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Transcript:

Julia: OK Rob can you just introduce yourself and tell us a – just give us a brief history about your relation ship with hops and where you worked and..

Rob: Yes, I'm er Bob Halford from Ledbury, Ledbury born and bread. Hops all through my life's played quite a big part from start to finish I suppose – I mean I made life long friends through hops – I was brought in the hop community – I was taken to the land when I was a wee baby but er I didn't know much about it at the time obviously but when I did become old enough to gobble around as we shall say me and hops got together in a big way because we'd end up sitting in the crib local growers in Ledbury which was Ernie Bartlett and at New Mills Farm which was one of 'em and Davies' at Hill House farm out on the Marcle Road, they were our local hop growers that er mother used to er go and spend her time amassing a little bit of pocket money ready for the winter and the new term back at school so it was a big event in our lives really. I enjoyed it thoroughly – I worked at the Hop Marketing board for 13 deacons which opened in the 60s and er I had three spells – I started as a Hop Porter there actually and er you got laid off generally – there was a small core of full time worker but er it was a bit of a pot – you was either lucky or not and the first two times I wasn't but I was third time lucky and spent just over eleven years there the last time and I must say – very happy years – met some interesting people, worked hard, slept well (small laugh) – but generally speaking hops in this area was the big thing – ver big thing. i mean from tying of the hops and throwing down at the end of the season it took up a big chunk of the year hopping – all the way round. Although the season was hectic – you used to start in September and for us working at the Hop Marketing Board it used to go on generally till January for the part-timers – we were called porters in them days – um we'd get laid off at that time when most of the running around had been done and that was it really till the next year.

In the first instance I took a couple of part time jobs on the farm – one of them was a hop farm actually – so you got to do other things – I've worked in the Hop yard – taking down the lines yes – I've helped to do hop typing and generally through my life hops has played a big part. I made friends with term a young Welsh chappy – come up from Wales who helped – he helped to build the Hop Marketing Board – and um he was working for G. Walker and Slaters at the time and they were one of the

contractors and we were lifelong friends until he unfortunately passed away some 16 months ago. So yes hops you could say has played a bit part – not only in my life but in my mothers' and father's lives because it was local work for everybody – it was on the land and er – I've also put my bit in as far as the brewers are concerned – in later days I've tried to support the industry in any way I can, although sometimes till 11.30 at night and I've been told that perhaps we shouldn't have had the last one but er – what can you do? Somebody's gotta do it as they say. So yes, I suppose my introduction to hops is still going on if you wanna look at it that way. But I've got some fond memories of hops and I suppose a lot of people out there have and it should never be forgotten what hops have done for Herefordshire – like the beef cattle – like the cider – things that we need to preserve – memories that should be put down for other people to see how we did live and you could live happily even if you live poorly – but I think hops was a big part of that.

Rick: Wow

Julia: That's great.

Rick: OK, Camera's rolling.

Julia: oh can you just um go back bit – because you said about your parents you said can you just –you were painting some really lovely pictures in there about your mum going up with the pram and just tell us about the size of your family and just being um being extra money for Christmas and all those things – just tell us a bit about that.

Rob: Well, I'm one of 13 children. How my mother ever coped I don't know but she'd be up in the morning – shed have four lines of washing flying in the breeze and she'd be waiting at the telephone box – now that was a pick up point you see – and she'd be there at quarter to eight to go out and do her stint on the land – however she done it i'll never know. But yeah – it was just a way of life – everybody done it really – some done it with the hops – some done it with other things – some done it with you know the fruit farms where they had to be doing the pruning and the picking and the spraying I mean it was the same it just went on – people didn't always realise what – it was more than a job – it was more that – you work with the seasons and it was just part of your life I suppose – you come home tired at the end of the day – you had a meal – if you were lucky you could afford to go out a couple of times a week maybe – skittles, darts – you know. But we went along onto these farms if you like for whatever reason when we were quite young so it – you didn't know any other really – I mean you were taken out onto the farm and it was your life – its like sending you to school – it become part of what you done on a daily basis – it was only when you got older and you appreciate why your parents

