Title:	Griffiths, John_Interview_Complete
Creators:	Rick & Julia Goldsmith
Project:	Herefordshire Life Through A Lens
Tagline:	Films, stories and exhibitions inspired by the photographic archive of the Derek Evans Studio 1950s-80s
Subject:	Autobiography, Hop Farming and Hop Picking in Herefordshire, Heritage
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Identifier:	Griffiths, John_Interview_Complete
Interview Date:	August_30_2017
Location:	Greenacre, Suckley, Worcester, WR6 5EH
Source:	Catcher Media Social CIC
Interviewee:	John Griffiths (speaker, male)
Interviewer:	Marsha O'Mahony (speaker, female)
Camera & Sound:	Richard Goldsmith (male)
Producer:	Julia Goldsmith
Language:	English

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Type:	Video
Video Format:	MPEG-4
Bit rate:	28.54 mbits/s
Frame rate:	25 FPS
Aspect ratio:	16:9
Width:	1920 pixels
Height:	1080 pixels
Scan type:	Progressive
Audio Format:	AAC
Audio Sampling rate:	48000 Hz
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Type:	Audio
Audio Format:	MP3 audio
Audio Sampling rate:	44.100 kHz
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Holder: Catcher Media Social CIC, Herefordshire Libraries, Herefordshire Archive and Records Centre

Transcript:

My name is John Griffiths and I was born on the main Worcestershire/Herefordshire border, where I still live, which is in the middle of the hop growing country.

My first recollection of hop picking is of a ten-year-old going with my uncle to fetch the pickers in an old cattle lorry from Prince's End in Tipton, Dudley. And the joke was they all used to have huge packing cases as light as a feather, but when they went back six weeks later they were all full, heavy, with potatoes, apples and you name it they collected it.

We used to go down the thing when our neighbours was drying their hops in our hop kiln – in those days it was coal-fired hop drying with sulphur, and we used to go down there and help. Looking back years later I think we were more of a hindrance because we always wanted to help but as ten and twelve years old we could never see anything through.

I was born at a great time of change in the hop industry. Everybody had pickers and everything like that. And all my generation got called up for their National Service, and the two years I was away in Germany, which we only came home once or twice, when I came back there was huge changes. The Bruff manufacturing company had sprung up in Suckley. It was only a small, a very small factory when I left and Albert Brooks was the designer and he developed this hop picking machine and it was just taking off. So I was involved, we were the local haulier, in delivering them. Mainly we took them to Kent and a few to Hampshire. But what I remember most was when Albert Brooks, that was the designer. He was a very clever man suffered from ill health and I always think he was like RJ Mitchell from the Spitfire fame, he'd had one great idea and he stuck to it and it went right from the out and everything was running late, the country was in chaos, the strikes and work to rule, So I can always remember as a 20-year-old deriving a lorry from Harwich to the Hook of Holland taking these machines to bypass the docks to get them out into Czechoslovakia, which is was behind the iron curtain then because everything was running late. And it was very big business, big business. The next year we took them to Hull, where they went on barges all the way up the Rhine to deliver them. And then the next year after that they got it more organised so that they were broke down smaller pieces and put into packing cases, where they finished up I just can't remember. So in ten years the hop picking industry changed from manual labour to machines and all the hop pickers from the Midlands just disappeared.

Also I was involved with hauling the hops, right from the early

age of ten when I used to go and help. I remember the farmer grumbling at me because I was walking over his pockets with my muddy boots. But I soon learnt to respect their wishes. And I was involved in hauling hops then for thirty years I should think, and it all changed again and it went to bales. I expect there's not many people alive today that's hauled as many hop pockets or has put as many on a lorry than I have. When they went to bales there was chaos. There was three people making the bales and they was all different sizes. So if you came to take them to the brewery you could max the loads up but Richardson then developed a system where it broke it down so that one pocket of hops would finish up in a little cardboard box.

