Title:	James, Keith_First_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, Derek Evans Studio, Herefordshire, Heritage, running a business
Publisher:	Catcher Media Social CIC
Tags:	Keith James, photography, Derek Evans, oral history, heritage, PV, participatory film-making, community film, Herefordshire, Derek Evans Studio

---

Identifier:	James, Keith_First_Interview_Complete
Interview Date:	October_15_2016
Location:	50 Lichfield Avenue, Hereford HR1 2RJ
Source:	Catcher Media Social CIC
Interviewee:	Keith James (speaker, male)
Interviewer:	Julia Goldsmith (speaker, female)
Camera & Sound:	Richard Goldsmith (male)
Producer:	Julia Goldsmith
Language:	English

Type:	Video
Video Format:	MPEG-4
Bit rate:	29.6 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:	48.00 kHz
Audio Bit rate:	192 kb/s
Stereo/Mono:	Mono
File Size:	8.06 GB
Duration:	38 min 59 seconds

Type:	Audio
Audio Format:	MP3 audio
Audio Sampling rate:	44.100 kHz
Audio Bit rate:	257 kb/s
Stereo/Mono:	Stereo
File Size:	82.9 MB
Duration:	42 min 24 seconds

Transcript:

I was Derek Evans' assistant and then business partner for nearly 50 years. A potted history of Derek's long career, to be honest, is asking a great deal because Derek started photographing his army chums in football teams and all the rest of it, and then realised that there was money to be made. This was a particular hobby that he liked, that he could make a career out of this. And he went through all the changes in technology in his fifty years, ultimately being a nationally important television cameraman and his images recorded and saved in the national photo museum in Belgium. So it was an illustrious career from a very humble beginning.

I started working with Derek in 1962. I'd been adopted by the art tutor at the high school, the late Harold Coates, he was very kind to me and one day said, 'oh, Derek Evans needs an assistant, you ought to go along and have an interview. So one Saturday morning I rolled up at Broad Street, climbed the 79 steps to the top, and there I met this fellow who was very smartly dressed. He was a dapper dresser was Derek. Anyway we talked for a few moments in the outer office and then he asked me to come down to his lower office and there I just talked. And to be honest it was the only serious interview I had for a job in my entire life. And I came away from there thinking, well I talked and he was a nice chap and all the rest of it. I didn't really remember what I'd said, nevertheless a few days later I got a letter in the post saying I'd got the job.

Those early days were frightening, it was frightening, because of course I was a simple country boy from a simple background, I was now at the studio with a very sophisticated man of the world and a man who would easily move among politicians and heads of industry, and others the good and the great. And I had to learn for instance, not my manners necessarily, but I had to learn as much about how to move among these people as I did to take a photograph. And remembering of course that I was not an amateur photographer before I went for an interview. I learnt absolutely from scratch. Derek was very generous in the way in which he allowed you to learn. For instance, he would send you out for an assignment and he would throw you in the deep end. And if you made a mess of it then he was always there to make the apologies or to put things straight with the clients. Very generous like that. But of course occasionally it would mean you would make an enormous amount of errors. I remember one famous occasion when

Hereford Utd were playing a team, Oxford perhaps, and Derek was ill and he sent me over there to film this for TWW, as it was then. There were eight goals scored and I missed every one of them.

The opportunities Derek gave me and other photographers were enormously important. The studio of course had this tremendous reputation, it really did have a first-class reputation for freelance or stringer offers, and it meant in fact that the studio was a gateway for many people into careers in television or newspapers. And of course some of the young assistants that he had did move on into television and become very very competent television cameramen. Over the years of course there were a few assistants who didn't quite make the grade, but some of them did move on to some very successful careers. Mike Charity moved from Hereford, as I joined Derek in 1962, and became a freelance cameraman for Central Television. Mike had the dubious distinction of being the longest serving photo journalist on the Fred West case at Cromwell Street, and subsequently he wrote a book about his experiences. Rik Calder left and became a cameraman at TWW, before becoming the senior cameraman at Border Television then moving into BBC, and of course Graham Essenhigh was our last assistant when Graham left us to work at Central Television as a freelance cameraman. I can't think for one minute that there was ever a typical day.