was doing it - they needed to to give you the clothes on your back, the food and somewhere to sleep at night in the warm. And I think once you've done these sort of jobs you realise how hard it was for them. Bearing in mind my mother also had to look after all us children and however she done that I don't know. You know but - we were never - never unhappy family in ourselves as a family - we were never short of food - so mother must have done something very very good in her times - because how she coped I don't know. I don't think a lot of youngsters would do it today - I think the challenge'd be enough - they'd walk away at the start I think but thirteen children I mean - I won't comment on that - I mean we stuck to three so we've done out little bit to equalise it back the other was if you like. But er - a family takes some running - but I think in a way, things like hop picking gave a purpose and a meaning more than just - like today you might be wearing a bit of pocket money - but it was your way of life in them days and she went on they done blackcurrant picking - they done potato picking-up - all jobs was tedious - picking up potatoes all day - unless your back's experienced that day after day after day - its hard to explain to somebody who's never done it. And yet - they quite enjoyed it - there was this sort of social event going on out in the middle of a field - and you could talk as well as pick up the potatoes and very often you were your own local news cos you got all the news that was going - what was happening in the next street - what had happened with the woman down the road - you know - where's she gone - she's left the area and all this - but it was just life wasn't it - you know - I mean - and I think hops - not just hops I say - the fruit farming the same - I mean it'd give you a social as well as a working environment - and I was - well I was happy to be brought up in that - when I sat in the crib when I was young enough at hop picking - I first of all you spent your time in the pram - because they had to know where you were you see so (laughing) even in them days - but when you were big enough to be slung under yer arm and taken up the hop rows and perched in the end of the crib - which for our family was a big open crib - sometimes you had a division in it and you'd share a trip with somebody else - and you'd work in houses - you'd be positioned in a house - you pick your house and then they'd move you on - and the flaggers would come along - the chaps who used to help to move the cribs - they'd pull down the ones that, when you pulled the bines, flags'd stay on the words - sometimes some of the best hops they reckon would be up there flying in the breeze - so along they'd come with their poles - they'd pull 'em down and drop 'em in yer - in yer crib so you could pick the whole lot - and er as a child it was an education before you went to school - I mean - the smells - somebody's started a wood fire down the bottom - the kettle's on - you know. We wasn't left out! We'd take a couple of match boxes when we were big enough to know - we'd have a competition - who could get the most hop dogs - catch 'em - put 'em in a match box- at the end of the day count 'em out - let 'em go again of course - I mean you gotta have tomorrow's fun as well haven't ya? you

know (laugh) - and there was hop dogs galore in them days - I still don't know now whether hop dogs - of any abundance of hop dogs whether they've all gone by the way of pesticides or what I don't know - but I know in them days it was a challenge and it was a game and we made fun of it. Of course as you got a little bit older you were doing the picking as well - once you were old enough to - you had the flags generally the little bits was dropped down that was your job you picked them - but er mother'd go along and slash the line and pull it down - drag it back to the crib - dump it on top of us half the time, you know - you were fighting your way from under a fine first - and then you start looking for your hop dogs when the line got out of the way and they'd picked all the rough bits of it - you know - and at the end of the day it was a bit of a divvy up to see who had the most hop dogs. But it was good - the smells around ya (sniffs) you know - I mean you'd say hops got a very strong smell (sniffs) but you learned not to think about that when you was little it just become part of your environment - in fact I suppose later on when I worked in the Hop Marketing warehouse it seemed even more pungent because they've gone through the stage of drying - they'd been sulphured and they've changed - but out in the hop yard that is a different smell in the hop yard to what it is in the warehouse because of the process of drying and sulphuring that they've gone through. But my wife - I mean - when I took my overalls off I could have stood 'em in the corner some days because of the pollen from the hops - you were just green - you know - but we had a certain hop called the bullion and my wife always reckoned it very much smelled like cat pee so i had to take 'em off and stick 'em in a bucket or water straight away. Don't get me wrong i just I'm - when I say cat pee it wasn't that cat went in the bucket of water it was the actual - but I had to do it because she found 'em very very strong and she could tell when we'd been sampling bullion hops - so -such was - now sampling - we used to be the porters tot start in all this - but evolved after time - the London boys'd come down - they come down on a Sunday night usually and they'd stay in the local hostels(?) or a couple of people used to take 'em into their homes - we had um Jack Fowler down at the er New Mills Farm - now some of the lads would lodge with hime. We had Jinx and Eileen Phillips first of the New Inn in Ledbury - they moved to the Seven Stars - both times they had people coming -0 the London boys'd come down and they'd lodge with them. We also had er an old couple in Worcester Road - er Clarence House - they took in a a couple of the lads. So for them they come down - they come on a Sunday night - they go back Friday afternoon, late Friday afternoon - and they did the sampling examining - one - they were representing the Factors and the Merchants. I suppose it was fair play if you like because the the one done the samples - the other one tested the pockets with an electric megger - one was to make sure that there wasn't too much moisture in 'em - whether there was any bad content in the pockets - if they did they were put aside and the between them they had to arbitrate of what was wrong with the pocket, what

