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Interviewer: Marsha O'Mahony (speaker, female)
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Transcript:

My name is Katie Cave Browne-Cave, though I was Eastaugh, and my father was John Eastaugh, Bishop of Hereford from 1974 to 1990.

My memory of the May Fair is that it was the most wonderful time of the year, much anticipated and greatly enjoyed and sadness when you walked back through the Palace Gates on a Thursday evening when it was going to be a full year before it would come again. So, it was very strong.

I think that's one of the really exciting things about the fair....today so few things are season specific or time specific, and this is one of the few festivals if you like, that marks a time of year. And you'd go to bed on a Monday night and cars were travelling down Broad Street and up King Street, High Town, it looks as High Town always does, and you get up at six o'clock the following morning and as if by magic there are dodgems and Helter Skelter and all sorts of amazing and terrifying and ghastly-looking contraptions lining the streets. I mean it's just extraordinary. Golly, they have to work hard to do that, but it's magic! For three days, it's magic in the town.

[Bishop Eastaugh's relationship with the Showman's Guild] That started in the first year we were in Hereford, that would have been around 1974, when we had moved into the Palace earlier in the year and my father must have told us that the May Fair was coming, and of course that meant precisely nothing to us, we'd come from London and you were lucky if you had a couple of rides that you might go on a funfair somewhere. I suppose we may have been to Battersea Funfair or something, and my younger brother who was four at the time, managed to get himself out of the house to the top of Broad Street and just couldn't believe what he saw and ran back to the house and woke my father and the two of them walked around the fair together meeting all the showmen and those who were putting up the various rides or just coming to the end of a hard night's day, getting everything ready. And so, began a relationship that developed into tremendous friendships. There were a couple of families that we had particularly strong links to, the Morris's and also the Scarrott family. But he got on well with several other family groups. My father was made an honory member of the Showman's Guild, so in theory he could have had his own fairground ride somewhere. So there were lots of jokes about which we'd have and where we'd place it. But no, it never came to pass. He was very touched by that.

My father was made an honorary showman of the South Wales Showman's Guild at some point within his episcopacy, I suppose as a thanks from the Showmen for all that he did to support them and their families, that they are on the road for a significant part of the year and therefore may miss out on pastoral care and so forth because they are an itinerant group and I think knowing that they had somebody like my father they could call upon at times other than just the May Fair was quite important to them.

[Why was he a particular supporter of the May Fair?]

I think he just got on with who was there, the showmen themselves. I mean they are, as with any group, there are great individuals and not so great individuals. As a whole, as a community I think their sense of family really resonated with him, that there was a degree of similarity between those he worked with in the East End of London possibly. I don't really know, but he got on with so many different people, but he had a particular affection for the showmen.

One of the wonderful things about the showmen is that you tend to see them with grimy hands having put together their large attractions and looking very very ordinary, but once a year they knew how to party. And on one particular occasion my parents were invited to the showmen's annual ball at the Grosvenor Hotel in London and my mother particularly commented on the magnificent gowns the women used to wear and how if you were to take someone into that group and say, who is it partying here tonight, you would never guess it was the showmen.

My father as Bishop was not only proud of his position but proud of what the position actually meant and that he felt he should be accessible at all times and one of the ways he could mark his accessibility was to wear his bright pink cassock. So I grew up with a father wearing a pink dress around town, every day, which was quite a novelty, very few parents (sic) I think had fathers who did the same. It meant that he was available to all and that was very dear to him. You could see him a long way off and I guess avoid him therefore if you wanted to or pick him out if you needed to speak to him you indeed could. As a daughter of somebody wearing a bright pink dress, there were moments when it was very embarrassing, when People would come up and want his time, and perhaps the things they were saying or the way they responded to him were embarrassing, and you thought, oh, I want to get away from this. But everybody has embarrassing parents and I do my best to embarrass my children too!