It was always quite different and of course apart from the newspaper work and the television work there was the industrial work as well that we did. And we worked principally for Bulmer's, for Painter Bros when they had the big pylons, Henry Wiggin and a multitude of small companies. So there was never really a typical day. You would have what we would call diary engagements where you could anticipate you would actually be doing such and such. Take for example the opening of the Greyfriars Bridge in Hereford. Well, you knew this was coming on and then you could say to Central Television and indeed HTV, 'we're opening a new bridge, want some film of that?' so you would know what was on that day. Other days of course there might suddenly be an emergency. I remember for instance the days during Kairo ?? Evans and the Welsh Nationalists, when they tried to blow up the water supply from the Elan Valley to Birmingham. And so all of a sudden we had to dash up there to this great big hole in the ground there and where the water had escaped and all the rest of it. So you never had a typical day. There were three and a half people working in the studio because we had a lady who was extremely good at doing the accounts and took the tedium of doing the accounts off our hands, and then of course there was Derek and myself and another assistant. There was a lot of work. Certainly in the 60s, 70, 80s and right through to the 90s the studio had a queue of work every day and it would not be unusual for one of us to work 50, 60, 70, 80 hours a week to keep pace with it all.

We were on the top floor of number 43 Broad street, which was above the Halifax Building Society in those days, and immediately below us was the Federation of Women's' Institutes and there were some insurance offices, but there were 79 steps I think to the top, because in foolish moments often at lunchtime, we would challenge ourselves to a race to see who could get up the fastest, and that sort of thing.

But you went into this under the eaves studio and on the landing at the top there were a number of exhibitions with pictures there, and then you went into a small corridor. On the left was darkroom and on the right was the general office. The general office was where all the fun too place, because there's a lot of fun in this business and of course a lot of smoking, which meant that the most junior member of the staff, every spring, had to get a bucket of water and some fairy liquid or something, and wash down the ceiling for the nicotine stains and clean the ceiling. Because everyone smoked in those days. And then of course there was the small darkroom, which tended to be very hot on summer days but was always very very busy. we had a studio and another private office for Derek of his own.

The studio had a very good reputation so within the community and within the county of course, Derek was very widely known. Today you talk of networking but of course in those days we would talk of having contacts. And throughout the county and the region that we covered for television, in principal towns, there would be a contact who would ring in with a story, there's a fire here, or some such thing that happened. One in particular I remember because I thought the name was quite glorious, there was a fellow in Llandridrod Wells who was our contact, and he would ring in saying 'there's going to be sporting events this weekend', and he was the manager of the automobile palace at Llandindrod Wells, which I thought was a glorious name. There was a journalist, Bob Jenkins at Bromyard. So all these people became satellites of our own particular studio. And they then spread the name, do you have a story for Derek Evans. I think that's how the network grew that gave Derek and the studio the reputation that it had.

The studio obviously moved from being a local to a regional, to national and possibly international reputation, not necessarily by intent or design, but almost by accident. One of the things that Derek would teach us all actually, that if you were on an assignment and you saw another little picture, a quirky little picture that could be used, you took the other little picture. And then of course that little picture might become a magazine article or something like that. And particularly Derek's pictures then were published widely in France. And so it really was a case of this thing growing organically rather than setting out with the idea that you were going to get yourself an international reputation.

Well, Derek had an easy rapport with people and if you met Derek at an event, he was never a man you would consider to be a threat to you in any way, he was an easy, charming man. And in fact I can remember one or two places that I went to and Derek would walk into a room and be in a splendidly good mood for the day, would absolutely take over the whole room, and he would lift the spirits of everybody there, and he would then have a very jolly time. He was that type of guy. And of course that was reflected really in his pictures. He wanted to see people doing well in life, enjoying life and perhaps, being amused by life. There were a number of pictures for instance that he took of a very wizened fellow in a Belgium market, a very slight man, but he was in charge of selling a huge collection of lady's brassieres, which were called busterhauders?? And it was a very amusing picture, but that was the sort of thing that would appeal to Derek of course.

