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Transcript:

I'm 90, born in 1927 in Sutton St Nicholas, Middlefield Cottage. I was at [inaudible] in Worcester and I had a bit of a fall out with my boss there and had a ride around and called in at the Bruff and Albert Brookes said, you're just the one I'm looking for. And I knew a bit about hops because my mother used to go hop picking and the cribs. And I got into it straight away. I don't know what made me do it, but I did it. I knew nothing about the Bruff machine before I got there. The basic machine Albert Brookes designed and it just went on from there. I didn't design the initial one but it was upgrading it from Albert Brooke's initial design.

I designed the vacuum bit, the bit that took the leaves away. I took one to Germany. Yeah, we introduced them to Germany and Poland and tried to get them to America and took a machine over to California. But typical for America, didn't have a big enough output and they introduced a machine there incorporating a lot of my ideas and they produced them in America.

I was a mechanical engineer and served my apprenticeship. Me and Mr Brookes, we just worked it out together. I used to gather what knowledge we could during September and talk over while they were harvesting. And we also introduced not only the picking machine but also the drying equipment, the kilns, mainly the heating equipment and also the tiers, where initially they just put them on one tier. We got up to putting three tiers in. again with slatted floors. You'd put the green hops on the top floor and after a certain time you tilted the floors and they fell on through on to the next one. And then after a period from the heat below went on through to the bottom floor. When they are finally dried take them off and put them into the hop pockets to go to the brewers. I designed that. Well I co designed that with Albert Brookes actually. We got on very well together actually. He was very quiet. We worked side by side on the drawing boards. First of all, the old type ones, flat, semi flat and you bent over to it. And then drafting machines then, when the boards were more vertical.

During hop picking there was no work in the factory. So, lots of workmen used to go out and run the machines on the farms. And during hop picking you gathered orders for the following year. Used to be a bit of a headache at first because after hop picking you didn't know how many machines you wanted for the next year. There was over 100 working at Bruff at one time but most of the time about 40 or 50. In a year we would make over a 100 with export. A lot of work. Lads and the odd woman in the factory as well, on the drilling machines. There weren't many women in the forties but mainly in the fifties.

I worked closely with Mr Brookes. We used to get on very well. We used to share all our problems, and putting our memories onto paper on the drawing boards. The girl in the office she used to put them in the machine to get prints off, the costing department, where it was all costed out before they were made. The bank manager used to get on to us a bit at times.

I broke away by myself. Doing farm buildings and a lot of farmers used to buy their machines through me and so I used to get a commission. I must have worked for Bruff for 30 or 35 years. We used to modify the machines each year and put a few extra conveyors in. the first machines used to have about 12 people working the machine and towards there's just the people hanging them on to the clamps to go through the machine and only

about two people on the final belt picking out the odd leaf and stalk that the machine hadn't taken out. During the harvest, I would take prospective customers to the farms near about and show them the machines. And sort out what their quote was for picking and suggest what size machine they had. Because there were about four basic size machines. I was working with Frank Dale of Leominster to do the buildings for the machines. Frank and his son Brian. I was a bit of a salesman. I used to talk through the machines capacity more or less. They couldn't cope with everything here so he had an agent down in Kent, Drake & Fletcher, so he used to work very close with them. Again, I used to go down there quite a lot and go out with their salesmen to the customers. I remember we used to start at 4am in the morning from Suckley and get down to Maidstone at 8. There wasn't much traffic on the roads then. I had an old Standard 8 car.

(Showing Alan some photos) the hops came down through these rotors, initially just one set of rotors and the hops came down through them and I added on, and you have to thrash through them to pick them all off them, so we took the track up through them which meant you didn't have to thrash the first lot. So, going back on through it would more or less clear the bine. But added to that to make it easier and to give the machine more capacity there was another set of rotors up here and the bine went down through two set of rotors and back up to that set there to clean the bine properly. And you didn't have to pick them so hard having three goes at them. As before that rotor was put in there was a platform up here that took them off the clamps and put them through into this chopper here. And after that going up through we took the tracker through there, released them there and they dropped down in to the chopper here, and dropped them on to this belt and here was a blade across to chop them and dropped onto this conveyor here and joined the conveyor and went up were chucked outside. That was all waste.

Lawrence Lloyd, from up the road here, he joined us in the drawing office. I used to give him instructions what to do. It's such a small industry. Fred voucher kept the garage in Suckley and he used to do most of the transporting. I've lived a happy life.

This type of hop ???? was designed before the machines. The I designed with the hop air rising up and the air, the cowel at the top, would swing in whatever direction the wind was coming from. They go round 180 degrees.

I went to Stocks farm a couple of weeks ago to see their machine. It used to be at the house actually. And in the 50s they increased the size of the original machine and put another building around it. I loved my job.

I knew Mr Hinds, they were the competitors. We never fell out over anything. There's a little picking machine that is only as

high as the hop and they took them through horizontally. They were I Malvern. They were our only competitor. A Bruff machine cost initially around £1000 but then went up to £4000. I used to work a lot of hours actually. We all got on well together. The Nelson down the road used to do quite a good trade in their pub.

