cos I had to get up at 6'o'clock in the morning and I

had to get to Holme Lacy with another person to take the decorations down because the Arctic Lorry was going out to be loaded. And when we got up there, we hadn't got a pair of steps with us because he had barriers right round, higher than what were, where we had the decorations on. So the next best thing – the person what was with me, I got her in me arms and held up while she undone 'em and I walked all the way round the edge of the lorry.

MOM: You're president aren't you?

MA: Yes.

MOM: and you were chair, so can you tell us about your different roles in the walk, and how came to be President?

Rick Goldsmith: Can you say that you were a President for the camera as well please?

MOM: Yeah.

MA: Yeah I am a...

MOM: Oh but say it to me Mike, just say ' I have been President for so many years, I've been Chair...'

MA: Yeah. I've, um, been President for at least 30 years and Chairman for over 40. Until this year as I've passed it onto Geoff Hardwick. And the reason I've passed it on the Geoff Hardwick, 'cos he's an old Fownhope person and I wanted to keep it in Fownhope with the people what was in charge.

MOM: How did you come to be President?

MA: Well, it was from all the work that I'd for the Heart of Oak and they decided to put me as President.

MOM: But who was, um, Louis Haines?

MA: He was Chairman before me, MR Louis Haines was.

MOM: So tell us how he passed on the Chairmanship to you.

MA: Well, he used to be the one what used to carry–

MOM: Could you say 'Louis Haines was the man...'

MA: Yeah. Louis Haines was the man what used to carry the one side of the banner and I always used to be with him as well, in front with the Oak trees. So, one day, I was on the committee and he on the committee, like, being Chairman. He said 'I've proposed Mike Andrews carrying on with my Chairmanship' and I took on, from that day, Chairman.

MOM: For how long?

MA: For 40 some odd years it is.

MOM: So are there any moments in the Club Walk, in all your years with it, that stand out? Any high points? Any mammoth drinking sessions? Any characters?

MA: Oh we had some characters alright – and um, we er used to, in the summer time, have barbecues at different people's places as a bit of a party, and drink. And um, Mr Desi Biggs's we used to go down to, sometimes – and we made some home made cider once down there, we did, two or three of the committee. So, it was ready to try, so when we had this barbecue down there, they decided to try it – so they put me barman down in the cellar – so I was down in the cellar 'cos they'd put all the drink down in there, because they had a nice cellar there. So, um, there was a character from Common Hill who used to come round and – Dave Door. So, he used to come down and he had a saying in the pub about when he wanted another pint – 'more beer vicar!' – like that. So, at the time, at Dezi Biggs's, down in the cellar, I had the local vicar there talking to. Dave come down the steps into the cellar and he said: 'more beer vicar!' and I was talking to the vicar and vicar didn't know what to say and I didn't know what to say to Dave! But we ended up with laughing and that was it, like.

MOM: So, it's been your role to cut the oak bough every club walk.

MA: Yes

MOM: So, I mean, could you tell me about that and how long you've been doing it.

MA: I've been doing it since i was 7 years of age.

MOM: But can you say what it is you are doing, because I wont be...

MA: I

've been cutting the the oak tree, since I was 17 years of age and I've had various people helping me. I had a Mr John Wallace, one time, helping me...

MOM: OK Mike, can we just talk about the oak bough again from the beginning again...

MA: I'll start from the beginning

MOM: Can you say 'oak bough' and how long you've been doing it, what it is, what it means...

MA: I've been cutting the oak bough since 17 years of age and I've had various people helping me. To start with it was Mr John

Wallace, used to help me and we used to take it then to the farm where we both used to work, and dress it with the ribbons and take it down to the village, to where we lived, with a tractor and trailer and that – and after a few years there was a Mr Gerald Powell used to help me to cut him and Richard Wallace, he used to help to cut him some years. I've always had somebody and now it's come to me and Geoff Hardwick, because we've moved down to Geoff's 'cause we got the – planted some trees down there, because I grew a lot of trees from acorns and passed them onto Geoff and he planted them down at his place and that's what we've been cutting.

MOM: Who used to do it before you?

MA: That was a Mr Allan Godsall, he used to do it before me. And he used to do it for Donald Watkins what used to carry it, who what passed it onto me after – carrying the tree.

