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Creators: Rick & Julia Goldsmith  
Project: Herefordshire Life Through A Lens  
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Evans Studio 1950s-80s  
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Interview Date: June\_01\_2018  
Location: Fownhope, Herefordshire  
Source: Catcher Media Social CIC  
Interviewee: John Hardwick (speaker, male)  
Interviewer: Marsha O'Mahony (speaker, female)  
Camera & Sound: Richard Goldsmith (male)  
Producer: Julia Goldsmith (female)  
Language: English

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Type: Video  
Video Format: MPEG-4  
Bit rate: 19.2 mbits/s  
Frame rate: 25 FPS  
Aspect ratio: 16:9  
Width: 1920 pixels  
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Audio Sampling rate: 44.100 kHz  
Audio Bit rate: 192 kb/s  
Stereo/Mono: Mono  
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Duration: 25 min 52 seconds

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Transcript:

MOM: OK John, we're just gonna start of by, I was wondering if  
could tell us who you are and your connection to Fownhope and to  
the Heart of Oak Society.

JH: Alright, I'm John Hardwick and I've lived in the village all

my life. I was born in 1952 and our family have farmed in Fownhope since 1794. I'm the sixth generation of the family and I farm with my brother Geoffrey.

MOM: That's a long time!

JH: Yeah, I haven't been here all that ime though, have I?  
(laughter)

MOM: So what's your earliest memory of the walk?

JH: I suppose one of my earliest memories of the walk, erm, stems from a photograph that we've got at home with brother and myself, with our sticks, stood in the front porch of the house – and erm I would be probably five, with my school uniform and erm, and then Geoffrey is stood beside me.

MOM: What's your memory of the day, then, when you were a child? Preparation...

JH: Erm...I don't know whether I've got too many memories of actually the preparation. Um, I suppose the main one would be my father actually dressing the sticks, er, by our dairy – he was always in charge of dressing the sticks. Quite an onerous task for him really, having to dress sticks for himself and two young lads. But he was also involved in getting things together ready for the club itself, and erm, putting the money in little brown envelopes for the prizes for the sports in the afternoon – and erm, er it was a little bit of tension in the household I suppose at the time because there was so many things that father was trying to think of what he needed to do, erm – so I suppose a youngsters we kept out of the way as much as possible and not interfere and spoil his train of thought!

MOM: But things changed 30 years ago, didn't they, what happened?

JH: Just over 30 years ago, before we reformed, erm – we used to be a Friendly Society, and there was a new finance that came in and because the club funds weren't overly large, we decided that with the onerous rules with the new finance act that the funds would soon be depleted – so we felt that it was far better to actually distribute the funds amongst the adult members of the club and erm, cease the Friendly Society and then reform as a society, dropping the word 'friendly' – to actually keep the tradition of the Club Walk alive, and benefit the locals but doing so...

Erm, back just over 30 years ago the Friendly Society as we knew it, er, due to the Finance Act coming in, we decided that we were going to actually close the old Friendly Society down, erm, and distribute the funds to the adult members. The funds which weren't large, um, would have been completely depleted if we had

just kept running with the rules that we needed to abide by – and erm, so in 1989, the new Society was formed as we know it today. With the, erm, with the club there was also a juvenile section with a separate account which didn't actually come under the same auspices at the adult fund and – erm – that could have been distributed to the juveniles but, because there weren't too many juveniles at that time it was felt that probably they would have benefitted more than the adult members and some of the adult members felt that wouldn't be entirely fair. Um, so, as one of the three trustees – there was Edwin Lewis, er Edwin Godsall – sorry – John Wallace and myself – we decided that it would be far more beneficial to do something for future generations of the youngsters in memory of the club. So, I was Chairman of the Parish Council at the time and we managed to use the juvenile fund as a nucleus to get in extra funds to build a young children's play area on the recreation field, and that was opened in 2002 and it is called 'The Heart of Oak' play area, and there's a plaque on the entrance gate to actually recognise that.

MOM: Tell me what happens on the morning of the walk. Because I understand it's an early start.

JH: Yes – a very early start – not so much for myself because I've never been involved, I've sort of shied away from that job – erm – where the oak bough, which had been chosen weeks before, is cut and then erm – Mike Andrews and a couple of others this year, it would be brother – Geoffrey who is the new chairman of the Club, erm, they will cut that bough at about quarter past five on the morning of the walk and then it's dressed with ribbons, and then, obviously, everybody's club sticks have to be dressed as well, erm and um yes, so it's quite a busy time. Everybody's supposed to try to get down to the New Inn for 10 o'clock but there's a few always running along at half past ten to join the walk, if they've got themselves a little bit behind in the morning.

MOM: As a child, did you have to dress up?