they could do about it and if it was to be passed off as perished – how much? and could it be used the rest of the pocket? Them sort of things like um – use it once, use within four weeks – which meant then that once that notice went through they would take that pocket away– the brew – go to the brewer straight away – they'd open it up – they'd take out the bad piece if it was in the bottom but he could still use the other hops because hey were still good and sound. These was the sort of things that – you know – people never see or never saw what was going on in this warehouse – it was just a warehouse where one day you was putting hops in and another day you're taking hops out – but there was something going on behind the scene and the samples we used to take out of the pockets would go to the show rooms and they were basically sold on the samples that were up there. Er you'd sent fives it was in my day – you'd send up the samples from all the fives: 5, 15, 25, 35 – which was representation of the crop term and in some incidences if you had small varieties they might take a couple extra of the smaller varieties. Then at a later date you would do general sampling which would come in as – nobody would know actually until just before hand but they would wait till all the pockets had been pressed and numbered and then they would decide whether you sampled 2, 4, 6 and 8s – 1, 3 – you'd already done the 5s – 7s and 9s – and that's how they kept so as nobody knew what the numbers was going to be so you couldn't – how can I put this without being derogatory to anybody – you couldn't be said that it was open to a fiddle so you couldn't turn around and put all your scrapings and all your sweepings up off the bottom of the kiln floors into that pocket because they know they wasn't gonna look at that one – so nobody knew – until they announce which ones it was – so...And the other thing we did was sampling for the ploughing matches which is big event in the hops for the local farmers it was a big event you know I mean they really wanted to go there and show that they'd got the best Goldings or the best Fuddles and they won it last year and we're gonna win it again this year – a bit of the old rivalry – um and they would come in and they would select certain pockets and you'd cut samples for 'em and they would go on to be entered on the tables and displayed and judged at the local ploughing matches which was also a big thing you know – and that again culminated in that time of the year – it was autumn – the ploughing matches come along after this hop picking and it was just a progression of the season for them to have their hops shown at the local shows. So i mean if you look at that through the actual process of what happened to the hops and then what happened to the likes of me – born and bred – in my own way – I've done a little bit of at the start of the picking – the fun on being in the hop yard – the daily sights and smells of what goes on in the hop yard – the toil of people there stood at the crib all day long and then the bloke comes round and he's got his bushel basket and “bushel 'em up” they shouts “Bushel 'em up” – everyone body knows the Bushler's about – out comes the tally books and you know he comes along and then very often you might get a little bit of a

discrepancy or an argment at one time because they used to push the hops into the bushel basket but some 'em had a happy was of follow (laughter from someone else) following in with their elbow - the become heavy handed - very often the word'd be said - its a bushel basket for a reason - it should hold a bushel - so sometimes he used to shake 'em back up and take a few back off - and then your tally would go in the book. So much a bushel you was paid for picking - dependant on it - you could get a sub - some farmers wouldn't give you one - perhaps because they didn't want you to take the bit of money and then perhaps go somewhere else or finish - they always seemed to think well whilst you knew you had something a pay day at the end of it you'd carry on and see the picking season through. But some people used to come up from Wales and they would come along and they'd look upon it as a holiday - yes they wanted the cash as well course they did - but to them it was a bit of a few weeks where they come up out of their own environment down in Wales where we all knew what was down there - you know - the slag heaps and the mining and all that so to come out into the countryside (sniffs) all that hop smell in the air - I suppose to them it must have been - you know- a great holiday for them - I mean they sit out in the evenings after they've been picking i n the hop fields all day - some of 'em in caravans - some of 'em'd stop in the farm buildings - they'd get a fire going - they'd get a bit of the local brew you know - the cider or a few - sometimes they'd be lucky enough to go and get a few kegs of beers in some of 'em - there was enough of 'em they used to get together and they'd have a couple of kegs delivered and they'd tap it and they'd be away and they'd be doing what we're doing now really - reminiscing about what's gone on during the day and what - you know - who they used to be with in the old days and what farms they've worked on - and it was a life - it was part of everyday life that was going on in the countryside - its never been glorified as far as I know - it's been wrote about. But, like I said, when I went to the autumn show I saw thais being shown as a video for some of the people who were in the hop trade and in the hop business - farming, growing and all this - and there was a display and I took time to go through the display and i thought to meself - yeah if somebody don't log this and make this into some sort of a catalogue of historically what's happened in the countryside a lot of this will be lost. The old techniques - you know - even the job of working in the kiln was a very skilled job - you know - you - the farmer could farmer could do all he would to grow them hops and he could the best job he could - he could come out with perfect hop - but if they chap he's got in the kiln makes a mess of it he can ruin them hops - so its a avery important job. We used to go up into the local kilns when we were little - not because we run the kilns - we'd help 'em with the green sacks - but our reward - even though we were officially not able to drink because we were too young - most farms used to have some farmhouse cider on tap - and it wasn't unknown for us to have the odd half a pint even though we were too young. So we got our reward for helping with

