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

My name is Sylvia Shaw, my age is 78 coming November, and it's 26th July 2017. My mother came to Newnham Bridge from the year 1932, she had eight girls and four boys. And we all went hop picking and we all liked it. We all thought it was a holiday. Well, when my mum went hop picking, every week, a few months before, she used to get something on the side, like corned beef, they'd have shrimp paste, she would build herself up with what she was going to take, and use the hop picking box to put it all in to store it ready for when we went. And of course she'd have to go and see the agent woman, Mrs Stafford, to know which barn she was going to be having. So anyhow, we'd be told by the agency where the hop picking boxes would be put. And all the visitors, all the hop pickers, would take the boxes the night before and there'd be somebody to watch these boxes because somebody could have took them off, there's clothes, there's food in them. Of course when mum was preparing, mum would have a cord around her neck with the keys to the hop picking box and the keys to the barrack, what we used to sleep in.

Anyhow, we used to go by coach, by Yarringtons coach from Eardisley and they'd arrange for a lorry to pick all these hop picking boxes up. But the hop picking lorry that took the hop picking boxes used to go in front of the coach. We were excited because we didn't have that many coach trips, we'd never been far out from our village. When we got to the barracks everybody would get off, you'd get into your barrack, you'd start fetching the water, you'd start lighting the fires ready for cups of tea and the lunch, get cooking.

So when we'd got a bit organised course we always went after the cows to see them be milked, which we loved. And of course we knew all the farm hands that used to do the milking. And of course we all had our Wellingtons on. When they used to get the cows out after the milking, we used to help to drive the cows out into the field and we'd do that on a morning before we went down the hop yard to help them bring the cows back in, yeah, from the milking.

Well, in the barracks, farmers used to leave like tree trunks, old tree trunks, and there was all straw, and me mum used to lift the straw up to lighten it and then she used to take her own blankets and her own sheets and cover it all and we'd all lay in the same bed because we were all very small children. And we still had to go to bed at a certain time. But before we went to bed the farmers would allow every worker to have a pint of

cider at night time and she'd boil this cider and put a bit of sugar in it, so it would help us to sleep. But it would be like a little small cup and it kept us warm. And of course, we had, me mam would have to light the Kelly lamps and candles, and we had candles as well. That was our night. When we went down to the hop yard we would have to take the Kelly lamp up to the farmhouse and they would fill it with oil ready for the night time. No fires there, nobody got burnt or nothing. That was our night. In the morning we would bring it to the farmhouse and they would fill it with oil. So when we finished at the night time at picking the hops we'd call at the farm to pick the Kelly lamp up to be able to use it at night time. Mam always had a ribbon on hers and it used to be a Scotch ???? ribbon, so she always knew she had that one and didn't have anybody else's. Me mam used to bring our Kelly lamps up and she always made a point of having her own by putting a little ribbon on it so she knew it was hers.

Before we went down, while we were taking the Kelly lamps to the farm, my mum always put her order in and we always had a batch cake and the farmers used to have it delivered from Tenbury bakery shop. Before mum had it she paid. They always had the money off her. And we used to have our milk, and used to have your own jugs, you fetched it and you paid for it. And you'd order that. And in the farmhouse, they'd got their own cellar and you'd go with her to the cellar and come up with this lovely milk. Creamy but nothing like today.

My mum had two hop picking boxes, one for the clothes and one for the food and she used to have all tinned stuff 'cause you got to have sandwiches, tomatoes and all sorts, and in the other one she had all our clothes and we could have a change at the weekends. And my father used to bring things in his suitcase. And there'd be stuff, chocolates from Cadbury's because my sisters worked at Cadbury's and biscuits, and of course when they do a pie at home, apple pies, and me dad would be bringing those as well. My dad had to catch two buses to come here to Newnham Bridge and when he used to come down he used to have a big blue case on his shoulder.