JH: Um, normally from the – well, personally anyway – I used to be in my school uniform. Brother and myself went to the Cathedral Prep and erm, mother felt that it was only right that we should dress up smart and be in our school uniform. Um, but um, not everybody dressed up – you know – some were in more casual clothes, but um – most of the senior members used to feel that it was right and proper to wear a suit and collar and tie, but I think, in more modern days, that er – you know – that isn't quite abided to as much as it was in the past.

MOM: Do you remember when girls were first admitted?

JH: Um, yeah I can't remember the exact year that they were admitted but, erm..

MOM: Can you say John, sorry, that 'women' or 'girls', 'cos my question won't be in the..

JH: Right. Um. I can't remember the exact year that ladies and girls were admitted to the club – but um, it was felt that to swell the numbers and to make the walk more spectacular them, that ladies be invited to join with us as well. I'm not too sure whether all the older members were that enamoured by that but – erm – it's been accepted in the main, very well.

MOM: So, you've been photographing the event for a long time.

JH: I have, yeah.

MOM: Tell us about that – when you started, how old you were..

JH: Right um, I was around 12 or 13 when I first became interested in photography, and photographic equipment was very expensive at that time, and I can remember that we had an old Box Brownie camera at home and a film was put in that and you could take 10 or 12 photographs with that – and erm, because of the expense, erm – my parents were always very controlling as to when I could press the shutter, and I can remember going on family holidays and sort of looking in camera shop windows at 35mm Rangefinder cameras that probably cost in the order of 30 or 40 pounds which was a terrific amount of money back then, and um, so the comment that I used to get was 'dream on' (laughter). So, I think my first camera was an Instamatic 50, um, cost three pound and a penny – and I'm sure that I've got somewhere, in the archives, a few photographs of club from that, um – but um, my cataloguing system of photographs isn't that brilliant, but one day maybe I'll have time to actually put them in some sort of order. But when I was around 16 I had a cousin that worked with (Penoverland World?) and used to drive coaches abroad and he actually bought a Pentax Spotmatic camera with a 50mm lens and 135 lens and after a couple of years of travel, he decided that he'd used it enough and taken all the photographs that he wanted and, he knew that I was keen on photography, and he actually loaned me the camera until I was about 24, so um, I had the use of that camera for about eight years... so I was very grateful of that.

MOM: So did you encounter any other photographers on the day of the walk?

JH: Yeah, well, during the walk there were very few people actually had cameras back in those earlier days – but there was a professional photographer, Derek Evans, that erm actually came along and photographed the walk for many years and, although I didn't know him, I was introduced to him on one occasion but I think that a 16 year old wasn't his priority, we was more interested in what he was up to as a professional.

MOM: But you said to me, you were carrying your stick in the

walk and you were photographing too! How did you manage that?

JH: Yeah well, um – you didn't take many photographs of the actual parade itself, um, I just carried the camera, carried my stick, er – we'd parade from one venue to another and then I had the opportunity, while we were in the gardens of the different houses that we were visiting, and I used to enjoy taking photographs of friends and just scenes and maybe I might get a shot of the group during that period of time but, occasionally I would hand my stick to somebody while the walk was actually parading down through the village and I'd run forward and try and get a shot of the actual parade and then quickly get back into line.

MOM: Are there any strong characters that stand out?

JH: Um, yes, quite a few really I suppose, over the years, um – Dickie Brooks comes to mind – he used to live at Sctoch Firs in a little smallholding in the village but then Scotch Firs estate was built in the '60s and erm he moved up to the Folly and Common Hill and stayed there for the rest of his days. He was a very keen walker, you know – very supportive of the club – always out without fail. I suppose he's one of the main ones that comes to mind. Obviously my father, he – I don't think he missed a walk, not that I was aware of anyway. Um, and then I had quite a few relatives, cousins, that walked in the parade: Clarence Sayce, Roger Sayce, Vernon Sayce, and erm they had a sister Rosabelle that used to actually always come to the club walk and view the club as well. There's many many many more that we could probaly mention but they are some of the main ones that I recollect.

MOM: Do you feel the pressure from people keep the tradition going?

JH: Yeah I think there is an element of pressure, it's very difficult to keep something like this actually going. The actual true locals of Fownhope, erm, are getting far less than what they used to. Although there is some newer members of the community that are interested in keeping the tradition going, erm, they are far and few between really – there's quite a few people in the village now, residents in the village, that don't even get involved on the club day and it's quite sad to see really. When we actually parade throught the villiage, some people might be in their gardens doing a bit of gardening and they don't even look! Which is beyond belief to me. But I suppose they haven't got that long history of involvement and it's irrelevant to them, but erm, it would be sad to see the tradtion lost, I think.

MOM: So, tomorrow morning – what will you be doing?

