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Transcript Interview with Jane Davis

My name is Jane Davis. I was Jane Williams before I was married. I was born here at the Manor Farm, which is the black and white house opposite the butchers and the church and I was born in 1958. I was 60 this year. The Club Walk, when I was growing up, was a really big part of our lives, and after I got married when I was 21, I still came back. So, I've been back with my children and I've been back with my grandchildren.

I had two brothers and a sister. My two brothers both walked with club walk, but my dad, I don't know why, my dad never did. I don't know why he didn't, but he didn't. I remember the preparation for the day because it was a really big day in our house. The family used to come so we had we aunts and my cousins, uncles, all used to come for the day. And so mum was busy preparing a lunch for absolutely everybody. And then to start with my one brother Richard, who is known as Jumbo actually by everybody, had to have his stick decorated. And actually, it's not my mum or dad's forte really, decorating the stick. Used to get a broom handle, because that's all that was on offer. And luckily, Mr and Mrs Best next door had lots of flowers, and they would come around and bring them and we'd put the flowers on the top of the stick, but it really wasn't easy and he never won because my mum and dad weren't very good at it.

At the Club Walk girls weren't allowed to join the society, they weren't allowed to walk, which was incredibly frustrating. That's all I wanted to do was join in. On the day, it always started off down at the New Inn. And we lived up by the church so the start of the day really was listening for the sound of that band coming down the road. And as soon as you heard the sound of the band and it was so exciting. I remember going knocking on the kitchen window saying, 'mum, mum, they're coming!' and because our garden overlooked the church, we, when we were younger, stood in the garden and overlooked the hedge, watched the parade come past, watch them going into church. And when they came out of the church, we'd join in the walk and go to the various gardens that they used to walk around. When I got a bit older we'd walk down to the New Inn and wait there and then just literally walk alongside on the pavement, going to church and then follow them around. But we very often on those days weren't allowed a drink. It was very often members only. So I remember in my teams persuading some of the lads to get me some drinks, as you do when you are 16.

[When girls were finally allowed to take part in the walk] I had

definitely gone by then.

Well my earliest memory of the walk isn't exactly a memory because there's a photograph. There's a photograph taken, I think it's about 1961 of the walk passing our house and there is a picture. Dad is standing in the garden holding me in his arms and my cousin in my uncle's arms and my other cousin down by the gate. It's not exactly a memory because it's a photograph. But I think my earliest memory is I think the running races, which at that time were down at the New Inn I think – they've moved around a little bit – and I can't run for toffee, I remember them, joining in them very enthusiastically but was never going to win anything. And the other big memory is the fair, was a fun fair in the afternoon. In the afternoon there was a funfair, which was occasionally here, this was my dad's field here. Where we're sitting in the sports pavilion is set in the recreation fields which belonged to my dad. When we were young we'd have a fair in the afternoon, down in the corner. Sometimes the fair was next door in Wyeside. There was also a grass track meet, there was a grass track here with motorbikes. But I do remember the fair one day really as only a 14-year-old can be and telling them on the dodgems that I wouldn't have to pay because it was my dad's field so why should I pay. But I didn't get away with it.

From the club walk there are lots of characters. Sort of men from my past really, people like Lewis Haines and Joe Chamberlain and Jim Clarke and John Hardwicke's father, Stan Hardwicke, those are the characters I remember. And of course women didn't walk so there was no reason to remember any of the women.

Because I grew up in Fownhope those men were just part and parcel of this village. You know when I got married I had wedding presents from them and because I was really closely associated with the church as well, I'd known them quite a bit from being involved with the choir in the church and they had just always been here, they were always part of my life. So I think that's what it was really.

The club walk was definitely a day for young people. We had a lovely time, we really did. Can you imagine we're in a village where, in the days before you went off to town to do things, you know, we had choir practise once a week, we had bell ringing another night of the week, we might have young farmers, but actually there wasn't that much else to do, so the walk was the highlight of the year, when you all just got together. There was a fair for goodness sake, races, there was the band, there was going around and socialising. It was, it was a really fun time, a really fun time.