He always reminds me, of the film, he was the spitting image of RJ Mitchell. I didn't know him, I only seen him on film like, but he was on the telly like and the film they made about him. He would leave it to the last minute to design anything from scratch and it went perfect. Now Albert Brooks was the same. Several people, Hinds built a hop machine but it always had too many snags like, it ……as far as I know, because I missed two years of my life and that two years is a big time, 18-20, you're developing aren't you and we were late developers, weren't we? Because there was no telly or nothing like that, wireless was almost, well portable wireless so, we didn't develop so fast did we, like the children, streetwise, a lot quicker than I was and other people, so…. I didn't know Albert t Brooks because I seen them on wheels, put an axle under the first hop picking machine, put a bit of a chassis and tow behind I think an old army 4x4, went about five or six mile an hour. I have seen some photographs of them somewhere.

What was Albert Brooks like? He was very quiet, suffered from ill health, grey hair, classes, he had a special bungalow kind of like a sanatorium, his chest or something or whatever they got in those days. But he was very very good to the workforce. And when he was behind, they would stop on late at night time. because my father once when they were working late and the factory people came round, workmen weren't supposed to work that many hours ……..into the ladies' toilet out of sight and they had to stop there, mooching around, no we haven't any women here. Like everything was left to the last minute.

Alan Jenkins, I think he was the only draughtsman, well I think he qualified as a draughtsman, he was in the drawing office, we'd see very little of him. Albert Jeynes, who was the foreman, his daughter married my younger brother, and he was works foreman, Albert Jeynes was. We'd see very little of him, Alan Jenkins, he'd come down in his best clothes wore a suit and a tie and everything like that like, so I didn't see much of Alan Jenkins.

WE had two lorries on contract to Bruff. Fred Boucher would do the local, he had one lorry, he was the general haulier. He came

abroad with us but he would, he must have been when I knew him he must have been in his late fifties, sixties. We were the main haulier like.

Packing the pockets, that's gone now, it was just an everyday occurrence to me. If you look at that photo of Morris Powell and you will see his pockets are on, he hasn't got that eye. I took pride putting mine on. precision, squared. They were alright when he put them on but you see the difference of his, one pocket is like this, and one pocket is like that. I had mine like that (looking at photo). You wanted to be young and fit hauling pockets it wasn't a young man's job, you were standing 14 feet off the ground and your balance wanted to be good and you wanted a strong back, because a pocket weighs a hundred weight and a half, a hundred weight and three quarters, that's the old measurements. And so you had a great old hook like this and you grabbed that in there with one hand, and grabbed hold of the tog, that's what you called the top of the pocket, to twist it up and handle it. Because you can't handle them because hessian sacks are bone hard, pressed hard, so you have to have a hook like this to grab into them, to turn them and everything like that. And when you are hauling so much a pocket these (metal hooks) hold the side pockets on. You jam that on in there into that pocket and face it that way and that would hold them. And you would have about twenty of those. But every man would have a hop hook depending on the man and what they, what kind of hook they had, but this was the most common kind of hook, a big strong hook like to slap it into the pocket, but it was just an everyday skill, which you took, in those days, for granted,. You wrapped the rope, you didn't tie any knots. You use a looping system, which has been tried and tested on timber hauling for hundreds of years I should think,. Like when they were pulling lumps of timber with horses they would still use the same system, rolling it round one way, and it would never come undone.

This is a hop hook, which is a must if you are going to load any quantity of pockets, because hard hessian sacks were pressed hard and were really hard and solid, so you only had what we called the toggle to hold to. So you would hold the toggle with that hand and dab the hook with that hand and twist them round. You could just get it in and just throw then up. Because I liked to take pride in my hop hauling and put my pockets square. Although perhaps they were only on for a short time, all sheeted up and covered up, I still took a lot of pride in loading my hops, some are eye-level straight. And if you ever see any photographs of my load of hops, which I've loaded you'll see I was pretty good, I'd say pretty good at loading them. This hook was only used if you were using gunners, but they were very very good because like the pockets were solid you hammer those in with your foot, and jab them in and they would really hold the load in solid. And if you were going a distance they were really good. The 30 years or the 40 years I was hauling hops I never

had a load slip. There were two simple things that made life that much easier, which is very often a fact of life, simple things makes life easier.