We used to unload at Suckley station. Mainly they went by road. The ones at the station we used to send them to Germany. Used to load them on a lorry here. Had some cross members and some pulley blocks on the four corners and go around and lift them up a few inches each time.

I knew Peter Davies at Claston. Through the machine we knew each other. I knew every grower with a Bruff machine. Used to argue with some about the price a bit and then had to give a discount to those who gave a deposit when they gave the order. ten percent discount. Bruff had ten times as many machines as Hinds. Of course, the daughter Cherry at Hinds she used to be the main draughtsman there.

I was going through Bishops Frome and was thinking of the Pudges. That canopy that goes over the road I built that so they could unload their hops when it was raining. I had a bit of trouble with the council because I did it without planning permission and they wanted me to take it down. This was in the fifties. This was after I finished with Bruff I was working for myself. His father used to be sat in his lounge window, every time you went by there that's where he would be sat. and sometimes he would be sat by the hop picking machine and every time it stopped he would stamp his walking stick and say, 'get the thing going!' I was called out when the machine broke down. If I was available. During the hop picking I would get my tool box out because most of the factory were working on the individual machines. Farmers would ask them to run the machine. one off the mains was electricity breakdowns. Electricity board were not very popular at times - no supply ... because I couldn't tell the men to get off home because it'd probably be switched back on in five minutes later. The first machine was Alec Hutton right by the Bruff there. And then Pages over in Stoke. Happy days. I was working on the marking out tables at my other work before Bruff and I'd marked out something wrong and it was scrapped and I was told off about that so I don't know why I did it, I just thought I'd rode around on a Saturday morning and called in at Bruff. I didn't really know about them then. People bought machines when they just couldn't get the hand pickers. Women and their babies used to take them in their prams into the hop fields. Used to have coachloads come down from Dudley. I haven't got any photos of me working. I liked working for Bruff, I put up with it. Mrs Capper is very prominent in the hop industry now, isn't she? Bruff went everywhere.

Alan's daughter Sandra showing photos: Daddy we took you to Hancocks at Bishops Frome, along the valley here. We have a

little tour every year. About three years ago we went to Kent looking for Bruff machines and we found some. And he gave me a task about three years ago when I went to New Zealand to find a Bruff machine and we found one on the South Island, and the chap then was probably in his sixties and he could remember as a child it is arriving in three separate containers. He was apologetic about the state of the building it was in. but there was a sign saying, Bruff manufacturing company, Suckley, Worcester, England. And I said, we live in Suckley, my dad used to work for Bruff! And it was still working. Daddy went to America for Bruff. California, for quite a well.

Alan: it went there in kit forms and we had to assemble everything. We only sold one and that came back and it wasn't big enough output for them. They had massive farms. In was in Lake County. The only help I had there was Mexicans. Oh, they were a lazy lot! They'd be working and then news would come that the police were coming and then they scattered!

Daughter: when we were in New Zealand and I went to their hop cooperative place and asked if any of their growers still had Bruff hop picking machines and she reeled off about ten local growers, and the first one she tried, George, his was still working. Guinness hops used to be a big thing, Bransford, they used to supply the machines to Guinness, they were huge. And in Kent used to have to go down there a lot for Guinness hop plants.

Alan: Guinness had 14 machines altogether. Up here and down in Kent. Around the Maidstone area and in north Kent. Phil Armitage used to stop at home and he used to come and stop at our place, he was Guinness chief engineer. Albert Jeynes was the Foreman at Brookes, he lived in Suckley. His daughter worked in the office. When I left Mr Brookes was sad about me leaving but production had slowed down and hardly any sold. It's sad the whole factory closed down and nothing produced there at all now. Mr Brookes died some years ago now. He built a bungalow at the factory. Beautiful garden. Fred the gardener. I remember he used to every lunchtime he used to go up to the pub in Alfrick, the Wobbly Wheel.

Sandra: my abiding memory as a child is of you smelled of hops and I absolutely hated it. But now I love it. We couldn't do anything in September, we had to be here⁴ for the harvest. When daddy left he started up his own construction company and his workshop used to be on old man Capper's farm. He was very good to dad.

Alan: he never charged me a penny for the workshops. An old blacksmith's shop. I used to look after his machine in return. That's when he said, 'the old business is growing a bit fast, taking over the farm more or less.' That's when I decided to buy

[Stonecroft?] – the girls had ponies there... and on the ground – it was a relief getting from there. We used to have to get rid of the ponies on his land. My business was Alvia Developments. I always loved maths. Slide rules, Logarithms, trigonometry. I learned the drawing at Royal Worcester Tech then went to [Hereford?], served my apprenticeship there and then went into the drawing office there. happy days. I wanted to join the RAF during the war, but they wouldn't let me because I was doing work of national importance, mainly to do with aircrafts, engine test equipment. But they wouldn't let me go in the forces, because I was working on that. I would have loved to be a pilot.

John Trenfield was the electrician on the machine, he worked for Abel Smith in Worcester, and they were subcontracted to the Bruff for wiring up the machines in the factory and when they were delivered, for wiring up the connections between the different units of the machine. but he finished with Abel with stress at the peak of the period. He was a good family friend. All the seals and the belting came from Sheffield.