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Creators: Rick & Julia Goldsmith
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Interviewee: Margaret Dallow (speaker, female)
Interviewer: Marsha O'Mahony (speaker, female)
Camera & Sound: Richard Goldsmith (male)
Producer: Julia Goldsmith
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Video Format: MPEG-4
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Transcript:

My name is Margaret Dallow and this is the 4th of October and I live in Frog Lane, Bromyard, but I've lived in Herefordshire all my life.

My mother's stories really are the first of my memories of hop picking, when she said that the Pankhurst sisters came down into the hop yard, at Bishops Frome to talk to the women there. And also living in my family home was a nun. And she came ever hop picking, and she came down into the hop yards to save the souls of the hop pickers.

Sylvia Pankhurst. I'm afraid I can't. My mother used to come out with these things, her little snippets of her memories, which stayed with me, but I can't tell you any more than that the Pankhurst did come to the hop yards in Bishops Frome.

We spent several years on a hop farm at Yarkhill, and this is just when we were just going out on a big scale of picking hops in the cribs. And we used to have 200 hop pickers and 100 children from the Welsh valleys, and they came in cattle lorries. There was one with the people in and one with the luggage in. We also had about 100 gypsies there. And we had a long drive from the road right down to the farmhouse and all down the one field was these green square tents, that had pretty coloured material hanging inside, hundreds of dogs. And the head of them all was a very strong lady and she kept them in check. And they knew that my father ran the local football club and so they used to protect my mother, my sister and I by walking round the farmhouse at night to see that we were alright. If they got to fighting, there was a big pool and sometimes someone got thrown in the pool and father used to have to put their caravan or tent down the other end of the farm. It was usually over a woman. But they got along with the rest of us. But the Welsh people, on a Sunday night they sang Welsh hymns. And this memory has stayed with me. I love a Welsh choir. And we used to clean out the cattle shed, so that they could all come in there and sing their hymns and that was a lovely sound. They just lived in barracks as we used to call it. The head lady, there was some very strong women about in those times, because there was a lady who brought them from the valleys, and she had the best one. And they were whitewashed out and there was like straw to put their rugs over for them to lie on. And they used to have charabancs that came on Sunday and father had to see that they didn't take all the apples and all the potatoes, but he made sure they had a fair share of potatoes and apples to go back to the valleys

with, on a Sunday.

The gypsies used to come with their horses and they used to trade from the farm and they never said how many horses there were. And we used, the girls, my sisters and I, we used to look out the window, and there would be 40, 50, how many we never knew, of the piebald or skewbald horses in the field, and then overnight they'd disappear completely and you wouldn't know where they went. We didn't as children hear them. We slept the other end of this big farmhouse. But they'd disappear overnight and there'd be no horses in the field the next morning.

The trotting races are my mother's memories again. She used to tell me that they used to have trotting races at Bishops Frome, the road that goes along by the Green Dragon towards Burley Gate, there's a straight bit along there, where they used to trot the horses.

This is another of my mother's memories. She used to tell me about the bushler. Because the women would go on strike, even in my memory, the women would go on strike if they weren't paid enough money as they thought and they would stop picking you see. She told me at Fromes Hill, she actually told me that it was at Fromes Hill that they did beat up the bushler. Because the bushler had to be a very firm man to deal with mainly women, who were there really to feed their children and get clothes for the winter, shoes. That was the time they could go out and earn money. But this is the story of mother's, that she said that they really beat him up because he wasn't playing fair. And the bushler had to be very careful how he bushled from one crib to another. If he was bushling light, as they used to say, he would only put a little bit in if he liked the women, he would put a little bit in and say, one. Well the next one, he'd fill the basket right up to the top, and the women soon would notice and they would get around him, but he was never got into conversation with anybody, he had to be strong as well. I can see my father bushelling now. They used to say, 'come on Bill, come on Bill'. You had to be strong enough to be fair to the women. I mean they were only there as I said, to improve their family, get clothes and things like that.

One of my favourite stories about the hop picking season is my father came home one night with this mandolin, and he'd given a gypsy some money so he could buy some food for children, or that was his story. So, it's been in our family for about 60 years. And I have this wonderful picture of gypsy girls dancing around a fire, while they played the mandolin.

