

Title: John Ellis Interview

Creators: Rick & Julia Goldsmith

Project: 'The Close in Living Memory: Hereford Cathedral Close oral reminiscences'

Subject: Autobiography, Living and working around Cathedral Close in Herefordshire, Heritage

Publisher: Catcher Media Social CIC

Tags: Cathedral Close, oral history, heritage, PV, participatory film-making, community film, Herefordshire

Identifier: John-Ellis

Interview Date: 2010, Hereford

Interviewee: John Ellis (speaker, male)

Interviewer: Marsha O'Mahony & Julia Goldsmith (speaker, female)

Camera & Sound: Richard Goldsmith (male)

Producer: Julia Goldsmith

Language: English

Type: Video

Width: 1440 pixels

Height: 1080 pixels

Scan type: Progressive

Stereo/Mono: Stereo Mixdown

Duration: 8 min 45 seconds

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Transcript:

(00:00)

John talks about his father - he was brought up in a village in North Wales and was put into the local saddler in the village where he served his apprenticeship - living in with his master for 3 years. Then he decided to break away from the village and went to other places, he worked in Shrewsbury and other places and eventually ended up in Hereford. There he worked for a saddler who was one of the finest saddlers he ever met in his life, staying with him for a long time in the saddler shop opposite the baptist church. 00:53 He was a welsh baptist and attended the choir there meeting a girl who he immediately latched on to, then went to the first world war where he had an awful time but managed to survive. When he came back the old saddler he had worked for before had died, but the girl was still in the choir. He married the girl, who was John's mother.

(01:28)

John's father came to work for another saddler in Broad Street in Hereford called Mr. James who was also a fine saddler and leather worker. He worked there with him for some time until Mr. James died. Mrs. James who was widowed didn't want the shop anymore so John's father who had worked for her for some considerable time was presented with this shop which was on the west end of the Cathedral. He worked and lived there, setting up his business on the edge of the Cathedral Close - it was a very suitable spot for a business really.

Whilst John's father was in Broad Street John's sister was born in 1929, when the river Wye was frozen solid and it was said you could ride a horse from Hereford to Hay-on-Wye on the ice. Two years later John was born, and was left to his own devices in the shop often - remembering going down to the cellar and hiding his fathers tools to make him very cross. Eventually John's father gave up the shop because it was damaged by fire, not badly so, but his father bought another shop within the city center.

(03:22)

John's parents were friends with Mr. Lowe who was the greenkeeper of the Close, he used to cut it the most immaculate way. Anybody stepping onto his grass would be immediately shouted off and told never to come back again. Yet, because John's parents were his friends John was allowed to learn to walk on the Cathedral Close grass.

When John was 4 his father had already bought the shop in the city centre, so he didn't live in Broad Street anymore - which was just as well as it went on fire properly then. That was the end of the business in the close.

(04:13)

John remembers playing on the Close, but they also had Castle Green which is very near to the Cathedral and they used to play there because there were swings. Which the close didn't have! He was only 4 at the time so didn't get up to anything naughty - he was very good.

(04:43)

John remembers that the shop had a very strong smell of leather, you could smell it miles off, and smell it on his fathers clothes - but you got used to it. In the end when they didn't have the smell of leather they missed it. The shop in High Town by the old house was bought by his father for 3,500 pounds and he served there for many many years. The Ellis' had been there when he died for 82 years altogether in the Close and in the Hightown.

(05:26)

John says that on the corner of the close was a very busy, bustling area - he can't remember it all that well as he was too small but he recalls his father kept his horse in the Spread Eagle yard and used to go delivering his saddles and harnesses around the countryside in this little cart that he had and a horse.

(05:57)

They weren't actually at the shop when it burned down, they were in the new shop by then - but when it happened John's father took him down to have a look at it. It wasn't a big roaring inferno, and was put out pretty quickly but John did see it burning, at about age 4 or 5. They also saw Woolworths on fire in Hereford as well, which his father took him to see as well - they didn't miss many tricks.

There was a certain sadness, when you saw your home where you were brought up disappear. When all of the sudden you see them knocking it flat your heart turned over a bit, but it soon levels out and they were very happy in their new premises and the very nice new house that his father bought in Hereford as well. Very happy times they were. Though to see the old shop crumble you think 'oh dear' and felt sad.

(07:10)

The back rooms of the house near the Cathedral faced the door of the Cathedral and they used to see Elgar going in and talking to people. John's aunt used to sing in the three choirs festival, and she used to speak to Elgar as well (so she says). He was very much well known in Hereford, living in Plas Gwyn his house in Hampton Bishop, where he composed 9 of his major works - before moving back to London

(07:59)

John can't recall if it was very well lit in the evening, he'd have been tucked up in bed by then. Enough for one day, up the stairs and that was it before then!

This film was made by Catcher Media for the Hereford Cathedral Close project in association with In Our Age and supported by The National Lottery Heritage Fund.

Watch the video interviews on the vimeo showcase:
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