(RE the top pocket would display the farmer's name) Well, pride for the farmer, make him feel good factor. When we were packing hops, we always tried to leave, when we put the last pocket on, we always used to turn it round, so when you slid it round on the front and hold the final layer on tight, you always tried to leave the grower's name, which is the farmer, out on the front, so everybody could see it, his name or whosever name it was, and it's got to be dead upright. It was just a small pride in doing the job right,.

I could do it quick. I could load a load in half an hour. That load there would take half an hour to put on. That photograph there, that Artic there, if they could bring them the right speed to me I could soon put them on. But no two farmers are the same. They are all individuals. Now not mentioning any names, no I don't expect he would mind me mentioning his name, Mr Burgoyne from Coleridge, he would grow hops. When you get there, yes, I'm ready. get his elevator, yes, yes, yes. Ah, no belt. He'd taken the belt off to use for something else, so he'd be hunting round the farm then to find the belt. So every farmer was different. Another farm you'd go to there'd be three men lined up and they would remember how you put the pockets on the time before and half an hour later you'd have 80 or 90 pockets on and away you'd go, and then you'd go to the next farm, they'd manhandle up the side so the first two layers that's and ok, but you'd be lifting them up to you and you'd be reaching down over the side to pull this hundred weight and a half pocket up over the side to load. You'd be there half a day. So farmers are individuals like.

When the 45-foot Artics come in, the long Artic, a hundred was nothing, well I'm talking about the standard four-wheeler, like 60 was the average. When you're hauling hop pockets, and we were hauling per pocket, my ambition was to put as many on as I economically could and I liked to fill my lorry,. I did get up to a standard four-wheeler, which is a 26-foot bed, and I have got up to 103 pockets on one load. Well the average haulier would be quite satisfied with 50 to 60, and make extra journeys. But I would try to cut down my amount of journeys by putting more on. And if there was a queue at the hop board when you unloaded, and there often was at peak times, you only did two journeys instead of three,. Well they were struggling rushing round to do three I could haul as many pockets in two, two hundred pockets of two load, so it would take the rush off plus I could do something after.

But the Hop Board did, going back, the hop industry really expanded from 1955 ish 'til 1970. Because they used to be stored in Worcester, different warehouses in Worcester. Well the one year they built a new purpose-built, well the Hop Board which as

it was then built a new storage unit at Ledbury. Well that's still standing and that wasn't big enough so they hired the cattle sheds at Malvern Three Counties Showground to store the pockets and several years that was absolutely full. So the number of hops grown in this country just for those sheer few years was tremendous. There was Cliffs' down at Lowlsey, several years they grow a thousand pockets. Lady Wactor down the Whitehouse, was growing 400 pockets and now it's shrunk to absolutely nothing. But it's making a slight come back. Now with new varieties that are more wilt-free it seems to be coming back. I think it's a global market now and I hear talk in 2017 America is planting more hops in one year than we grow all in the country, so I don't think the hop industry will get as big as it was back in the fifties.

How many farms for the season? Crikey girl, I'd have to sit back and reckon up, could be fifty, sure to be. I could write them but it would take me a long time. You all have intense times. Hops came in and took priority through September, October, and November and then you had the sheep sales which took an intensity, and then the sampling, and then you'd have a period when you were taking them out because they were paying storage so they'd want them taken to their own storage or straight to the brewery like. So they was all usually finished up by about March like by the time everything had been sold and sampled and things like that. Our hop season would last from second week, third week in September, because it wouldn't' start the same week they started picking because they got a 50/60 pocket. Because a farmer only grows 60 pockets, a small grower, he'd wait til the end of the season but people like Cliffes, and Old Smith at Malvern who are picking literally 50 pockets a day like them are the people who want you every other day.