MOM: What's the significance of the role? What does it mean to you?

MA: Well, the – what it means is that the oak tree – who's the heart of oak, that it covers actually, of the club. I don't know what else it actually does but mainly for, because it's the Heart of Oak Society, the oak tree and the acorn to cover it.

MOM: So where do you go? Because you used to go to Capper Wood?

MA: Yeah, used to..

MOM: And what time of day, what time you have to get up–

MA: Well, I used to go up there in the weekday, and I used to look round and sort a tree out and mark him, ready for the Saturday morning, because just after 4 'o'clock some Saturday mornings it used to be dark, some years, and I had a mark on him, and we used to cut him down and cut him into size, carry him down, take him down to the farm, where we used to farm – Roy's Farm – and dress him down there, and then bring him down to the village afterwards.

MOM: tell us about some of the oak boughs you've had to carry.

MA: Well, some of them were good oak boughs to carry, and some of them were not very good. If you ever had one which was a bit one-sided, you was going one-sided instead of walking straight and it looked like you'd had enough drink before you started, with them! But if you could get one well-balanced, it was a lot easier for carrying it is. So you've gotta make sure you gets one – that was the idea of having a look round before to try and get one which is a nice shape, as it makes a lot easier carrying.

MOM: But you've done it so often now, you must be able to identify that?

MA: Yeah, I can do – just by walking round and looking. It's a good thing to round before the leaves are on them and have a look round some trees before the leaves is on there, and you can see the shape of them better. You can get them lines up then for when you comes to cut one.

MOM: Why do you go so early in the morning?

MA: Well the reason is, because...

MOM: The reason we go so early...

MA: The reason ... go so early in the morning is because I've gotta cut the tree, gotta dress it, get it back to my place, then, sometimes I got one or two sticks to dress with flowers and the banner to assemble, with the poles and everything, and then have breakfast, ready for to go down to the New Inn for quarter to ten, and to get the people at my place what's gonna carry the banner.

MOM: You've got a lot of organising to do then –

MA: Yeah, yeah.

MOM: So tell us about dressing the bough and the sticks.

MA: Well, dressing the bough with ribbon on the little branched what comes out on the outside of the tree, we puts ribbons on there – there's red, white and blue, and we tries to dress him all round on most of the little twigs and branches with the ribbon.

MOM: And dressing the sticks?

MA: Dressing the stick, that's another different sort of job, dressing the stick, with the flowers. it can be easy after you've done as many as I have or it can be very hard and difficult if you don't know and you can have a problem as the flowers ends down the bottom of the stick instead of the top. The old sticks that they used to have years ago, used to have an acorn on them – I have have got one at home, a child's one, now with the proper acorn on, but they're no good for when you're an adult because they're not long enough, they're not. So the sticks I've got now, I've wrapped some cloth round the top of it and then I've knocked some nails in there as – when I start when the flowers in there and the string cos I turns the stick round and 'oles and the flowers don't drop – they can't go down your stick!

MOM: Who taught you how to dress your stick?

MA: Well, nobody really! I picked it all up on me own and kept learning and trying different things which worked out the best.

MOM: But your wife was saying, Rose was saying that you dress your stick in the traditional way.

MA: Oh yeah!

MOM: Can you tell us about that?

MA: Well, I haves a row with her some days because I said - 'you've haven't given the right flowers' - so, she gotta get me the right flowers. I likes good long ones, to start with, and shorter ones and I'm going on down the stick and after you put so many on, you gotta a pair of secateurs - just nip some of the ends off down at the bottom to get them to lie right on the stick and you, er, after you thinks you've got enough on, what I does next is ties him off with string, right, and then get some tin foil and wrap it round the ends of the flowers, tight, and then on top of that is the red, white and blue ribbon, which I got hanging - and I even hook the red, white and blue to the string to stop that dropping down and sliding down the the foil.

MOM: So there's a great deal of thought that goes into dressing you sticks?

MA: Yeah, but you don't think, I don't think no more of it now for doing so many I just goes and gets on with the job now.

MOM: And your wife is there, Rose is there.

MA: Yeah

MOM: Beside you. She's been doing it 40 plus years -

MA: Yeah

MOM: Are you a team, is it a team-

MA: Well she knows somewhere near now what I wants - she do - to give me what I want.