the green sacks – taking them in – we weren't allowed to spread 'em because that was a – that was the kiln man's job. He looked at that – they had to be put unto a certain level on the kiln – they had to be nice and even – there had to be no compacted – he'd lighten 'em up so they had the same result each times they dried 'em. We wasn't allowed nowhere near that – that was a job. But when he had his free time we could go along – ver often in the evening we'd and there'd be a dart bard up in the corner – his bit of free time. Over from the kitchen in the farmhouse would come bread, cheese – you know sometimes a bit of cold meat, perhaps a quarter bottle of whiskey if you was very luck – and I was more than lucky once enough – once or twice even as a sampler in the winter – to get a small little something to your tea – you know – on a cold winter's morning – it was very nice – but to us when we were young – that drop cider was – you know – it was all important – and we did it for nothing – we done it for the fun of it – you know – perhaps then I started to play darts when I big enough to get me darts back out of the board – you know – and perhaps thats what started me on darts – could be down to hops in the end – that could've been – which has been part of my social life anyway.

Julia: So Bob could you just tell us a bit about the heavy handed Bushlers as you call them.

Rob: Well yes, of course, once you've picked into the crib and you'd hear the cry "Bushel 'em um! Bushel 'em up" – pretty soon they'd all start shouting g around "Bushler about!" – of course the Busheler would come to your crib with his bushel basket obviously, it held a bushel of hops – or should have held a Bushel of hops –but so e of the Bushlers 'erself was a little heavy handed they would very often scoop into the hops, fill the basket – but they had a nasty habit of following in with the elbow and then put a few more on the top – some'd get away with it but not all. And this where they come – they got known as heavy handed butlers – obviously for that treason – and they were not looked upon very happy I tell you because once you've picked a bushel of hops you don't want somebody taking a bushel and a third – because it goes on your tally book and what you've earned comes off the tally book and you don't wanna be paid for less that you've got – so yes – they kept quite a close eye on the Bushler – especially if he was known as a heavy handed Bushler and – is that OK?

Julia: That's great, thank you

Rick: That's lovely, yeah

Julia Thank you – the Mop Fair you were talking about that...

Rick: Oh yes!

Rob: Yeah

Julia: That was really interesting...

Rob: Yes I can, well you see...

Julia:...(inaudible – overlapping speakers)... more than just a street fair.

Rob: Well The Mop Fair in Ledbury, we..

Rick: Sorry, can we just start again? (in audible) having a fiddle, sorry Bob.

Rob: That's OK.

Julia: Sorry, carry on.

Rob: Right - The Mop Fair in Ledbury is quite significant as regards the Hop Picking season and the reason for it was that because everybody's had their hops tallied - so of 'em as they say might get a sub - some some farmers might not let 'em have it but generally at the end there was a pot that they had picked - picked up at the end - like my mum used to have to go up to the Farm House at the end of the hop picking, and she had a standing line on a certain day, and you'd got through into the office and they would tell you - mind you you kept a little bit of paper for yourself mind -you know - you didn't and you had your tally book anyway but you knew what you'd been paid if you had and you knew what you were expecting - and you'd go along in there and you'd sign the book to say you'd been paid and that was it. So you've got this little bot of money - now this time of the year is also sort of going back to school time in the September time - so if you didn't get chance to have perhaps a new pair of shoes because you hadn't got the money before you picked up your hop picking money - you go down - and this is when you'd buy your shoes - but the Mop Fair itself was in town also in October and its usual on the second Monday and Tuesday of the month - so this was a good way that- - whatever you wanted in them days you could buy things from the local Mop Fair. Some people called it the Hop Fair but it wasn't - it is the Mop - and the reason for that was it wasn't just an amusement thing in those days - it was more about -you had what we call hawkers - I mean I ain't sure that's the right word for 'em - but they were - they'd hawk their wares around the country - they'd go to fetes and fairs and shows and the of course they'd come to the Mop Fairs - and in there you could buy canteens of cutlery - you could buy crockery - odd plates - you could buy full dinner services if thats what you wanted - tea pots, pots, pans, oil cloth, lino back in the day - I mean - pretty much not heard of now a lot - especially oil cloth as it used to be called - but thats what most working class families had a bit of that down in the kitchen anyway because you could wipe it over - especially if you had the old flags on the floor - you put something down first an then you put a bit of that over the top to give you a smoother surface - bit it - you got it from the mop fair generally cos A: they brought it to you - B: you had your bit of money at the end of hop picking so it was a significant time for a lot pf people what they spent thinner hop money on.

