Title:	Pudge, John_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, Hop Farming and Hop Picking in Herefordshire, Heritage
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Tags:	Hops, Derek Evans, oral history, heritage, PV, participatory film-making, community film, Herefordshire, Hop picking, agriculture

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Identifier:	Pudge, John_Interview_Complete
Interview Date:	July_28_2016
Location:	Bishops Frome, Herefordshire, UK
Source:	Catcher Media Social CIC
Interviewee:	John Pudge (speaker, male)
Interviewer:	Marsha O'Mahoney (speaker, female)
Camera & Sound:	Richard Goldsmith (male)
Producer:	Julia Goldsmith
Language:	English

Type:	Video
Video Format:	MPEG-4
Bit rate:	30.19 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:	48000 Hz
Audio Bit rate:	192 kb/s
Stereo/Mono:	Mono
File Size:	5.74 GB
Duration:	27 min 13 seconds

Type:	Audio
Audio Format:	MP3 audio
Audio Sampling rate:	44.100 kHz
Audio Bit rate:	256 kb/s
Stereo/Mono:	Mono
File Size:	50.9 MB
Duration:	27 min 13 seconds

Transcript:

My name is John Pudge. My family have farmed here at New House Farm, Bishops Frome, for at least eight generations. We have grown hops as long as hops have been grown in Herefordshire and over the years we have been involved in Bishops Frome and many other parishes here abouts with a number of hops farms and produced many thousands of hop pockets in that time.

The largest impact hop growing has had in Herefordshire and Bishops Frome in particular would be from its heyday in the 1900s through to the second world war. In those days the hops were picked by hand. Bishops Frome as a parish is very similar today. We have about 600 people who live here. In hop picking in those days the number would go up to 6000. Hop picking was the life blood of this village. All sorts of the different aspects of the life of Bishops Frome, it all centred around the hop industry. The hop picking period, through September and October, the pickers would come in all different directions. Most of the farms would have just one type of picker. Our farm here at the New house we had Welsh in from the Valleys, but next door they had pickers in from the Black Country. Also the travellers with the caravans they would arrive.

The largest hop farm in Bishops Frome in those days was the Upper House in the centre of Bishops Frome. They had some very large kilns, in fact if not the largest kilns in the country and they were built in about 1927 I think those kilns went up. And at that period of time, in about the late 1920s and 1930s, they would have three separate camps – one for the Welsh, one for the Dudleys and one for the travellers. The Upper House itself would be producing by hand around over 4000 hop pockets per year, and a hop pocket is a hundred weight and a half of dry hops put into a six-foot jute sack.

Those pickers would fill into the village, and to put everything into perspective, as I said earlier, they had so many people coming in they had, in those days we had a policeman and when it came to September two more were drafted in. There was three of them walking around, and at least two together, because they didn't like to go around unless they were in pairs because it was a bit rough in Bishops Frome at that period of time.

Each farm had shops. There were three shops in Bishops Frome itself and the bigger farms had their own shops as well. The pubs – we're standing here at new House Hop Pocket at Bishops Frome, and within a mile or so of here I could name seven or so pubs that were open and having a very good harvest themselves during that period. The other kind of things that would encroach

on the day to day life of the village was of course all the people in the area were out picking: the children came, the mothers came – everybody was involved and they made money to get them through the winter. And of course the other thing that happened at that time was that when hop picking finished, the last day of hop picking in the village, the village school opened for the autumn term on the following Monday. There was no set date. It was always the Monday after hop picking finished. And of course the children were all in the hop yards helping to pick the hops and the teachers couldn't be there either because they were the ones doing the booking, because they were the ones that could actually do the writing.

The pickers that came for the hand picking in those days, they would be contacted. My grandfather, who was running this farm then, he would contact a lady in Wales and he had a number of ladies down in Wales that used to arrange for everybody in the area or was interested, would come up to our farm for that period of time. The ladies changed over the years but one of the latters ones that I can remember was a Mrs Williams and even when we were picking with the hop picking machines, Mrs Williams wold be arranging for the hop pickers to come up for whenever we wanted them. My grandfather in his time, he would telegraph them and tell them when we would be starting and a couple of days before the lorries, or the train they came in on, would go down and pick up their luggage and bring them up and then they would stay for the period of hop picking in the barracks here at New House.

Of course one of the benefits of these pickers coming in from either the Welsh Valleys or even from all around the Black Country, as they arrived the country air was just the same as going off on holiday. You think about it, they were here for a month, five/six weeks and during that time the value to their health was enormous compared to some of the situations they lived in in the cities. As they arrived they came many of them were very pale, bedraggled, they weren't that well kept at all. The time they were here the sun did its work and they ended up with quite good tans and the children themselves probably went home a lot tidier and a lot healthier looking than they ever did before they arrived.