In 1976, and this is where my knowledge of the history and how the event came about is perhaps a little ropey, as I was only nine at the time, the reintroduction of the ceremony to open the fair where the fee to run the fair rides was paid over formerly to the local dignitaries, which included the church and the

Bishop. And in days of old the Bishop used to get part or all of the rent, again I'm not sure why but he did, sadly we didn't. as a ceremony, it was bought back to life and I remember clearly that year being picked up by a vintage car and being driven around the streets of Hereford and we drove in across High Town, parked outside the dodgems, which was located close to Marks & Spencers, where there was a lovely horse and cart. We climbed onto that and stood around and the Mayor at the time and the Bishop said whatever they were saying, it was probably extremely boring for a child of nine because all I wanted to do was jump onto the dodgems. And after the ceremony took place then the various dignitaries would get onto the dodgems – and none of the fair rides was supposed to have started before that first dodgem ride. So four o'clock, bumper cars were off and suddenly this great cacophony of ride after ride started. It was quite exciting. And following that there was a procession, a procession around the rides, the Mayor and my father and us, luckily, would go on all these different rides. So it was great fun. The bumper cars, as I said, were always the start of the fair and I believe one year the Mayor, the then Mayor and my father were somehow squeezed into a bumper car together. I'm not sure how far the car managed to move, they were large men. But I think there are a few good photos somewhere to be had of that.

One of the rides the procession always stopped next to was the helter Skelter and that was really great fun. And there was one year that my father, who was as I said before a large and quite heavy gentleman, came down at greater speed, than I believe the delicate Mayor in front of him and there was the most almighty crash at the bottom. I don't believe there's a photograph of that but certainly the photograph that Derek took, where you can see my father, with great hilarity, coming to the end of the ride. It's a very familiar sight. My father was huge fun, he was the life and soul of the party. He always had an interesting thing to say about anything. As a father, he was always interested in me and wanted to know about what I was doing, what I was up to, always found time for me, and I remember sitting in his study, sunk in a deep arm chair just talking about my day, probably never asking what had happened in his day. He was a wonderful father. He had a very gentle, kind and caring side as well, so again always had time for the individual.

When my father died, he died in office in 1990, there were several members of the Showmen, members of families of showmen, who came to his funeral and when my mother came to leave Hereford a couple of months later she was invited to what would have been my father's last May Fair and she was presented with a clock and a silver salver. And very touching that they were one of the groups of people that actually cared for her after he died. Every year, even now they invite her to their party after the opening of the May fair. And you know Christmas Cards are exchanged and so forth, and so it's really very special. It wasn't just a cynical, let's make the Bishop a showman because

he might speak for us in the House of Lords or wherever else, people are fighting to get rid of the fair from the town, perhaps he'll speak for us. No, it was a heartfelt, we really do love you and because of what you do for us and we will be there for you too. Very special.

[It's quite an unusual friendship, isn't it?]

They're quite an unusual group I think. There are a few faces that I know now but obviously I have no reason to be involved with the showmen anymore, other than annually that we get to see the old familiar faces. No, they are very fond memories.

There is an ongoing, should the fair be on the streets of Hereford or should it be put on King George V's playing fields, away from the main city. And I don't remember why there wasn't space for a fairground ride, but for some reason there wasn't, or it may have been political. If you want the fair then you as the church needs to demonstrate that you are as happy to have it on your land as the city. And although the city is not responsible for the Close, the Cathedral and the Close is the responsibility for the Dean and Chapter. Together they agreed I believe that a ride could go there. It can't go there now before there's an amazing piece of artwork that's been installed as part of the paving outside the Cathedral and all the new railings and so forth. And so actually it wouldn't be very accessible. But for a few years a ride was sited outside the West doors of the Cathedral.

I do remember as we walked round the fair, people pointing my father, but I suppose as you grow up, if that's all you've really been aware of, because I was six when he was made a Bishop, it was normal and it was normal for people to point and go, you know, who's that, and sometimes laugh, and sometimes nod and wonder who it might be. So, I suppose it was just what's normal, it's what you're used to and I was used to my father wearing a pink dress and people looking at him.

My mother loved the [May Fair] as well. I mean she loved taking us round and enjoyed meeting all the showmen as well I think. She was very much a people person and she just liked them. A lot of them were very lovely people to be associated with. Yes, I do take my children. My children are very keen to go to the fair, although I am ashamed to say that this year I couldn't take my children but brother did take my son to the fair so he had a great time as you may imagine, so we've got all sorts of pictures of him being tossed upside down on things you really wouldn't be on my age, you wouldn't want to be tossed upside down on.