Julia: Tell us about the man with the plates.

Rob: Oh yes! Yes – we – we used to have – and he was a regular – he used to come for years and years and we all knew what to expect from him – of course they're very brash you know – they want your attention so you know they – they don't – they're not timid sort of people you know – they're very loud – they're all banging on the table you know and they'll turn around and shout "Good quality!" you know "These are general household items – you know – you buying good value here" he said "you'll never get it at this price again" – and of course they would bang them on the table or they'd clack 'em together and roll them across their arm – set of six plates – you know "These are sturdy plates" you know "this is what you want in your kitchen – their lot are light hearted – this is good quality, hard wearing stuff!" – well of course – it probably was – but the day we were watching and he clacked 'em together and they all small – course – we had some sort of laughter then – but he turned it around – as quick as a flash – he's saying now "That's inferior – I've bought them just to show you what happens if you buy the cheap stuff – so we don't want none of that" – chucked the basket back on the floor and he said: "This is what we're offering" – picks up another basket – takes out the plates – displayed 'em in front of him – bang bang on the table – "different quality here altogether" – to me they looked exactly the same – I think he just covered himself but this is where you got your household wares from most of the time – because you had the money, the opportunity, the fair come to you. My mum always used to buy a teapot – we always had lots of teapots – it wasn't because we drunk out of all of 'em – it think it was – some people (inaudible) carpets, mats – call 'em what you will you know – my mum just liked a teapot and i suppose that's another year – got another teapot.

Rick: Excellent, thanks.

Julia: That's great

Rick: Ok – Ooh you're just in there, sorry. Sorry, it's (inaudible) yeah..

Julia: Hm, so Bob just – can you just tell me about that image of the guy cooking his little bit of meat over the fire and also about getting all the hop marks on your sandwiches and all sorts...

Rob: Yeah – I mean – you know you never give it a thought at the time – it's only looking back that you realise that – you know – the little things that made up the day in an hop yard – and as say – the smells – obviously the hops – the earthiness of being outside in the country and it wasn't always dry as most people who've done hop picking will find – sometimes it was splattering down the back of your neck maybe – but er – the one thing that

was significant was when the fires were lit – when the kettles went on down the end of the row – and the sight you met when you just popped of to have your break – if your lucky – some never did – they used to bring it up to ‘em and they would carry on but – we as a family – used to pop off down to the end of the row when the kettle was ready – but the one image that says it all for me was an old chap – he must have been about 70 I suppose – but he’s a little bit of fire going down the end of the row – and he’s got a bit of home-cured bacon on a bit of forked stick – and he’s toasting it over his little bit of fire – but he’s not wasting anything cos it starts to drip he wipes it on the bread – and the smell coming off that bit of home cured bacon – you know – it – bacon today I don’t know – it hasn’t got the strong smell it used to have then i know – but – I mean most of it was probably fat – it was home cured and anybody who knows home cured – its easier to see the streaks of lean because there’s so much white fat around it – you know – but (sniffs) it fills your nostrils. But talking about eating and the – I mean – your hands – you never really had any facilities in a hop yard – my mum always used to take a couple of wet cloths – put ‘em in bag – take ‘em with yer – I mean if the kids got – I don’t know food or even mud over there – cos we all used eat as my nan used to say – a peck of dirt afore you die – but you didn’t want it all in one day – but when you went to eat your sandwich (sniffs) you hadn’t got all – you got all this green pollen off the hops – and very often – it you put you sandwich down – take a bit out of it – pick up your team – have a sip of your tea – next time you went to pick it up you realise its got these green imprints all over it – but it still takes good – and you still eat it – you know – I mean I sometimes wonder – don’t we miss that as well – the introduction of everyday life and not being too fussy about you know – you’ve gotta build up a resistance – hygiene – in them days we had plenty of chance to build it up because everywhere you went – I mean even down shall we say to the – the occasion when people went missing from he crib – they just walked away and – like – when you were younger you were a bit naive – where’s she gone? Where’s ma gone? Where’s John gone? but you was told: they’ll be back in a minute – well of course you’re on the land – you know you don’t go into you en suite do ya? they come back – and they did come back – but today you would’ve said – oh they’ve just gone to the convenience – just popped to the toilet – but in them days – you just gone – everybody knew why they’d gone – nobody knew where they’d gone – but they come back – and they always seemed a lot happier when they come back – so that was another thing of working on the land – you had to make do with what you got. But food – cooked out in the open – i suppose its like now when people have a barbecue – to us that was – as kids that was brilliant – see all these little fire going (sniffs) the smoke – smell of the smoke you know – and as I say that very a bit of toasting of a bit of bacon and some of the Welsh people, they come prepared – they had their pots and pans – you know – they had a full breakfast – you know the eggs and

everything would be going in there and spotting away – and it was (blows) a sight to behold – I mean – we didn't get many eggs and bacon ourselves like, personally, but er – maybe they were a little bit better off than us or what I don't know but er yes – it was truly something to behold when the whole hop yard was in full flow – it was sights and smells to remember.