One of the things that was a tradition in the hop yards in the handpicking days – there were so many traditions that came to light in those handpicking days – and one of those traditions of course was being 'cribbed', where a person on their first season or just got married or whatever, they would be picked up and thrown into the crib and smothered into the hops. And this was obviously cribbing. I'm probably one of the last, in fact I am the last in my family anyway to have been cribbed. We were still picking by hand in 1958/59, and at that stage some of the pickers, I was there with my father in the hop yard, I wasn't very old, but I was picked up and thrown into the crib. Father

had no hesitation but to laugh so there was no problem grabbing hold of me and smothering me in the hops. Very similar to the days when you moved onto the machine times and the kilns here. In those days we used to put sulphur up through the hops and what you would do is you would set fire to the rolls of sulphur underneath the hops and it would come up through the hops just before they dried to kill the bugs and whatever. And one of the tricks of the kilnman in those days was that you would accidentally get locked in the kiln. And of course in the kiln itself you would have the vents at the top, so what you had to do was climb up the metalwork inside the kiln and get to the vents so you could get some fresh air. So it was another one of those little traditions that was centred around the hop picking at that time. There's all sorts of different traditions over the years we've seen with the hop trade.

I know that when I left school there were a number of youngsters who were leaving school at 15 or 16 and they'd go onto the farms and they'd start at that age – a lot of them are actually still working on the farms now or just retiring – and they would be asked to go to the next farm to go and get some sky hooks. And they'd go all the way up to the next farm and the farmer would give them a couple of top hooks to send back. But of course there's no such thing as sky hooks. It was very similar to being asked on the farms around here to go next door and get a rickmolt??, which is, allegedly, pieces of wood you set the rick in, and of course there's no such thing. And so there would be lot of things that would go on. Here there were lots of tricks and jokes that were played. I know for a fact that on the first morning when we got somebody fresh and hadn't picked on the farm before, they were put onto a tractor, shown how to drive a tractor, and they would go two to three miles away from here to the hop yards to be picking up hops. We had one that came back down through on the first morning, came through the village and couldn't remember where the farm was, so they turned right at the first turning. He ended up at Cheney Court, which was just a farm just across the fields here and James, one of my cousins, turned around and said, 'in here'. And so our first load of hops went through James' machine and not ours! And then he told him to go back and get some more. But by the time he'd got his second load he realised he'd got the wrong farm. So those are the kinds of things that happened in hop picking.

On a Sunday, especially in the days when we had hand pickers in the village, those were the days when, obviously the pubs were heaving and so forth. But there were a number of religious services that went on. St Mary's, the church in Bishops Frome always had services, it had morning and evening song. There was a house known as the catholic church and that was the base where some of the catholic priests used to come and stay. They would hold services out in the hop yards themselves. There were two chapels in the area and they had different services. So there was a number of services going on in the actual hop yards on a

Sunday. Also of course all the pubs were all full. In the village itself, bishops Frome, in front of the green dragon, they would be selling horses and traps, and all sorts of things would be sold by the gypsies and travellers at that stage in the area in front of the pub. You have to remember that there were virtually any vehicles or anything, so they just took over the place. There were people everywhere at that time.

The reason why the groups of travellers, the Welsh and the Dudleys, and the travellers, were kept apart – their own separate farms very often – was mainly because when they went out to the pubs or into the fields or whatever, if there was a dispute they would end up fighting. There was somewhere they could go back to at the end of the day, which was their own people rather than going back to where there were potential problems. So that was the major reason for keeping separate groups within the pickers.

Some of the travellers I met over the years, they were lovely people. I had a lot of respect for them when I was growing up because they knew all about the countryside. Yes, there were rogues, there are in all sorts of life, but many of them had really sound hearts. They were great people.

We were talking about the children out in the hop yards – the children themselves used to pick normally up until lunchtime and then they had the afternoon to roam the countryside and go scrumping, and doing all sorts of things that they shouldn't have been doing. We've had all sorts of things over the years go missing. I can remember in, 1976 I think it was, a very hot summer, the apples, the cider fruit, the apples weren't very big and they dropped off the tree because it was a very poor season – and I can remember on the first night that the Welsh arrived, I had one of our Welshmen turn around to me and said, well that's a bit unfair. And I said, well what's the matter? They've gone and picked all the apples this year so we can't have any.

Well of course they'd all taken them. It was standard practise. Once, during the fifties or the sixties, there was a snap storm and some of the area by the bags was starting to flood a bit and we'd finished hop picking and father said we've got to get them back down to Wales. And the men and everybody were there and they were carrying out bags of potatoes and bags of apples and all sorts of things that had been scrumped in the four weeks previous, just so we could get them onto the lorries and the coaches so we could them out of the water. So those are the kinds of things that happened. Lots of things happened during that period.