The pictures of children that he had were of children reacting to things, weren't they? Particularly the gypsy children and I think Derek……of course the gypsy children were very attractive anyway, big brown eyes and they would be naturally photogenic for Derek. But of course again these children were part of a wider scene in the community, hop picking and other things that he loved.

Way back in the 1950s Derek would find, perhaps, a seasonal thing, even the May Fair, or again going back to the hop picking, and would produce a splendid picture that would be attractive to a picture editor who didn't want to publish any hard news. He had some space to fill and he wanted something nice in there, so Derek would find this picture. Of course having found publications in the late 1950s, for say the may Fair annually, or the Hop picking, every year when the season came around it would be the time to try the market again. And so that's how the whole thing came about.

Derek was a people person. Derek loved people, he wanted to be with people, ad couldn't bear to be alone. I mean to put Derek in the middle of a farmer's field, with buttercups and daisies, and say look how beautiful this is. That would horrify Derek. But put him on the touchline by Hereford Utd, where there were people shouting and bawling 'come on Utd', oh, that's where he wanted to be, absolutely.

There was a transition of course from still photography to cine, for television. But of course that just naturally occurred. In the late 50s, early 60s, there was the advent of television. Those of us old enough as I am to remember it, it was quite a limited transmission, but nevertheless there was a market. And it was a market for an insatiable appetite for material and Derek had all the cunning and all the skills and all the contacts to know what was going on in a particular patch. And when I say a particular patch I do mean there was a patch.

Because of course the filming that was done for independent television in those days was largely governed by television trade union, so there were not too many people flooding the markets and offering film, we were each allocated a patch – Derek Evans in Hereford, John Cullin at Merthyr Tydfil, Frank Bevan at Swansea and a chap up Rhyll, whose name I forget. And you were given a certain patch of land to look after, it was Herefordshire into Montgomeryshire, Radnorshire and all the rest of it.

So there was a market, Derek was able to do it and he had all the skills and the knowledge because he had worked in the newspaper industry of course and he just blossomed. And I think in the 70s and the 80s the studio would have been 80% at least relying on its income to come from television work. It wasn't all news gathering, some of it would have been sport, and occasionally we were sent to the national eistedfoff at Newtown Montgomeryshire or we were sent to the international at Llangollen or we were with the other cameramen to help out at the Royal Welsh Show, and then you would work alongside other cameramen of course.

With Derek it was the entire package, it was Derek, the studio, the work and all the little bolt on extras that go with it because at the end of the day all of us who worked in that studio would say one thing at the end of it: it was all great fun, absolute fun to work there.

I think we would all readily recognise that photography has probably changed more than any other industry. And when I started with Derek it was absolutely a skill to take a black and white photograph in the middle of winter because of course there were so many variations on the equipment, on the film, the processing, the light conditions and everything else. Whereas today of course everything is totally automated. And Derek steered the studio admirably through a lot of technical change. I can well remember for instance when the television studios first of all changed to working in colour, and you then had to film in colour transparencies stock, which was very difficult and you had to be very accurate with it. Well a lot of the freelancers and even the senior cameramen found it very difficult because they had only ever worked with black and white. We had worked with colour transparencies with other sections of industry and we knew the difficulties of it. So we moved quite seamlessly actually into working on colour transparency stock.