(When you arrived at the hop marketing board warehouse in Ledbury), you'd Back on at right angles to the dock and you'd slide them off the back onto the floor where they'd bounce and they'd have special lifts with canvas sacks that would go up to different layers. It was really well designed plus it was all under cover so you could load and unload in the wet. They had a great big veranda, so you just used to pull the first one up, take the rope off, and roll him off flat onto the landing stage and you'd take each layer off one at a time. You could just keep rolling them off literally as fast as you could roll them off at a time. The system was very good you could unload two lorries at a time. There was no health and safety. There was no shirts, no high visibility vests, or steel helmets or anything like that. You walked cheerfully around 14 feet up some of the time when you had a full load on you were 14 feet high. Well over because you couldn't get under the bridge at Ledbury because he was 15 feet, so if you had a good high load you had to do a two-mile round. We didn't think anything of it. We just climbed up over the cab and onto the load and think nothing of it. Sheet up there walk around with a great big bloody sheet and there was no

health and safely in those days. It's all stack a truck now,. It's a lost art, it's bygone days like. It will be recorded more in my lifetime than it was hundred years because there's more cameras and things like that. i think it's a very good thing to have it recorded so future generations perhaps they can see back and see how we worked and thigs like that.

I've never took any samples. The samples never came into my brief. Not at all I've seen people taking samples and wrapping them up in Farams. I was their main haulier, at Charles Faram. They're still in existence today run by Hawkins really. They had three warehouses in Worcester down the backstreets of Worcester, which you couldn't' get down then with a lorry now because every person's got two cars and they're parked on both sides of the road down there. I went down there only two year ago I mean you have a job to get a car down there now so you've got no chance of getting a lorry down there.

(How did I get my customers?) talk to people, being known to people, by taking their livestock haulage and things like that. I didn't do Walkers but I went down there one day and gave then a quote and asked if I could haul his hop pockets next season. I told him how much I would charge him per pocket, which was competitive in those days because I was putting on another 20 pockets. In those days another £10 per load was a lot of money.

I'm John Griffiths and I was born on the main Worcestershire/ Herefordshire border to a large family but I finished up being one of eleven. I worked om the small family farm after I left school because we were always short of labour after the war and I was cheap at £1 a week all found. Called up for my national service. I always smile to myself now because mother said, all your uncles did their bit you go and do yours, because father wanted me to have deferment because I was classed as a farm worker I could get deferment. So I did my national service and was promised a new tractor when I came back from two years in Germany.

Well when I came back from Germany for two years and there was no money about and dad was suffering from ill health, he only had one eye, and I always remember going to Bromyard market with my father's old lorry, which I learnt, I could always drive, take a few cattle to market for one of his customers. and wanted to be part of a gang and I went down to a local café with the other hauliers and sat there having a cup of tea and the conversation got around to taking the mickey out of dad: 'old Bill Griffiths, his old lorry!' and I remember Chris Phillips one of the hauliers saying, 'That's his son sat over there.' and they turned around and looked at me and scoffed, 'oh he won't 'last long, we'll soon get rid of him.' I didn't say anything and went home, went back up there, I had nothing to do and went back home. The next week went to take in a few cattle for one of dad's local customers so when they all went down the café I

didn’t, I sat on the fence. And a new buyer had come in the market and was looking for some stand by haulage, couldn’t find any. Sent one of the boys down who was running around the market that time to fetch him up because he wanted to get off. And his drivers, he had three lorries parked there, couldn’t do anything without the boss’ say so. And I said, oh Mr Duggan, I’ve got a lorry. So he said, so who are you? I said, I’m bill Griffiths’ son. Ah right, where’s your lorry? Up There. so he said to me, I’ve got seven cows and seven ewes, can you get them on. I said yes, if you’ll give me a hand to get the seven sheep into a canopy, which is a boxlike section over the cab. So we put these seven sheep on, seven cows in, and I remember going up the Downs, he told me where he lived, at Ashworth Bank, in dad’s old lorry, which didn’t go too well, a 22-horse petrol engine, so you can imagine going up there in bottom at about four and half mile an hour, and I eventually got to Ashwood Bank, which didn’t mean anything to me at that time driving all over Germany. And he said, oh, you wouldn’t do me a favour and take some cattle down the slaughter house. Well typical farm, a foot of much everywhere. So I take these two or three loads, I think I did about three loads. So he thanked me very much. the next week Stan White didn’t go down for his tea break. He was stood there got all his lorry there, and Mr Duggan had bought a load of cattle. so he said, yeah, there’s two loads for you and for Mr White and one for Mr Griffiths here. His drivers all blocked me out so I couldn’t get in to load. But I fought my way in or literally would have done if necessary if I had to give way, and that’s what gave me the determination to make a go and be afraid of nobody and stand to everybody. And I think that small instance in my life turned my life around and made me very determined and be afraid of nobody and take them on head on, which I have done all my life.