JH: Well, historically, personally, I always used to have to feed the stock on the farm. I've retired from the farm not so

that's not a job that I need to do, erm, so my start in the morning will be far more relaxed than it always used to be – um and – I was always in charge of dressing the sticks after father, but my daughter will be coming up this year, she lives in Bath, she's very keen to be involved, she's got my first granddaughter who was born just under 12 months ago and so this will be her first club walk and Francesca is intent on dressing the sticks this year. So I think probably I will do my own, but Francesca will probably do one for her husband – and I intend, this afternoon, to go out and cut a small stick out of a hedge on the farm and we'll dress a little stick for Louisa. So erm, that will be quite a memorable occasion I think. My son-in-law is very new to this tradition but he is very enthusiastic to actually join in and erm as his father-in-law I normally stump up the membership fees and so I automatically register my son, my daughter, my son-in-law now and my wife and myself and they will all be around on the day. My son currently is erm, he's working actually up at Hay Festival – he's studying, or just coming into his finals for University studying Documentary Photography down in Cardiff and erm, he's picked up the interest in photography from me, and erm he'll probably have his camera with him tomorrow and be taking a few shots as well. Son-in-law he's quite quiet but, as I say, he's really enjoying the tradition of the day and he'll get involved with the sports in the afternoon, he's quite physically fit – a lot fitter than myself – and erm Francesca and Leyton will probably join in with the sports – there's a little bit of family rivalry goes on between cousins as well, so it should be a fun afternoon.

MOM: Secretly, has your wife dressed your stick?

JH: No! (laughter) I know that erm, everybody believes that the members dress their own sticks but I think there are quite a few that are dressed by the wives of member, but personally no – I've always dressed by own stick. Previously, it was my father, but since he passed away I've always dressed my own stick.

MOM: Er, interest about your son by the way, that's interesting!

Rick Goldsmith: Tell him about the project...

MOM: Can you introduce us to him tomorrow?

JH: Yeah, yeah, yeah!

MOM: Um, same question I directed at your brother Geoff, about why your story, you know – your experience and memories of this event, need to be recorded...

JH: Right...

MOM: ...or should be recorded!

JH: Yeah, um. Yeah, I believe that it's very important that these traditions are recorded and, erm, I am very heartened by the interest that Catcher Media have made towards this goal. Um... I've got a lot of old photographs myself and I get a great deal of enjoyment on looking back on those, and obviously – you know – I can sort of visualise conversations I've had with past members over the years, etc, and relive certain years of the walk and so I think that actually doing these recordings is very important for future generations to see and get a flavour of how we felt about Club Walk, now and how – they will compare it to how they feel about it in years to come. So er, no it is very important.

Um, I've got three photographs in front of me now that I took last year and the one is in the church yard where the Vicar and um, also the Reverend Jane Davis who used to live in the village, actually came and preached in the service last year. Jane was actually born in the villiage and lived in the Manor Farm opposite the church and she was very happy to come along and join with our Vicar to actually run the service last year. Er, but I've got a photograph in front of me that erm is actually of the juvenile winner of the juvenile stick, erm, Jane is pictured in the photograph with mug and its Roland Clarke's son who won the stick competition last year, actually presenting the juvenile stick to one of the Bowen lads and his grandmother actually looking on as well, and Mike Andrews who was the last Chaiman of the club overseeing the procedure as well. So, you know, that's a really lovely shot. And the other one that I've got here is Roland Clarke and his son John, plus the two grandchildren and two other children on the ropes of the banner, all stood at the Medical Center, erm and erm that's quite that's quite a historic – or that will be quite a historic photograph I believe, because to get all – you know – three generations of the family all in charge of the banner last year was quite special. And then, the third photograph that I've got in front of me is a local the Samualses who've lived in the village for many decades and it's a bit of a standing joke with me and the family really that, erm, when I see them actually coming along to club day as a family group, I always try and take a photograph of them as a family group and er – some of them are keen the have their photographs take, others perhaps a little bt shy. So, over the last few years I've managed to get a photograph of that family. So, it's little things like that that really make me – well, it's the enjoyment of photography and er, it creates a little bit of banter as well between yourself and the subject and erm, what makes me really enjoy the subject – you know – the photography generally.

MOM: Do you feel...

Rick Goldsmith: That's great...

MOM: Sorry, do you feel that you're playing a role in

documenting heritage?

JH: Yes – certainly, by doing this, and once I get them archived and organised correctly, erm – it will be good as a historic record of Club Day and yeah I... I think that a lot of people take photographs these days, they've got their iPhones, everybody's a photography they say now, don't they? And that's fine, but I think actually printing the images out and actually having physical copies of the photographs is far more pleasant then to view and very important.