As we moved into more easily, we were fed more work because we could simply do the job. Then the next thing that came along was the change to video. And I well remember the changes to video because Derek and I would sometimes go to the international photo fair in Cologne and you would see this fledgling equipment there. And all the old guys were saying 'it will never catch

on’, ‘everything times it rains these cameras don’t work’, ‘it will never catch on’. And of course here we are today. Derek didn’t’ get involved in digital funnily enough. He had just about then come to the end of his working life and his health wasn’t up to par, so he didn’t really get involved in digital work at all. But to be honest I think he would have done, there is no doubt about it. The only thing is he would have picked up the camera and taken all his pictures and handed over the proceeds to somebody else to put through a computer. The may fair was always an early appointment in the diary. You always knew it was coming and could tell we had to take pictures of the May Fair and what arrangements where we making. And of course one of the more useable pictures was a picture of high town taken from one of the upstairs windows of one of the buildings, perhaps Lloyds bank. So what you had to do was go down to Lloyds bank and say, 7 O’clock on Tuesday evening can we come in and take a picture from your window, and all the rest of it. Apart from that Derek had found many pictures previously that were very amusing and certainly gave a flavour of the May fair. So of course you always went back thinking ‘we might find those sort of pictures again’. And in fact when I look today though at the pictures of the May Fair, it’s inevitably people putting a camera on a tripod and taking a picture say of the big wheel whirling around and round and round, seldom looking at the people and the fun they’re having.

I can’t remember much about the hop picking to be honest. I think the hop picking was dying out very largely just after I started working with Derek. I do remember we went out into the fields once or twice to take pictures. But it seemed to me by then that great gangs of gypsy workers had gone and this was now getting mechanised, this was getting into people not necessarily professional people but they were trades people who knew exactly how to handle the hops and all the rest of it. So I think the great character of the hop fields had gone by the time I worked with Derek.

Derek was always a great supporter of football and in fact he played briefly for Shrewsbury town and famously told me once that at the end of each game he used to find ten shillings put in his football boots. And of course he loved Hereford Utd and had a huge association with them over a very long period of time, particularly when Len Weston, of the cider factory, when Len was the Chairman. And Len and Derek of course were great chums. And every time there was a cup run that meant there was going to be fun at the studio and at Much Marcle, because inevitably going out to Much Marcle when they were listening on the radio to the draw of the next FA cup and all the rest of it, and Len would then have to bring out some of his best cider and then they’d have to swap stories…. fun all round.

Fownhope flower walk is a wonderful photo opportunity event today isn’t it? What could be better than an old English village

and all the folks come out and they put flowers on a stave and they process through the village. Just a fabulous picture opportunity. I think I have told you before there was one picture, this one elderly gentleman there and he looks particularly parched. He's got his lips apart there, and he's holding the stave – apparently part of the ceremony is, or the procession is, that they call in at the village doctor and they give him a pint, perhaps the chap was waiting for a pint. But then Derek sold the pictures to the chocolate magazine which said 'do you feel like an Aero?' which was the way Derek worked you see. He'd have a good picture and think, how can I sell that.

It's difficult now to give somebody a summary of just how different things were back when I started in the 1960s at the studio. Because the little studio was a microcosm of everything that went on in Hereford. There was gossip, there was fun, there was information coming backwards and forwards, and there were a lot of people who just liked to spend half an hour or an hour there just catching up on various things and also to be part of it. There were a great number for instance of photographers who would come in to discuss doing something or another. There were a number of retired journalists who would come in. there were a great number of reps, travelling reps in those days, would come in. we had one from the film manufacturers Ilford, Kodak, May and Baker the chemical people. And there was one famous gentleman, the space salesman from the Hereford times or the Hereford Evening News, a retired military man. And again a great character, great fun, came in with a bristling moustache, heavy tweed three-piece suit and you would say, do you want a cup of coffee, and he would say yes, and you would give him the cup of coffee and out would come the hip flask, and in would go a rather generous measure of brandy or whisky and then you would listen to his stories for an hour. There always seemed to be time for people like that, always time.

This was part of a picture series taken at Westhope Court near Woolhope. There was a school there for deaf children and there were a number of images I think as good as this one to be honest, but it is a hallmark of how Derek worked, because he would have been quite unobtrusive in the room and these children would have been just reacting to one another, they would have forgotten he was there. But Derek nevertheless would have waited for that exact precise moment when perhaps this child looked at this child, click, that's the picture. Of course it's the thing Henri Cartier Bresson used to call the 'decisive moment'. And Derek was tremendous at that. But of course when you look at this kind of work and when you saw Derek operating as assistants, you then start to sort of copy that. You know that's a proven technique – quietly sit there and just wait for that one moment and click the shutter goes.