I think making these short films is well worth while because history should be recorded actually by people who were there at the time. Not necessarily myself, but other people who were actually there at the time and then you get a true recording. I think it’s a very good act of life to have it recorded live. I don’t think you can beat that for history because histories tend to be written, I can’t remember the right word I want to use, hindsight.

Wherever there was a brewery, I think Worcester and Herefordshire was a bigger hop growing area, as big as Kent, so wherever there was a brewery I hauled them. London, Park Royal, which was Guinness’s, which used to have a huge amount of hop pockets, but the farthest that I personally hauled hops was Tyneside to northern clubs, they used to have them pressed again. About once a month they would use about 120 pockets a month when they were brewing their strong ale and it was strong ale. To small and little breweries like Chipping Norton where they had 18 at a time. To Wales. I’ve taken pockets to Llanelli, you name it. To Burton. Burton on Trent was the biggest area.

Birmingham Mitchells & Butlers, there was one in Dudley, Burtonwood, that was an old-fashioned brewery. I took several lots up to Alveston in the Lake District that was a nice journey, always a nice little load of about 25 pockets and they would pay for a special journey which was very nice. you could pop up there it was a very nice experience and enjoy the lakes at the same time.

The one particular year when Albert Brooks, who I got to know well because he used to come round and look round and say, everything was left to the last minute, he would be loading you at ten at night. It was always Mr Brooks. 'You couldn't be down in Maidstone for 7 in the morning could you? And this was at ten o'clock at night. And we'd still be loading and I always got there. only two hours sleep perhaps and away I would go and roar down there through the night. I would do anything for Albert Brooks he was that kind of man. Very quiet, unassuming, different to his foreman who would be up in up in the air and shouting and bawling at everyone but Albert Brooks and got that very quiet manner and I thought he was a gifted, a very gifted man. Albert Brooks made the Bruff, he was the Bruff, the Bruff Manufacturing Company. He was the boss, a very good man and a very clever man.

(Bringing a Bruff across the Channel) well I don't know what to say, we just loaded it up we only to it as far as …..Hook of Holland there and then it was put onto the Continental railway, it was to bypass the docks really,. Because the docks was hit and miss really, you never knew when they was going on strike, you're probably too young to remember, it's only history now, but they would strike for a fortnight at a time. That ship could be literally blackballed, it was all a last-minute job. I was 20 and I had just come back from driving on the continent so it didn't mean anything to me.

I remember going at the last minute, there was a huge panic on because of getting these machines out to Czechoslovakia for, I can't remember which season it was, it would be the 56/57 season because I was 20 at the time and we and to get our lorries insured, went through the AA to get these lorries booked passages from Harwich we went from. there were about five of us went across on this ferry. We had big high loads on because they hadn't been broken down very well and so they had to lift us on onto the top of a deck. I can remember taking the camera with me, taking several photographs which was thought nothing at the time but looks funny now. So went out to the Hook of Holland on a flat-bottomed tank, landing craft, which I'll tell you one thing, it was a rough ride, and we did that two or three times. And we put them onto railway trucks, international railway trucks to go to Czechoslovakia. And the Bruff sent men in those days out there, to show them, to put them together and make sure everything worked. I don't think they were 100 per cent successful out there because we used for our hops to go up and

they use wire. So the machine didn't cope so well with the wire as far as I can remember as they did with the string on ours. It was rather a hectic time.