Well mainly, riot and strikes that went on, it was mainly, it was over the money. You know if the bushler was favouring one women over another, then they would get argumentative, the women, and they would go on strike. I remember when I was on this hop farm at Yarkhill, and they all went on strike for more

money because they felt they weren't being fairly paid. Well I think father had to go and talk to the man who owned the farm and... oh, another memory I've got of the farm, that they used to sub them money. They used to queue up at the window and often by the end of the week there wasn't any money for them to be paid. They'd want payment for what they'd earned for the day. We had a window and an office on the side of this big farmhouse and they used to queue up some of them, the men usually to go to the pub. So, by the time the end of the week came there wasn't any money.

This is one of my poems, called 'Songs and Charabancs' and it's for when I lived on a farm at Yarkhill.

The yard was cleaned out, where the cattle had wintered.
Barracks whitewashed, all must be ready
The hop pickers were coming from down in the valleys
200 souls bought here in the lorries
another followed behind with all of their baggage.
96 children, their only holiday.
Tips of coal make up their mountains
Black tips of coal make up their mountains.
Songs and charabancs are my memories.

Busloads of visitors arrived on a Sunday,
Potatoes with apples stuffed in a bag,
Father checking no more than their quota.

Strains of hymns ring out through the rafters
Down that long drive to the farm called Garford.

This poem is about the hop drier. We always in the farm house, had to feed the hop drier. He'd come in dirty, his hands oiled, stained, and he never slept properly for all the time he was drying the hops. It's called the hop drier:

The night hangs heavy with the sulphur fumes.
The evening mist gathered down in the valley.
Drying the hops has begun, sacks bought to the kiln,
Picked and leafed in an ancient crib piled high on the lofty
green stage.
Now carefully spread, sack by sack on the kiln's hessian floor
to be dried by oil or coal.
The man in charge is called the drier.
holds the key to whether the hops succeed or fall.

Two loads a day, he never sleeps.
Eight hours a time, the hops are cooked.
Then you wait for the load to come back.
A phrase the farmer used.
Cooled and coddled, finely crushed under the pressure into the
giant pockets, proudly stamped with the farmer's name.

We lived and breathed hops here in the Frome Valley.
It was our life, our heritage.
It simply consolidated village life.
It's all but gone and all Mam's memories now.
Will our children ever know the feeling of a community pulling together.

There was a whole family in Bishops Frome that did the wire work for the area. And their names were Watkins. And the father was a very clever man, because it was all about weight and strength. And because if you had a hop yard go down, that was your season's work and all your money lost. So, if Ned Watkins put up a hop yard, then you knew you would be alright. And the local headmaster used to help him work out the maths, because it's all about maths, a hop yard is. So he was quite famous in this area for his wirework.

I think recording oral history of Herefordshire about hop picking, and other things that took place in this wonderful county of ours, is very important, because it will be lost. I feel when I'm gone who will tell my mother's stories, of the Pankhursts coming to Bishops Frome and things like that.

Cap on the back of his head, and his sleeves rolled up, and he'd be in that charabanc saying, you can't take all of those! they didn't stop the farm of all the produce.

I have memories of my father, tall man he was, with his shirt sleeves rolled up and a cap on the back of his head. And he used to be on the back of the charabanc sorting out, see that they didn't take all the produce off the farm, pulling the bags out from above their heads and sorting how many apples were in that, how many potatoes were in that bag. And that was his job on a Sunday night before they went back into wales and the valleys.

In my family home at Bishops Frome, there was a large room, which rarely used by the family, that was where the nun lived for the duration of the hop picking, sometimes six weeks. There was a little door in the one corner where she could pop out to the outside toilet. And there she lived with the family for the time of the hop picking. She left behind, and it's a prize possession of my sister's, a little organ that could be folded up and carried like a very large suitcase, down into the hop yard. And she would sing hymns and of course people liked to sing and they would join in with the hymns.

One of my earliest memories of life in Herefordshire was that my father worked on a large farm and he had, he didn't go to war, but he had lots of prisoners of war working on the farm. And the Germans, three or four of them he would bring them home to tea. And they would make presents for my mother and they would make presents for my sister and I: a kaleidoscope, handbags, purses,

and they didn't really believe what was going on, they said it was all propaganda, and they didn't believe Auschwitz and that. And he received one letter from the one that was the school master, at the end of the war, and he said it wasn't propaganda.