MOM: Who are you passing your skills onto?

MA: Well, I don't know whether my grandson or granddaughter. My granddaughter is very interested - as - probably they'll have a go doing the stick and that and I don't know, the oak tree, i might pass that on if Geoff Hardwick'd take it on probably. I'm alright at the moment but, er - you never know - if I can't manage it, i was thinking of passing it onto Geoff. That's what I'd like to do. The Tree.

MOM: that would be really difficult though, Mike, would it?

MA: well, it would make it difficult for Geoff and hard for Geoff but er, he's seen it done now, and he's been with me for a long time and know everything really – somebody like that.

MOM: Do you remember the day that, er, girls were aloud to enter?

MA: Well yeah, I did, but I can't remember what year it was. I think it was after we come out of the Friendly Society.

MOM: Could you say, Mike – "I think girls were allowed to walk after..." – sorry...

MA: Yeah – I think that girls was allowed to walk after we come out of the Friendly Society. Because, when we was in the friendly Society, it was only men, but when we come out and we carried – start-restarted the club all over again, as, we had ladies then join in as well.

MOM: And what do you think about that?

MA: Well it was, its OK! We've never had a problem.

MOM: You were talking before, when you were very young, you used to have to hold the ropes of the banner...

MA: Yes...

MOM: Have you ever been in a walk where there was a gale or a wind or–

MA: Yes. Yes.

MOM: Can you tell us about that?

MA: Well, we have had trouble – there was trouble back a few years ago, going along to Geoff Hardwick's. there was a gale come and the banner – the ones what was carrying him behind me – very near took off! And they ended up right near on top of an hedge and I had the tree, in front, and the police was out that year with their cars – so the policeman – he could see as I struggling, so he backed the car again' me and I put me foot again' the bumper of the car and held the tree that way! And after the windy stuff, away we went again – but for a few minutes, we couldn't move! The backward or a front wind is not too bad – a side wind is the worst one, because it takes you across the road. I've had that happen before now – and one or two used to say to me 'Is that the wind or have you got the drink in you?'! I said said probably a bit of both.

MOM: Probably your 42 pints, Mike! [laughter]

MA: Yeah! Yeah! Well, I always tells them, I always haves a pint at the New inn before we start and when we're talking to people they said 'Oh you likes a drink then before you start' I said 'I haves that for balance – to help to hold me down carrying the

tree, look!'.
MOM: Sounds to me you have to be really strong to carry that bough.

MA: Yes. I used to think nothing of it years ago. I'm struggling now, I'll tell you, more, than what I was then. But see how things goes and i wants to carry on as long as I can. that's what i'm hoping to do.

MOM: When does the preparation start, for you? Anticipation, the excitement? The anticipation of the Saturday, does it start today? Does it start two weeks ago?

MA: Well, yes organising everything and getting everything to come along happens a week or two before, but you don't worry too much about it because you've done it so many times as its just natural to us now.

MOM: What's been, of all your 40 years involvement with the walk – has there been any highlights for you? Any high points?

MA: No, not really. There was one year, we couldn't do it – the year of the Foot and Mouth. We cancelled it and we didn't have it that year. Otherwise, it's been going on the same very near every year.

MOM: Would you ever allow your wife to dress your stick?

MA: Well, I would, it ain't for me, it's for my granddaughter actually. Yeah, she could do.

MOM: Tell me about your granddaughter though, does she get excited about the day?

MA: Well, yeah she – ever since she's been small she's been walking and she quite enjoys it. But er, she's very busy like as er, sometimes she can't come to help. She's hoping to come at half past five tomorrow morning.

Rick Goldsmith: Can Mike say... Can you say that again Mike but say it's your granddaughter–

MA: Yeah. My granddaughter –

RG: Sorry

MOM: Sorry Mike, just a second,

RG: Can we start again because my voice crossed over your so... Ok go ahead.

MA: Yeah. My granddaughter is hoping to come for half past five, to help us with the tree and the stick tomorrow morning.

MOM: is there lots of competition amongst all the walkers and...