Rick: Wow, that's lovely

Julia (chuckles)

Rob: (CUT in) it was good, it's easy to tell – because you don't need – you don't need to stop and think about it...

Julia: Yeah

Rob: ..because it happened – you know you was there – and to be honest as I said – working in the hops side of my working life was the best of my working life – and I said to the wife – I said not just because thats the time we met – we got married – we had two of our three children while we were at the – I was at Hop Marketing Board – but when I moved on to big industry – Doughtys – I realise what a mistake I'd made – and I thought well money's not everything – sometimes its the simple things that make you happiest – I've never wanted for fast cars and certainly not fast women – you know – I mean – I'm happy with my lot – food to eat, occasionally out, not wanting for things but not having a lot and I think thats where we come from – it was a family of thirteen we never had a lot but we did make use of what we had and make the most of it – and I think that's important.

Rick: (inaudible) ... Ok we're good to go.

Julia: So, Bob, can you just tell me a little bit, introduce us to the Hop Marketing Board and its function and what you used to do there.

Rob: yeah well the Hop Marketing Board was um – it came in as far as we was concerned into being in the er in the 60s erm I wasn't personally there at the start of the Hops Marketing Board when the warehouse was built in Ledbury – I did join 'em slightly later – bearing in mind you had to be 18 to work in the warehouse and when it first oped I wasn't 18 so I couldn't start there straight away – but I had erm – I um – mate I made come up from Wales – they actually come up there with a company called G. Walker and Slater and they built it and he was staying up during the week and going back home on weekends back to Wales – and um – they spent – well they were billeted in this sort of caravan but the one lad he started working behind the bar in a local pub – and he ended up stopping in the – in the pub itself and lodging with 'em, some and him – it wasn't right from the

start but we was friends I went to work there and he was working there throughout my time there and we become lifelong friends. But the Hop marketing Board was basically set up to give a safe - shall we say a safe environment - or a safer environment - and also as far as the farmers and the London blokes who used to do the actual sampling and examining - it was to give 'em bas where they work from instead travelling the farms all the time - see they used to have to travel around to lots of farms and you can appreciate a lot of the farms haven't got the best facilities to work in for space and things - very often you'd be taking pockets, breaking 'em down from a big heap and then having to stack 'em up on the other side just to give yourself room to work in - which wasn't ideal. So the Hop Marketing Board built this warehouse and it was run by board and I - I think in my time to start with er - Edward lane i think was the chairman of the board at the time - well he was one of 'em anyway - and we had a Mr James Cooper - he came down to manage the er - the warehouse - hew was a er - he was a London man himself - he came down and er we had a little bungalow on the outside of the er grounds of the Hop Marketing Board - bearing in mind where the Hop Marketing board - it used to be an ordinance depot back in the day - and this little bungalow used to be where the watchmen and gateman's gatekeeper's house used to be. Now he lived in there so he was living right on the job - um - the samplers would come down obviously on a Sunday evening they'd be billeted in the various places, their function was to make sure that all the pockets that needed to be sampled and examined were logged - each pocket - weighed - anything wrong with the pockets at all had to be entered and then a sheet would be a -a- wrote up at the end of each growers crop - the whole crop as such would be - and the pockets that had to be shall we say - deducted of weight or from hops which had been pact - practically put in cold if you like or you'd had a cold spot in the kiln - you had to make allowances - well the sampler and the examiner came together then to arbitrate - now the reason they would be together was they represented both side - obviously from the grower and the brewer and the buyers for the breweries - there had to be an in between whereas they could come to and agreement on whether your livelihood as a hop farmer could be jeopardised if you had a lot of problem with your hops in one year and it might mean that brewers mightn't touch your hops the following year - or you might lose quota - which in them days was a big thing because some was trying to get more quota and build up their hop business - nobody seemed to like to lose quota - so the idea was this would all be done in - or basically done in these places that were set up - it wasn't just Ledbury we already had Pudge's at Bishops Froome where you'd go and work out there. But Ledbury's capacity was 15000 pockets at the time - that don't mean we only had 15000 through Ledbury - what it meant was our capacity on the first shift would be 15000 pockets - what they would then do - they would draw in from other farms who were still storing in the region - they'd either go into Pudge's or they'd be drawn into the