This is a lovely father of my father that was taken in 1982 that was used for publicity for my father's pilgrimage around the diocese to celebrate the 600th anniversary of Thomas Cantilupe,

the saint who used to live in Hereford and who was Bishop of Hereford, and about whom if you go into the Cathedral you will see lots of lovely artwork that were fairly recently created. And he was taken by Derek just outside Hereford, somewhere by Broomy Hill, Breinton-ish road. Derek, I believe was lying on the road and my father was striding towards him wearing boots that the SAS had given him for his walk. Just a lovely photograph of my father in full flow. Such a wonderful picture.

I think there is one memory I have that is not to do with the fair but to do with the people and that's I suppose to acknowledge that they move from site to site and town, and because they are on the road they are at risk of accident and injury and there was one terrible time when the fair came to Hereford and my father was called in the middle of the night, and one of the showmen had been killed on the road and my father went to the caravan where his widow was, and sat with her and other members of the family. And his comment was how wonderful it was that the strength of the community was such that the widow was held and that her ride, or the family's ride was cared for by other members of the Showman's Guild, that the family still had an income coming in. and I think that sense of community is one to be celebrated and I hope it never goes for them. You know, we've lost it, a lot of our communities and I think that's really special.

I think it's very important to record stories. I think failing to record our stories actually diminishes us as a human race, or as the human race, that we all come from communities and the more communities are dispersed and the less shared knowledge and experience there is, the more difficult people find it to live. I run a charity called the Cart Shed and work predominately with adults with mental health issues, but as a result of doing that work it's quite clear that a lot of people have lost that sense of family and community. and part of family life is family history and community history sits within that. And knowing where you came from, knowing why things are as they are, knowing why they look as they do, is hugely important. It roots us to a place and I think that's really important.

We moved to Hereford in 1974. My father was appointed as Bishop of Hereford in 1973 and we couldn't move into the palace when he moved because they discovered death watch beetle, so he had six weeks living in the Green Dragon Hotel and meanwhile we were living with my grandfather, who lived in Worcestershire. So, my father, it must have been quite an experience for him. So, he'd come to a very public position and had lost his family at that moment in time and was living out of a suitcase. So rather an extraordinary start of his episcopacy. He was in office for 16 years and died in office on February 16th, 1990, my brother's 20th birthday. Very sad. He'd been in the church since the war. he didn't serve in the armed forces. he had been asked to continue his training for the priesthood because there was a

Homefront that needed support and he went to the east end of London so ministered to the docks. And there are various stories about how buildings in or around where he was living took direct hits. And obviously people he knew were killed and a very very difficult time for him so he was working during that period. He worked in Poplar and West Hackney and then back to Poplar again. Poplar was a very well-known training parish at that time and it's around that that Call the Midwife series is actually filmed. And Jennifer Worth who was the midwife who wrote those stories, did know my father. She came to visit my mother a few years ago, not long before she died. It was a very formative time of his ministry. He was then made Vicar of Heston and then he was made Arch Deacon of Middlesex and moved into Belgravia. My brother was born in Heston. He married my mother in 1963 and my brother arrived in '64, I arrived in '67, and another brother in 1970.

It was an extraordinary contrast going from certainly the east end of London out to leafy Herefordshire. I mean where I knew London it was leafier but still a very urban early childhood to a wonderful large house with beautiful gardens and you could see countryside all around you. So yes, very very different. I think there was a degree of questioning as to whether a very urban minister could come to a very rural county and be successful. I think my father had faced a lot and knew a lot of very different people that I think gave him the common touch. It meant he could speak to anybody very easily about anything. And I think actually quite an interesting move in the mid-seventies at a time when agriculture was going through another recession and yet more mechanisation and more people coming off the land. Very similar I suppose to his period of time in London when the docks started to go into decline and a lot of unemployment and people having to rethink what they were going to do. So a lot of similarities. I believe my father was seen a lot around the town and the county. He would go obviously into Hereford and shop, often down to Tanners for his bottle of gin and cigarettes, great smoker and drinker. But that was very much of that convivial side of him, that actually welcoming somebody in and offering them food and sustenance. So it might be a gin if it was after six o'clock, cup of tea or coffee if it was before. Very important.

Watch the video interviews on the project website:
www.herefordshirelifethroughalens.org.uk