I don't know how on earth he used to carry it, and he used to come into the hop yard and he'd start picking with us all. And of course we were all excited when dad was there, and all the visitors would start to come as well from the area because nobody had a car. They'd all have to get two buses. One from Stourbridge into Kidderminster, and from Kidderminster into Newnham Bridges. And it was the Midland Red bus. Not only that, people would come from the Black Country from the area where we lived, Quarry Bank, and they'd come on coaches, and they'd be visitors just for the afternoon and they be coming to the cribs if they knew ya, we'd shout 'em, and they'd come and pick for you. And of course your hops in the cribs would be coming up. And of course, my mum, we'd have a little fire in the hop yard

and she's put the kettle on and they'd have a tea pot, enamel, and she'd do them a cup of tea and they enjoyed that. And of course they after then they'd go up to the barracks, well I call them that, barns or the barracks, they'd have another cup of tea, and probably after another half an hour they'd all go back home.

The Sisters of Mercy, one used to come with a priest and they'd come in a little Austin car and she always came to my mother's crib and she'd open her case up and you'd see all the tweezers, and plasters, the bandages, gentian violets, and everything, and then the children would come to where my mum had her crib and she would administer all these cuts and stings that the children had received because there was wasp nests sometimes in the hop yard. And while we were in the hop yards you could look up the furrows and if we saw the rabbits run across we'd be that excited. Me brother did catch a rabbit. And he took it back home and because we had a rabbit hutch. But the rabbit escaped.

While the priest and the Sisters of Mercy were there they'd sell the Rosaries and the little books. I have got a little book, I'll show you what they used to sell. And my mum bought us one, I think a member of the family had it. But she was very kind to all of us children and did like children. She looked beautiful to us, you know, lovely clear skin as well. But they didn't go on much about the religion, you know, harp on about it. We just accepted them and they just came five days a week. And if it rained like it did this morning, she'd put on her uniform, she'd have a grey mac on. Used to look a bit odd because it was sticking out a bit won't it, you know? She didn't sell the medication. They'd sell the prayer books and Rosary Beads to the children and to the grown-ups for the children to have and we would wear one when we were there. But she couldn't afford to buy all of us one, could she? You'd have to have it on turn.

Now this is Sister Christine on this photograph and Sister Christine used to sell beads of Rosary and little prayer books and this is the sister that used to administer all the medication to the children that needed it. For instance wasp stings and cuts. Maybe if they had a rash, they'd put something on that. They'd have cough mixture and I liked that cough mixture. I'd have a cough when I hadn't got a cough. I used to love that. I forgot about the cough mixture.

One day I'd had a boiled sweet and I'd swallowed this boiled sweet and it'd got stuck here and it was really hurting and I was crying and the pole puller, Mr Davies, he came and said to my mum and said I was and he said, have a drink of my cider, which I did to try and shift it, I was swallowing bread to try and move it. He said if you'll stop crying I'll bring you back something nice this afternoon, when he'd been back home for his break, and when he came he bought be some great big yellow plums, and that's one incident I could remember.

Mr Lemon and Mr Lawton used to come every Sunday morning and we all used to gather round the fire and he used to play hymns and we used to sing to them. And of course we always went to Sunday School and we always knew the hymns. The most famous the elderly used to ask for was the 'Old Rugged Cross' and 'What a friend we have in Jesus', that used to come on every Sunday morning. And Mr Lemon and Mr Lawton went into Quarry Bank and where they built a new community centre and when they were there, he said 'does anybody know Mrs Tibbetts?' And this lady said, 'yes I do'. And he said, 'will you ask her to come and see me'. So they fetched me mum up to see him. And you know what he give her? A big bible. Me sister's got that bible, and it was a big bible. But Mr Lawton sent me brother a bible because he was in the forces, he was in the Korean war, and he said, 'this will keep him safe'. 'Cause you know we all went to church and what not, you know, from when we were children, had an education in religion.