One of the best people at this, to be honest, was his one

assistant, Jennifer Bowen. Jennifer was tremendous. She would know exactly when to take the picture. But again like Derek she was never a threat to anybody there. She was a charming, easy going person, so she would melt into the background. And then of course when the picture presented itself, click, and that was it.

As I say, apart from melting into the background, being unobtrusive so the children move on to do just what they have to do and choosing the decisive moment. There are a lot of clues in this image that shows quite how the photographer worked. There's quite a lot of grain you can see in the picture, and that's of course he would have used what would have been then quite a high speed film, probably HP3, an Ilford, a British product, that would have been 440 asa. But I suspect this was taken on a Rolliflex camera indoors, and the soft lighting you would have had an exposure of something like a 30th at 5.6. And working at a 30th of a second it means that any slight movement would actually blur. So not only would you try and find the high point of the picture activity in terms of expression, but you would hopefully do it when somebody wasn't vigorously moving the hand or vigorously moving the head, otherwise you would get a blurred image. And then of course the other thing is to think, well, you know, you've got fairly soft lighting, it's fairly low lighting, what would you do when you took the film back to studio? Would you actually it a little bit more processing and time in the developer to increase the contrast in the picture. But if you did that you would have to be very careful then that you then didn't darken all these shadow areas too much. If you did darken them too much, you would have a small circular disc of card on the end of a piece of wire and as you projected this image in the enlarger down onto this piece of paper prior to developing it, you would actually wave a small piece of card around and round on the face here and just hold the light back for a few moments. That was called dodging an area of print. And if, for instance, there was a stark white area here, you would burn in the print by giving a bit more exposure. But this was all an intuitive thing and nothing you could actually be taught. Another aspect of Derek's life of course was he was a leading Liberal. He was a Liberal all his life and he eventually was President of Hereford's Liberal Association. He was a Liberal councillor and was responsible for pulling the money together for swimming baths on the King George's playing fields. But of course he went back a very long way to the 1950s supporting the Liberal Association.

And here is Robin Day, the grand inquisitor, later known as Sir Robin Day and the man largely responsible for putting in the dustbin deference to politicians. Famously in fact had one politician storm off a meeting with him on BBC I remember. But Derek said that when Robin Day was the candidate here, and incidentally later in his life Robin Day was not very anxious to get people to know of his associations with his Liberal

candidacy, but when he was here the one thing he feared more than anything else was actually going out into the sticks, particularly up in Michaelchurch Escley, Craswall and all the rest of it. Because he said, the trouble out there was that all the farmers had nothing better to do in the evening than listen to the radio, and there were all very clued up politically. And if he went to a village meeting they always gave him a damn hard time.

There are some other pictures Derek took of Sir Robin Day, or Robin Day as he was known then actually, of him just sitting at the table in the Liberal Association headquarters. They are very graphic, very strong lit pictures. But Derek was very fond of Robin Day. And in fact many years after he was a candidate here, they used to meet at the Liberal Club in London.

Robin Day followed on from Frank Owen, who was the ex-editor of the Daily Mail or something.