And we were hauling them right from South Wales, any big cow in those days, even as far as south wales to Boston. The Docker's strike came on and they stopped dead and we had two lorries on it, or all three at the time, and we were completely without work and it never got started again because it stopped, just one of those jobs never started again. So the Dockers don't realise how much damage, I don't think those people did to the country and how many people they affected down the line. These people go on strike for any little thing, it's got to be talked through in the end. so I believe talk it through, cause they're going to achieve nothing by striking. How many people's lives they affect right down the line. People yo9u never think of or dream of. The repercussions come down.

Made at Malvern, it would be a bit too third hand my information. I would estimate Francis Loudon had one, three or five around here. A few in Hampshire. But they wouldn't sell many like. I forget what the faults were look. Alan Jenkins would know if you questioned him ten years ago, which is why I'm big believer I think you're doing a good job.

(Bruff) it's still there but it's been turned into offices, all little units now, it's still there. we came to a gnat's cock of buying it. the approach was all wrong like, you know, the lorries, very narrow down through there, a steep bank and you come out, oh terrible, you crept down there with your heart in your mouth sometimes. We stored some stuff, some pallets, when Bruff were packing up, we hired off Johnsons who own it. We hired our outfit, well we've still got some of it, still got one of the cubicles there. There's an extra storage if we get busy for the lorries like,.

I couldn't tell you for certain if Albert Brooks was a Suckley man. He was about before the second world war because he was making hop powders before he made the hop picking machine, you still see am occasional parked under a hedgerow or something like that. The last one I seen was over at Suckley. But there's sure to be one or two about like. But the hop picking machine hasn't altered, he got it right first time like.

Well she'd got the money look, his first wife had got the money, I don't know what happened to her I don't know can't remember people will know better than I did. She was a Brough but the Bruff hop picking machine was Bruff. And he was Brooks like and it was her family that put the money up but it was his design and brain. But he was always designing something in those days, but very quiet, he would just walk quietly around, always wore light clothing, always wore white, walked very slowly and spoke very quietly. Never raised his voice to anybody, I never seen

him raise his voice to anybody.

I don’t know how far around the world the business went, later on, a bit later on we took them in packing cases but I can’t remember at the time, now, where they were going. I just can’t recall. Once they were in packing cases you took them to the docks and that was the end of your brief, your responsibility. once they’ve lifted them off your lorry to go on that boat you didn’t mind where they were going. I just know they were going to Czechoslavakia because we were taking them abroad. And I know on the next year we spent a whole season hauling these hop picking machines and they got it better organised cause they dismantled it so you could haul two parts side by side, but they were going by a big ocean going barge an I don’t know for certain but they said they were going so far up the Rhine, that was the cheapest way. There was not so much hurry they got so long to get them out there. it was just one year when they were all behind. We took them, I think there two of Frome Valley lorries, one of Fred Boucher, myself, must have been four of us. I have got a photograph I took at Suckley station. They were going on the trains down to the docks. But it was going to take too long look, so we unloaded them off the wagons and put them onto the railway carriages and put them onto our lorries, once we got the ferry booked up, well Albert Brooks booked the ferry up, and it was all booked up and all we had to do was drive down there at a certain time and take them abroad, and it was all laid on at the other end. We’d drive it to the big railway station, you’d have a marshal in the yard, we were directed to where we’d got to unload and they unloaded them by train and put them on trucks and that was the end of our responsibility. Then we came back, we loaded back up and straight out again look.

The Bruff hop picking machine was designed and made in Suckley, Worcestershire and it was a very important part of everyone’s life, I don’t know, a huge percentage of the people who lived in Suckley all left the farms and their other jobs, and worked at the Bruff because the overtime was unlimited and it played a huge part in Suckley life for ten to fifteen years, a huge boom and it played a huge part, everyone seemed to work the Bruff, they came from miles around to work for the Bruff. it was a big part of Suckley life and it was a very important part of everyone’s lives