During hop picking there was lots of socialising going on in the evenings. They went to the pubs or they were in the cookhouses here and they would have their campfires there and so forth. But the cookhouses would be warm because they would have the devils

working in there. The social side of hop picking was a major side of it as well. Obviously there would be very many going to the pubs but even on the campsites they'd be around the campfires. The farms here where we have the barracks and whatever we had cookhouses and in the cookhouses there would be the devils that they used to cook their meals on. The devils were a metal container sat on four legs which we put coke into and they set fire to that and that gave the heat for cooking their food, and it warmed the cookhouses as well. During evenings of course they would all sit around and there would be singing and telling tales and drinking and doing all sorts of things and a really good time would be had. Lots of friendships and whatever would be made during the hop picking period.

Of course during those six or seven weeks of hop picking it wasn't just the work in the fields a lot of it was the social side in the evenings. The travellers would be sat around their camp fires. Most of the farms had cook houses. The cookhouses themselves there would be devils, which would be filled with coke and lit and they were fired up all the way through hop picking. And the food and the drinks were actually cooked and taken from the devils. Of course those devils provided the warmth in the evenings and people would congregate in the cook houses and all sorts of evenings you'd have tales being told and songs being sung. And of course with the Welsh there'd be really, really good singing. And of course those are the evenings when lots of friendships were over the years forged.

The way the hand pickers were paid all through those years before the second world war and just after, they were paid by the bushel. They picked the hops into the cribs and the bushler would come along and take the measurement of the hops, which was a basket full of hops, which was a bushel basket, and the bushler would come along and put those bushels into green sacks and then taken to the kilns to be dried. But there would be a tally man would be with them, or a booker, and they would book each individual crib's tally of hops picked. And then at the end of the day or at set times the pickers could go to the farmer and the farmer would pay them so much for the hops they picked during that period of time. But they didn't give them money they gave them coin. Every farm in the area had their own coin and set with the name of the farm on. So they dished these coins out throughout hop picking. And those coins could be taken – I mean in Bishops Frome, from this farm and the farms around, they could be taken and the pubs would accept them, the shops would accept them. And then when hop picking was finished and all wrapped up the shopkeepers would then collect all the coins and take them to the individual farms and the farmers would then pay the shopkeeper for the money owed them.

The pickers themselves, after the picking was finished, they would bring their coins and the farmers would change those. But in those days they would want cash for that ad not cheques. One

of the reasons why this was done was it meant the farmer could pick his crop and he actually hadn't paid a penny towards the picking until afterwards because he was using his own coin. Soon as hop picking was over he could try to sell some of the hops and get the money back in and help to pay for picking the hops themselves.

Of course everyone talks about the nostalgia of hop picking and how much good fun they had and whatever, but it was very important to the economy of Herefordshire and to the valleys and to the Black Country and to the travellers. Because all round here everybody went out and picket hops, and that money went towards clothes and shoes for the children for the winter time – it was a bonus. And of course the ladies who came out from Bromyard and Bishops Frome and all around, they would actually pick very quickly to try and earn as much money as they could and it was one way of making quite a bit of money compared to anything else in the area and that gave them security through the winter months.

Hop picking was a very busy time, whether it was through the hand picking days or when we were picking in our heyday here in the 70s, 80s and 90s with three machines. The busiest day of the year was always the first day because you had to make sure everyone knew what they were doing. That was the hardest day and the longest day of hop picking. But as the days went through, you used to work your way through different days and it would become more of a routine.

When we finished up on the last day, you'd pay the staff in the afternoon ready for them to go back on the coaches the next day. So that night, they would all hit the pubs, there would be a party in one or another of the pubs, each farm had their own parties because they all finished on different nights – you could go around to two or three parties if you knew where you were going – and those parties would go way into the early hours of the morning. And then they would wearily get onto the coaches and lorries and so forth, and head back to Wales from here. And suddenly you'd turn around and it was so quiet.

The winter arrived, it was October, you'd look around, all your hop yards were bare wire. There was no noise. The machines stopped, the people had gone and suddenly it was very very quiet again.

One of the things we must do is relate what happened. Many of the stories I've got have come from my father and my grandfather. From the labour force, from the different people I listened to as I was growing up. The different stories that they told. I think that one of the things like this museum here at the Hop Pocket shows what happened during that period of time. It helps to record it. I think the fact that we're going to get this onto tape or film, the record of what happened in those

years is very very important cause otherwise they will be lost, and once the memories are gone it’s very difficult because I’m trying to tell you some of the stories of what I’ve been told and, for some of them, maybe what they were told, and it needs to be recorded.