Getting rid of the news was always the problem and of course the later in the day it was the more acute became the problem. If you were working for TWW or later HTV, or Central Television, you then had to get your film, which was inevitably a hundred-foot spool of film, into the laboratories by about half past four in the afternoon, because it had to be processed and edited, ready for transmission for the six o'clock news. And that was always a problem, that you were always up against time. I seem to remember there was a train to Birmingham New Street at about one o'clock in the afternoon. If you missed the train then you would, occasionally, ask the picture if you could drive the film to the studio. He was reluctant to do it because you were going to charge him extra money to do it. But nevertheless it was important that the film got there on time. And the other thing that we did have was we used to purchase from British Rail some newspaper stamps, and they were big stamps, and we used to buy £70 a time they were. So you would have your film and if you were lucky you would dash down to the railway station for the one o'clock train, you'd put it in an envelope, you'd put these stamps on it and that would go straight through to new street. You would then telephone the news desk and say it would be at NEW Street at 3 o'clock or whatever. It did rely, to be honest, on the good will of the British Rail staff. And at Hereford they were particularly good. And in fact if the train was there and going at one o'clock and you'd dashed into the parcel office at two minutes to one and you didn't have time to have it stamped, and they would say, alright, go on through. Then you would dash out and you would find the guard and hand him the material. There were other occasions of course when you just couldn't' meet the deadline without driving into he studio. And I remember Derek and I were at Aber??? Near Rhyader one day and filming a section of the RAC rally. We were there from about seven in the morning til about three in the afternoon in torrential rain. And then we had to sit in the car, soaked through, drive down to

Cardiff and hand in the film and hope that it was going to be ready for the evening.

The other way it was done of course for the newspaper industry in particular was they would have to wire a picture. And what would happen is you would do a photographic print of about seven by five inches of a ten by eight piece of paper and it was put on a rotating drum, scanned and sent up to where ever it was. When Dr parker was murdered here in Hereford, the Daily Express I think it was, sent a wire team in from London to actually wire a picture of the Constable standing outside the doctor's surgery. And I remember them because they were particularly piqued because they'd actually been pulled off a boxing match in London that they particularly wanted to attend, and they'd been sent to Hereford just to send this one picture of a fellow standing outside a doctor's surgery.

In those days you had to hire a dedicated line from the Hereford GPO station up to the receiving site. And it was very expensive. I think in those days it was £70 to transmit a picture. It was a huge amount money.

Well of course the Aberfan disaster was unbelievable. Well over a hundred children who died in a slurry of coal that came from a land slip behind the school and through the school. And of course such a tragedy would inevitably attract the world's media and Derek went down there for two or three days. But as they men dug and the situation became more and more hopeless, I suspect tempers became more and more frayed and the behaviour of some of the continental press, who came into this village and would be gone in a few days, was a little less than respectable I suppose. At some point the tiny coffins I believe of the victims were put into a chapel and the Paris match photographers I think it was, freelance photographers, tried to get in there to photograph this, and of course it upset the miners tremendously. And there was a lot of hostility then to anybody who carried a camera. But unusually, not to Derek.

Derek of course was the son of a Welsh miner and perhaps there was some unknown link between them, that they immediately thought, right, here's a kindred spirit, and he's alright, and Derek carried on working.

Derek did have a great love of jazz and of course he would go to various regional centres like Bristol Colston Hall, Birmingham Town Hall, when the big American bands would come over here. I think he might have photographer one or two at the Shire Hall in Hereford. But there were one or two wonderful pictures actually in the 1950s. and they were wonderful because taking pictures then in very low light was very difficult, and Derek was working with quite slow films, again HP4, HP5, HP3, which would have been 400 asa at the most if he pushed it. So it was a skill to work in low light. And again it was the same problem that you

would wait for a high point of something, a lifting of the hand, perhaps, if they were conducting, or just lifting their head, using it in conjunction with the lights that were coming down. Very skilled work for its tine, very skilled. Didn't always finish of course when you took the picture because inevitably you would have to go back to the dark room and you would then have to decide, do I over develop this film or was my exposure correct so if I don't over develop it will I get enough shadow detail. So again it was a question of judgement to be honest. I did go once or twice with Derek to Birmingham Town Hall and believe me, there's not a lot of light there and we went when films were a lot faster and it was very difficult to work. Later in life Derek used to go to Nice actually to the jazz festival down there. This was just a few years ago, he was photographing a band there, I can't remember which it was, and he recognised a drummer that he'd known from the fifties, walked up over to the fellow, and said, I remember photographing you in the 1950s, and the fellow said, and I remember you doing it at Bristol Colston Hall. And of course that was fifty or so years later.