I was ordained 22 years ago and it all started here in Fownhope. So last year they invited me back to lead the service in the

church, which is a real thrill, absolute thrill to be asked. And the service is always exactly the same, has exactly the same format. What happens is the banner stays outside because it can't really go in, everyone goes into the church puts their sticks up against the walls, the band comes in to accompany the hymns; always the same hymns: Fight the Good Fight, Onward Christian Soldiers, and Through the Night of Doubt and Sorrow. Always the same hymns, every single year. So last year they invited me to lead the service and in my address, in my sermon I talked about how the Heart of Oak Society is still important in the village, but it's role has changed. So years ago it would have been to prop up people who were having a hardship for some reason. So people joined and if they were off work for some reason could claim some money to help them thought. And I remember years ago my brother claimed, I can't remember why or what had happened but I remember he got five shillings a week for two weeks. I don't remember much more than that. But I was also saying last year, and I firmly believe it, it still has an important role to play. And the important role today isn't so much about providing a bag of coal to somebody who can't afford it, it's about the community and it's about the things that happen in the community, and it's about creating and sustaining community life. And of course it's not just about the club walk on Saturday, there are other events throughout the year, there's been fashion shows, all sorts of different things. And so I think the role it has now is more about maintaining and sustaining community life. So the role of it has changed and I think it is still really important.

The walk is definitely an opportunity for families to come together, for people who no longer live in Fownhope to come back. So I don't live here anymore and I'm planning to come to the walk this year with some of my grandchildren and I want some of my grandchildren to enjoy the experience I had. And if you live here, a lot of their families make an effort to come back. When I was young, we invited members of the family to come and enjoy the day because it's quite an uplifting thing, you know, the minute you put a silver band with something, walking down the road to the sound of a band, it just lifts the spirits immediately.

When I was young the anticipation started way in advance of day. When the fair arrived, when the lorries arrived with the fair on the back that was, for a teenager, really exciting, and when they came and put the ropes up for the grass track, that was exciting. And then o the morning when you start putting your sticks together the excitement really starts to mount then. And I hope that the people today, the youngsters today I hope they get that same sense of anticipation the fact that there's something exciting and that they're all in it and they're all part of it. It's great.

My grandchildren aren't really old enough to be aware of the

tradition, the oldest has only just turned eight and the youngest is two, so they're not quite with the tradition thing. The whole family came in the afternoon for the sports but they didn't come in the morning because they had other things, you know how it is. So this year I want to bring some of them to the morning so they can actually see the build-up to the sports in the afternoon so it's not just about children's races and hotdogs that there's a lot more to it.

I had absolutely no opportunity to dress a stick. I would have wanted no opportunity to dress a stick. I have as much creative prowess in my little finger as Yogi Bear. I'm hopeless at making stuff. I would have absolutely loved to have had a stick with everybody else. It's incredibly irritating that we weren't allowed to, but personally have wanted to dress a stick because I would have no idea.

I don't think much of the day has changed. When I came back last year it was exactly as I remembered it. I think there's a slight change in that the village is bigger and whereas before a greater proportion of the village joined in there's now a bigger proportion of people who know it's happening, think, oh that's the club walk, but actually don't get involved and I think that's just a sign of the times and there's just more people living here. So I think that's changed and it's not quite so, it doesn't have quite the high profile in everybody's life as perhaps it used to. But one of the things I love about coming here is just catching up with everybody. You know last year when I did the service and went around after, round all the various gardens, the number of people I ran into I hadn't seen for years. And I think, for those of us who have left the village, it's a great opportunity to come back and chat with old friends, see the same familiar faces, I think that's one of the real joys of it.

I think things like the annual club walk is something steeped in history. It's been going for, is it 125 years? And there are already memories lost that couldn't be recorded, 70, 90 years ago because didn't have the capacity to do that. And who knows what the future's going to be. I'd love to think the club walks going to go on for years and years but you can't guarantee that. It's been such an important part of people's lives in the village, and such an important part of the life in this village that I think it would be tragic if it was all lost completely and there was no record of it. I think to have people's personal memories really enhances it. You can look at facts, you can look at photographs, you can even look at film, actually to talk to people and hear about it their experience of it, I think is the icing on the cake really, it enhances everything.