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Interviewer: Julia Goldsmith (speaker, female)
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Transcript:

Interview with Lilly Morris & her son David

My name is Lilly Morris and my husband was the organiser of the Leominster May Fair. From his father. It goes back generations. Like, my husband's father had this and he bought it off Con Stutt (indecipherable) and then after he died then my husband he took over, and now my sons are taking over because I lost my husband, three years ago, and they are taking over from it. And it's going in generations it is. You know, I've got my grandsons coming up. The history of my husband was Henry Abraham, but we call him Abie for short. Now my son is called Abie and he's got a son called Abie.

JG: so how long has your family been part of the Fair?

I would have been married 53 years coming up in December, November sorry, it would have been 53 years I would have been married. He cheated me really at my fifty years, he only had a month to go, but he couldn't help that. He said sorry and but there's not much else I could really do about it. And since then I took over and then I thought I better let my sons and daughters come into it. Joanne's the oldest, Alison, then comes David, my son over there, and then comes my youngest son, Abie, who is now running it with the other three.

JG: tell me a bit about when the Leominster wasn't running in the town?

It wasn't in the street. It took 23 years for the by-pass to be built. And we got to admit the council who was there, I can't remember the gentleman's name now, honoured the contract what they said they would do and they let us back on the street for two years. And we did the two years and then they said we could do another two years. And they done that. And then we had a ten-year contract, but we got a seven-year contract. Now our contract finishes, we're here for next year, a new contract is supposed to being made now, coming up, keep fingers crossed, hope it do. But it's all changed, it's all changing. Whereas we used to know the people, now we've got all different people coming into it and some people don't really understand it. Like we had disabled children, learning children, this morning and we give them the freedom of the fair. And the lady said to one of my daughters she didn't know this was going on. It's been going

on for thirty-five years for the children. And they didn't know about it and it's the first time they've come. They really enjoyed it they did, and hope it will continue for it, for all these children. What we do we don't publicise it for anywhere like that. We put our notice out for the schools and the hospitals, children who couldn't really come, who wants to come. Money can't buy that. Money can't buy the faces, the smiling, eating candyfloss. When my husband was alive, they presented him with a book, years ago, thirty-five or something like that. We call it his life story, his life story on this book. Children some and we've got photos, we've still got it. And they sign their names. The letters we've had. And that's been going a long time. This is what we've told these people today. And we want to keep it going, we want to keep the fair going. We hope to get the contract if we can get it. Keep fingers crossed. But it's still here.

JG: can you tell me about your family's relationship with Bishop John Easthaugh and how that came about?

My husband met John a long time ago. And he said, 'what's up Abie?' because that's what we used to call him. And he said, 'I've lost my ground down there.' So, he said, 'oh, what are we going to do about it?' So he said, 'I don't know.' And we was in front of the Cathedral, and he said, 'I'd like to stand here'. He [Bishop Easthaugh] said, leave it with me. And my husband had another meeting, he called Abie in, he had another meeting, and my husband had to go to London, so me and my daughter come. And like he explained, we nearly got killed going. And he said, 'oh, I'm glad to see you again, you know', and he said, 'what's up?' and he said we'll have a cup of tea to celebrate. He said what would you like it: the showman's way or our way. And we said, 'what would you prefer it, John?' and he said, the showman's way. He said to me, would you like a ciggie? I said do you mean a cigarette I said no thank you, I've given up smoking. You don't mind if I have a cigarette. And I said no, not at all. And he said, 'right, it's all past. You can come,' he said. 'if it go inside the Cathedral, we'll put it inside the Cathedral'. And he said, 'what stalls, what stalls you got?' and I said, 'oh, I've got a few stalls'. And he said, 'will you build them up, outside here, at the Cathedral?' And I said, and my husband said, 'well it's all according'. So Abie said, 'what do you mean by the Cathedral?' he said, the shadow of the Cathedral, he said, I will give it to your family. Which we said no, we're satisfied what we got. We'd like to get up what we call the Mexican Hat, what we call it, we like to just have that on the Cathedral Ground. And he said, have it! So they went and celebrated, the two of them. Well, I had a drink too, but we left them to it. Only John was there, his ??? (indecipherable) was there, what I call the Monks, they was there. so we thought, which way can we get these home. So one of my sons said, we've got a pick-up outside mum, so one go one way and the other go another way. They took John home first then they took my husband

