

Title: John Ockey

Creators: Rick & Julia Goldsmith

Project: 'The Close in Living Memory: Hereford Cathedral  
Close oral reminiscences''

Subject: Autobiography, Living and working around Cathedral  
Close in Herefordshire, Heritage

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Identifier: John-Ockey

Interview Date: 2010, Hereford

Interviewee: John Ockey (speaker, male)

Interviewer: Marsha O'Mahony & Julia Goldsmith (speaker,  
female)

Camera & Sound: Richard Goldsmith (male)

Producer: Julia Goldsmith

Language: English

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Type: Video

Width: 1440 pixels

Height: 1080 pixels

Scan type: Progressive

Stereo/Mono: Stereo Mixdown

Duration: 21 min 51 seconds

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Transcript:

(00:00)

John introduces himself, and briefly summarises his family's history in Herefordshire. Farmers of Hereford Breed cattle, who moved from near Bosbury to Exchequer Court in Thruxton. His father was eldest of 7 children and apprenticed as a forester. (00:55) John talks about being in the cadets while at Cathedral School, marching along the close with Lee-Enfield rifles, and doing shooting practice at the back of the school towards Castle Green. (1:40) The Chemistry Master, Mr. Brooks, was captain and they would go out once a week or so. They also used to go to Tadworth as an OTC - University Officers' Training Corps.

(02:18)

John recalls that many Boys would join the OTC - though it was just the beginning of the war and there were two or three German Jewish boys, sons of doctors etc who had fled, who didn't join in these activities. The feeling even at that point being slightly exclusionary. (03:02) John tries to recall other elements of being in the cadets, such as marching around Castle Green, but remembers being a member of the OTC as well. (03:58) Parading and marching down to Wyeside and doing a bit of 'war work' - practising leopard crawling on the floor, what you would do to get under the fire.

(04:24)

There was quite a lot of army in Hereford at this time, even the Sikh regiment at one time were based here, of course Credenhill was going and Bradbury Lines therefore people didn't really take too much notice of Cadets training. (05:01) John wanted to join the Navy, and his brother had already gone into the Navy, but became exempt due to his exams at Liverpool. (05:27) John talks briefly about the rifles they would use, small .202 bore rifles, in a long shed running along the road at the back of the Cathedral where the prep school is today.

(06:01)

John and his peers did fire watching in the Cathedral, sleeping in the transept, and they used to have races carrying a bucket and a stirrup pump to the top of the Lady Chapel roof in under a minute and a half. (06:57) John also was in the Home Guard LDV (Local Defence Volunteers) in Bartestree, where they also fire watched at Bartestree Convent. During the war they would watch outside, looking towards Woolhope woods. John remembers noticing a light in the woods and thinking a parachutist has landed and notifying the captain and there being a search for these people who weren't there - though in reality it was likely a farmer or a poacher.

(08:09)

Being in the Cathedral to fire watch didn't worry John and his friends at all, it was very quiet and you could hear birds flying and that sort of thing. He remembers clearly lying on bunk beds beside Sir Thomas deCanteloupe's tomb beside the spiral staircase that goes up to the tower - so they could run up there with their buckets, but they only ever ended up doing races and fun. (08:51) They volunteered to be fire watchers at the Cathedral, John would be there with other dayboys, but remembers Derek Wardle who he cycled with and another lad called Dick Jones who lived on Ryeland Street. They were a close knit group, playing rugby and rowing, though John didn't like cricket at all which his mum refused to let him play.

(10:00)

John remembers that the cadets became a little more important during the 30's, as even then at that age (16 or so) they were aware of Hitler becoming somewhat worrying. (10:37) John recalls dressing up in the 1914 great war uniforms around age 16, with the peak cap and the putties. They used to get in terrible trouble if their putties weren't put on correctly. It was khaki and rough material so if you didn't have any clothes on it itched somewhat. They did the majority of their training at the back of the prep school but not with large rifles. (11:36) When he joined the Home Guard it was a different matter as they actually had the 'larger' Lee-Enfield rifles. It was quite enjoyable, though he didn't really feel like he was doing something for the war effort - it felt more like a game. (12:35) They would never run across the grass on the close, they were very good not running anywhere 'it wasn't the done thing in those days'. Though he wasn't as involved with the close as the people from Langford House.

(13:33)

John recounts cycling to Birmingham during the war. When he was in the Home Guard during sixth-form they could see the lights of Swansea and Birmingham burning in the sky. John and four or five of his close friends decided it would be rather interesting to see what the bombs did, so they each told their parents they were going to stay at each other's houses, then set off cycling to Birmingham. They got near the south side of the city and it was quite horrific - the smell of gas and sewage and all the houses broken down. So they turned around and cycled back, not going into the middle of the city having become a bit afraid. This was just after the main blitz. (15:00) John found that during the war Hereford was quite alright, it didn't seem to worry them a great deal, they were all cyclists as well as rowing and playing rugby so were more concerned with what was going on at school rather than the actual war itself. Though at the same time recalling the last parts of the blitz in Liverpool when John saw a german bomber going over Derby Hall at low altitude whilst the HMS War Spite was shooting at them. (16:15) John and his friends didn't really play on the close, either being involved with school activities or cycling back home via Ledbury Road. (16:42) There wasn't any courting on the close itself, though one or two of the lads got caught at Breinton Springs but that's another story.

(17:07)

John's father had retired from the police in 1933 but he was asked to go back and do intelligence work in Rotherwas so he was there everyday, though John didn't know anything about it, and also got involved when the bombs were dropped on Rotherwas Munitions Factory. John recalls going around a Munitions Factory in Rochdale when staying with an uncle, and seeing women covered in yellow bomb material which was another interesting side of the war. (18:07) John wasn't told of people who died in action at the time, not realising until he came back to Hereford after studying - whilst he was at school and university the war was a part of life, he'd seen bodies and things in Liverpool, they were simply immersed in it. In a way, though it's a terrible thing to say, it was interesting... you couldn't put it any other way. It didn't bother John as he was a veterinary surgeon as he was used to blood and such.

(19:01)

John talks about the houses on the close and the mayfair. Remembering coming in a pony and trap from his Aunt's Merryhill farm during the summer selling fruits, vegetables and flowers - especially sweet peas. So he remembers the houses there that went right across, (20:05) also recalling Oswins jewellers on broad street that is still there today. (20:20) John remembers the mayfair as being very polite, none of this sort of drinking and what have you. It was quite small, there was a boxing ring on King Street an old helter skelter, Dodgems, horse rides and the shooting gallery and coconut shys - though the fair never extended all the way to the close.

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This film was made by Catcher Media for the Hereford Cathedral Close project in association with In Our Age and supported by The National Lottery Heritage Fund.

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