Ledbury warehouse. So the idea was to have a central hub like they had in Paddock Wood in Kent - where you knew that once your hops had been taken out - if you had any queries or you wanted any samples or anything like this - you go in there - you got to the office - you tell 'em what you wanted - we'd be turn around and instructed and it'd all be done for everybody in the same manner, in a fair and even way that their hops would be extracted - their pockets - they would open 'em - they'd take samples for ploughing matches and the likes of whatever it was for - and then they'd be treated the same way as everybody else and they'd be arbitrated by the factors and merchant's men from London. And I think thats the reason why it was set up - to give sort of an overall fairness to the system - I'm not saying when it was done on the farms that it wasn't done and seen to be done fairly - but only what I've was told by some of my predecessors who actually worked on farms previous to the Hop Marketing Board being set up - sometimes corners were cut - and sometimes perhaps the insertions was that perhaps one or two of the lads went back to London a little richer than they should've been at the end of the season - or perhaps they got half a bottle of whisky off the farmer instead of just the coffee - I don't know but the - the idea was that everybody would be given a fair shake if you like - and it would be done in a fair manner - and I think it probably worked that way - but it surely made it a lot easier than dragging pockets from one corner of a store room on a farm to running them on an open floor - smooth floor - two little wheeled truck it was - our little bogey truck and a pair of steal hooks - and thats all you needed to be a Hop Porter - oh and a pair of fast legs by the way. And yes I think it was set up to be managed by a board, to be seen that you had board members - who were farmers - to make sure that other farmers were pretty secure in their own mind that they were getting a fair shake and could be seen to by people who were already on the board and they could come in any time and see what was done to their pockets and nobody got to have any fair presences or unfair practices practiced against 'em in any way shape or form - and I think to a great degree it was a big success - it certainly speeded up the process of moving pockets cos of the elevators - the hop pocket elevators and the lifts in the building itself - certainly made it a lot easier for loading and things like that - because you put 'em on an elevator - the dropped off on the floor that you were loading on - they went down a shoot straight onto the lorry. Now - other whose worked on the farms will tell you very often - you had people all in and around - two or three blokes at a time trying to get them up the side of a lorry (laughter) - or on the forks of a tractor - and it wasn't always very handy to do that - it it did make it - it did make it a lot easier I think.

Rick: Brill.

Julia: That's great

Rick: (inaudible) on.

Julia: Erm - tell us a bit about the kind of - you know - how busy it was at the time that you weren't allowed to have holiday but also I really like that story about you liked the fact you could go home when your - when um the first baby was...

Rob: Yeah...

Julia: ... about to be born (laughter).

Rob: Well yeah, the - the convenience - but the um - the arrangements once the season started was pretty strict - we worked a five and half day week in those days so you you worked Saturday mornings as well - it was part of your working week - and some days you didn't finish on time - er - perhaps we got a bit of an influx of lorries- term - come in fairly late and as a perishable product, especially on a dry day when they didn't know if it was gonna stay dry they've got 'em on - they haven't no sheets on or anything - we'd probably go over our time and get 'em off obviously I mean - it wasn't encouraged - um - especially with people - because there was always the thing that they could phone up and say - I'm undercover perhaps out at Pudge's - er - can you f - can you get us off tonight if we come in now - and very often some would do that - and we'd do it if we could - but they wouldn't - there'd be so such thing as overtime - if you had the lorries in the yard then at a certain time they had to be got off - don't matter what time you finished - so again its back to the fact that sometimes a driver who'd been loading and unloading hops for a long time - he could be a lot quicker - so that time of the day you was always glad to see the locals - because you know they could cope with pockets - they'd get 'em off quickly and you'd get 'em in quickly - obviously it was in your own interest. But the season started hectically in September - bearing in mind that's the - obviously the picking time, September - it doesn't last now as long as it used to but it used to be a good six week stretch - but it was so hectic that er - you know - you went home tired at the end of each day. We used to have to start off in the farthest corner of the floors - um - when we first started loading hops into the warehouse and we always used to say we were on the long runs because you filled up the corners and worker your way back to the elevator - rum - you got to know by the growers- who we knew roughly how many they grew - we knew what sort of space to allocate on different floors - so you - after a few years you you got to know your warehouse space. But the time was the all important factor that was always against yer - we weren't allowed to take any holidays between start of September and the end of March which - Christmas and New Year obviously was the exceptions - it sounds a bit harsh to put it that way I know but back in the day it wasn't unusual to have limited times for holidays anyway but there was a silver lining to it really in a way because after the season had effectively