home. But the two of them was up the next morning to go to London. Five o'clock that morning they go to London. They had things signed for them and come back. And my husband was on there but we could have ??? (indecipherable). My husband said no, we're Showmen, we're in the Showmen's Guild, he said, it's only right we should let the Showman's Guild what they got to say about it. And then this other street, then Owen Street came up in Hereford and then he said, we'll move to Owen Street, which we have done, moved to Owen Street, and then the Showmen's Guild took the front of the Cathedral. But it was only my husband and me and my daughter got that position for them. And I don't know if they like it or not, I've got to be honest with you. But we were the one that got it. That was the main part. ???????? (indecipherable) the donations and everything, what they collected off the people what was around for it, and there was very well satisfied with it. I'm going back a few years, but unfortunately, at the same time, my husband's cousin got killed, one of the Danters, young Chris Danter. And he got killed on the Brecon Road. He got killed. It was a good day but it was a sad day. That was on the day we was building up that young boy got killed. Well Chris got killed as they was building up, like erecting all the machine up and a message came through to my husband that his cousin had been killed. And that's one of the Danters boys that's here now. His son's here. ??? (indecipherable). You'll know when Chris is around. So like I said it was a good day and a bad day. We couldn't really celebrate really because it was a sad day. This was the first time we were putting this ride on the Cathedral Close, that's when it happened. But when they said Chris, 'cause my husband had a brother called Chris and he thought it was him at first. But then they pointed out it was one of the Danter's boys, that was his mother's sister's boy.

FROM HERE ON IN IN TRANSCRIPTION I WILL BE DOING A SUMMARY OF THE INTERVIEW

10.59

My husband's mother was a Moffat/Matthews ? and she had a sister called Katy, she had a few sisters, and they all married different people, but one married a Danter. And that how come they come into the business really. Because I believe Mr Danter, he was an outsider and like my husband's father, he was from Risca, the pub. But he loved the fairground and that's where he made his business in. so the Danters and the Morris are related through sisters.

12.00

[Bishop] John used to come out at five o'clock in the morning. And when his children were growing up, he'd fetch his children to the fair. He loved the fair. He was a fantastic man.

13.40

[Tell me about Pauline Davis?]

I was coming here when I was a little girl. We used to open down Church Street. Course, we lost it out of the streets and had to go down to the carpark because of the new road going through. And they kept promising, we'll come back, we'll come back, but it was going on and going on. This lady, Pauline Davis, we didn't really know her at first. But she remembers my husband when they was in school. He couldn't remember her, but she remembered Abey. It was in the papers that she was setting up a petition for the fun fair, so my husband said we're going to go and meet her. So we met her and her husband, Ben, he was the mayor. She fought and fought the decision and she got it back. We've been friends ever since.

16.46

[Tell me you name and about your ride]

David: I'm 47 and I've been coming to Leominster fair all my life with the Helter Skelter ride. I'm just following on from my dad and my grandad. I'm the fourth generation of our family. We think it's the best life in the world, we do. If you wasn't born into it you wouldn't do it. Here we are lucky because most of us are cousins, family, it just makes life easier. We used to have a Noah's Ark, that's the earliest one I can remember.

16.00

then we turned it into the Waltzers, then we had a Mexican Hat. We had it in front of the cathedral once, because dad and mum and the bishop were really good friends. Because the late Bishop of Hereford, he loved the fair people.

19.00

[the fair right in the middle of town] It's tradition. This is where our grandfather started, and if you move it out of town it will die. History is a big thing for us, and culture. We should move with the times, but we must keep our history.

22.00

There used to be a gentleman in Hereford, a showman, in the war years, he opened in Hereford on his own.

24.38

this isn't just our business, it's our way of life and we want to keep it for our kids now.

25.00

Lilly: If you go to all the fairs, they have all different shows. Stephens's, they had a parading show, that's with the

girls dancing on the front, the can-can. Then you've got the cowboy one.

David: then you've got Appletons, the smallest man in the country.

Lilly: then the little lady, wasn't she? Taylors the boxing booth

27.00

[Why did they change, stop those shows]

Lilly: Well the generation changed. The teenagers wanted something different like they did when the rock'n'roll come. I think it all started to change and that's when the change started to come.

David: showmen will move with the times.

Lilly: when you had those shows, the sheep with the three legs. Or things like that. That's history now. You couldn't put it on now. They'd stop it like the circuses.

David: you've got to go with the times. The first lightbulb, was on a fair ground. You've got to move with the times. We don't want to die.

29.00

Lilly: showmen have done a lot. They built the iron bridge in Gloucester. We had boys that went on the plane and never came back. We don't broadcast things like that.

David: the film, Private Ryan. There were two showmen in the Midlands on Normandy beach. Spielberg found one of them when they were still alive and he told a true story of a Private Ryan. These fairs at Leominster and Hereford have so much history. The Scarrott family, the Danter family, the Deakins family. Us and the Danter, we've been going to Hereford all our lives, and the Deakins family have been going longer than that. Mr Barton, whose family kept it on in the war, his family still owns ????? in Hereford.

33.00

[tell me the story again about the guy who kept the fair going during the war]

David: well he kept it going during the black out, Albert Barton. Uncle Albert Barton, he lost his eye to cancer, so he couldn't go to war. But he used to have a boxing booth many years ago and he opened, I believe it was in High Town, because on a charter we must keep going to stay open, and when it was

the blackout he set out in High Town, and he opened to keep everything going. Uncle Albert was 96 when he died and he had a ghost train at the end.