MA: There is. There is for dressing the stick – of who's got the best dressed stick and that... Because somewhere on the round , round – one of the host's places – they judges the stick and, we have got a juvenile stick one what was made, and a senior stick, and erm the winner haves this stick for 12 months, they do. But I've suggested 'em, if they'd like to, they can dress this stick with flowers, carry it on club walk day, then take their flowers off during the coming week, and pas it on to who won the best stick, ready for next year. Because the sticks never used to do nothing, the use to pass the sticks without flowers on to one another on the judging and I thought ' well that's a waste a waste of time' so, whether it'll work or not I don't know, but er, we're going to try.

MOM: Do you know where – why you have this decorated sticks? Do you know where the tradition comes from?

MA: I don't, not really. They've been decorating the stick for years from the time it must have started I should think. From 18... 1870 some odd. i can't quite remember now.

Female voice: 1876.

MA: Yeah 1876, I thought it was. And they must have been doing it since then.

MOM: Did your grandparents and great grandparent – were they involved?

MA: No. No. No.

MOM: So how did you get involved?

MA: Well I got involved because the person what used to cut the oak tree, I was with him actually, Mr Alan Godsall. I used to go with him, up into the wood when I was a boy and see him cutting the tree and help him. And that's how I got involved, and that's when i must have been about 7 or 8.

MOM: Um, so you've been involved with it for such a long time, so what does it mean to you? You know, personally. What does it mean to you to be involved with this walk?

MA: Well, I'm always very happy to do it and I looks forward to it every year and I shall carry on looking forward to it as long as I can. And I hope, as anything happens to me – there's other who'll keep it going.

MOM: is it a tradition that's very close to your heart and the village's heart?

MA: Well, it is in a way. But once club walk's over, you forget about it 'till next year. you haves your meetings in between, one every month, and we doos the quiz and a car treasure run, we used to do, and different things and that. But otherwise you just waits for the next club walk.

MOM: What were you telling us before about the darts matches?

MA: Yeah, that's what we used to do years ago, that was. Quite a long time ago. As Mike Bess was involved with that as well, down the Forge and Ferry. Used to have a dart tournament what used to go all the week from the Monday 'til the Friday night. It was quite interesting. Some used to play and some never. Some used to do more drinking than playing. Because we had a lot of drinkers in that time and that but you haven't got them no more.

MOM: And people used to be very smart, you know –

MA: Yeah. Always dressed in a suit. I still wear a suit now and I shall have a suit on tomorrow and that. But, it's got now as a lot of people don't wear suits. but all the men, when it used to be only them men – they was all, everyone was in suits. And i remember when I was a little boy, me mother used to have to make me very smart – I used to have a new pair of sandals or shoes especially for the club walk when i was only 6 and 5 I can remember.

MOM: When you were at school, did you go to Fownhope School?

MA: Yes.

MOM: And is it something the school ever got involved with?

MA: No not really. No.

MOM: And finally, I think Mike.. um, er – the same question I

asked your wife. Why do you think it's important that we record your memories of this event?

MA: Well, if you don't record it, or somebody records it, nobody in years to come will know anything about it, actually, if it finishes, like. There's always something, with you recording it, as people can look at.

MOM: Tell us about Derek Evans and can you use his name as well.

MA. yeh. Derek Evans used to come, every club walk, to the New Inn for 10 'o'clock and he used to go round and photograph different sticks, the oak tree, me with the oak tree, the banner and then, when we started – he'd go up the road, he'd run up the pavement, and he'd be turning round and as we was parading up to the church, he'd take photographs all the way up the road, he would, to the church. When we got to the church, he used to nip in and up on the wall, and he'd be taking photographs of everybody what walked up the aisle into the church. And then, in the Hereford Times, about a fortnight after, you'd see a bit of a write up he'd put and photographs, of me most probably with the tree or the banner which he had took and put into the Hereford Times.

RG: Rolling.

MA: this photograph of me and Rose, was took probably just after we were were married because we've got the old Heart of Oak Society banner which now is hung in the church and er, that one – he went out a long time ago and we had another banner, a blue one which we've still got, which was very very heavy, and if a storm or rain come, that was the end of it. In the end, he cracked one of the wooden poles though, because he was so heavy, and that is how we've come to have this other new banner now, actually.

This is me, and I'll point to me, when I was about 6 or 7 outside the green man, we used to wait to start, and that was the start of the club, with the old banner. And there's a lot of our school mates along here with me and then all the older people is at the back.