drawn to a close which - most of the work was done January February - by March things were quite light so if you had your skeleton crew of 5 or 6 left to run the warehouse through the summer - we had the incentive that - on a week where nobody else was off or you was taking your holidays - they'd give you an extra day off - which was a great boom really because er - you could do something with that day you know, and it helped to pay you back for them half an hours here and there you game 'em during season where you didn't see anything on your pay slip. But it didn't seem to matter that much because you was a good crew, it didn't take long - I mean a lorry between us it - you know - it was only a matter of 10 minutes - we could have 'em off in h'door and that'd be it - in fact I enjoyed working there so much - they used to moan at me coz I turned up for work early - and I only lived up the road - I could be down at work in five minutes on my push bike - which was a mother good thing - because I could also be - pop home at lunch time and be home in five minutes which I very often did - I only lived up in the town - so to me it was an ideal situation - so much so in fact that two of my children were born whilst I was at the Hop Marketing Board the' - and I remember my first daughter being born - I just jumped on me bike - went back to work and er - I hadn't been back a work long at the chappy in the office calls out "I think you're wanted" he said - it was the wife - she'd gone into labour - so I said "right - don't mind if I pop off?" - "No you go" - so off I go - jumps on the bike - and of course being a first-time father - you know - I read the book - I've heard the stories - I knew what to do - "tell me when you gets another pain" I says - [sharp breach in] "oooh" she says - I said - sorry - she said "Are you gonna call the ambulance?" - I said "Oh no, plenty of time yet. Would you like a cup of hot chocolate?" - she said "what?" - I said "Well I'm gonna have a shave first I s' make myself a cup of coffee" - she was aghast - I said "No you got plenty of time - its OK" - so anyway this went on until she was getting quite worried - so i said "Right - I'll go down" - because in these days you could get the ambulance to come and take you to hospital - in the good old days - anyway I went down - gets to the phone box - well you wouldn't believe it - there's somebody inside on the phone - there's somebody waiting outside - so I think hang on a minute - perhaps I have left it a bit late - so I had to dash down the road to the local hardware store - chap I knew quite well - well we ought to - the whole house was done up on his products from his shop - so I goes in there - "Can I use your phone? Can I use your phone?". Now i ain't saying I was panicking - not by a long chalk - lets just say i wasn't in my comfort zone - anyway that was just one of the things that I was able to do because I was just down the road and with my first daughter you'll never know how much that meant to me and I'm sure it meant a lot to my wife for me to be able to be there - and I went in with her - and yes it did take all of 30 minutes from the time we hit the hospital 'til she presented us with our daughter. But I don't think I'd have done that if I was working away - mind you I

still think she thought I left it a little bit late - I had admitted to that mind.

Rick: Excellent, excellent.

Julia: 30 minutes is cutting it bit short.

Rick: Sorry, Rob, I think the beginning of that we had a truck going by and then we had someone going up the stairs and..

Julia: So tell us about the benefit of living near when there's a baby about to be born.

Rob: Well, I'd gone 'ome - popped home on me bike - as I often did - say its only five minutes up the road and er - appeared to be alright - you know - I mean - we knew it was immanent - erm - but the good thing is you know I could still be back up in five minutes more if I needed to be - so I hops on me bike after lunch - cycles back to work - I hadn't been back long actually and er - I gets a call out of the office - "you're wanted! i think it's on the way!" says Mr ashford who was the chappy in our office at the time - I think he was a bit more nervous than me actually - so off the bike - onto the bike I goes - off up the road and er - I gets home - and she's there looking rather worried - and er she says "are you gonna call the ambulance?" and I said "I dunno, tell me when you gets another pain" - she did, later - and I looks at me watch - [sharp breath in] "ooh we, got plenty of time yet" I said "I needs a shave" - so I said "w'd'you like a cup of hot chocolate? Because I'm gonna have a cup of coffee" - she looked rather worried actually as I said - hmm - course first timer I read the book as I said - I knew all about it - just time 'em you know. So anyway I giver her a little bit longer and I could see she was getting a little bit - shall we say - uncomfortable so I said "Right I'll got and get - phone this ambulance now then" - but wouldn't you know it I got down to the local phone box and theres one on the phone inside and there's another one waiting outside - I thought oh perhaps I should have gone a little bit sooner. So anyway - I nips on down and I goes on over to the local hardware store - chap I knew quite well - I wasn't afraid to go in an say "can I use your telephone?" - even in them days - and er I called the ambulance yes and er it duly arrived - but - to say I was a little bit uncomfortable towards the end I probably was but er - we got there and within half an hour, my daughter was born - which was a real benefit of living close to home and being handy - and working with the sort of people who understood and just said "you go".

Rick: Fantastic

Julia: Lovely

Rick: That's lovely

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