Mr Lemon was only a little man, a little plump man and he'd got this big accordions he used to play and I did hear that his daughter has got that accordion today. Mr Lemon and Mr Lawton were both missionaries and I think they went from hop farm to hop farm, but I think they always went to Coopers Farm first. But of course, this accordion was nearly as big as him, nearly went down to the bottom of his stomach and up here. The kids loved it. And then we used to have what we used to call the magic lantern, and the magic lantern used to come one night in the week and show the old movie things, not the films we know today, but the old ones. I don't know if you remember them. When the magic lantern used to come, there'd be a farm, a fire, and we'd be under a big shed. I think they used to put the cattle in this shed in the winter time. But there'd be a fire in there and we used to sit on oil tins that the farmers had used, they had a lot of them. And we used to take them down the hop yard and pick in them and sometimes we'd sit on them by the crib because it's a long day for children. I mean we'd be down that hop yard a half past seven in the morning. Don't forget if it was raining, if we had rainy weather, you'd stop so long, but when you realised, probably after a couple of hours, everybody have to go back up to the barracks. I remember one year it had a real flood and Cooper's farm, in the field and at the bottom it flooded, just like a river, and it had struck an apple tree and the apples were bobbing in this and we thought it was great. We were sitting in the barrack and we could see this and we were jumping up to see these apples.

We used to go at night and probably once a week under the shanty. Now the shanty had a fire underneath it, and we used to sit on oil drums to watch this magic show. We used to go under a shanty, that was open fronted to watch the magic lantern. All the children used to get together to watch that and it was about half an hour, but we liked it.

When they used to light the fires, and when mum had her own fire, they used to have all the wood from the apple trees, and it used to be in a pile and we used to call it faggots in them days. We'd help Mr Strafford to drag all this fire wood because it was the next field to where we were. I was frightened in case there was snakes there. I was terrified. We did a bit of scrumping, we went after the nuts, hazelnuts. We knew all about nature and on a Sunday, in the morning, we'd all go walk along the lanes and we'd all got a stick, I don't know what we had a stick for but it was a walking stick, it was the elderflower and we used to mark it with knives, make fancy patterns on them. And of course, we thought we was important when we used to be driving the cows but of course we never hit the cows. I won't into that sort of thing. But the farmer thought a lot of his cows, I must say that, he looked after them. He used to keep them in the barracks. We used to give them names.

I never saw mice or rats in the barracks. In the barracks, he used to lime his barracks every year and I think he might have stored stuff in there when the hop pickers weren't there. Some slept in the cow sheds. My mum wouldn't go in the cow sheds and some were right by the bull, they were! Mrs Stafford always used to have one, you had to go through the gate, well that was the gate where you went up to the cow sheds. They never took any notice, nor the smell or nothing.

I know when I see a good hop. A good hop is a nice one, a big two-inch one. But I do know there's different varieties and I know there are smaller hops. As I was saying, the end hops, the bines, are thinner, not so good. The farmer used to make them all share, cut them down and go to every crib, three each, and of course while we were there were local people that used to go to the hop yard as well. He employed local people. One year my mum was there and we had a dog from there, we had a collie dog. There was one of the young men that was there, I think there was something wrong with him, and he said, 'Mrs Tibbetts, would you like a dog?' Of course, they didn't want them. And me mum said, go on, I'll have one. And we named it Lassie and oh she was lovely. Like Lassie off the telly. She really was a lovely dog.

Usually, if there was a person on their own, they'd probably only have about five bushels. But if there was a family, you might have nine, if you've got children you know. And of course, you may have a lot more if you've got visitors. What we used to do, is get one of the sacks and if you've got visitors put them in the sacks, because your crib would get full, really full. If the farmer, when he was actually bushelling, if he was being naughty and he was pushing the hops into the basket, they'd grumble and they'd tell him and they'd tell him not to be socking them down. Of course, he was making them harder so that he was getting more to the bushell. We went on strike if we heard one farm was getting a penny more than our farm. So, they

all stopped and all went back to the barracks for the rest of the day. And either by next morning we were all back in the hop yard. Yes, we had our penny extra. And of course, everybody was singing then.

When it was a bright day, when it was sunshine, somebody would start to sing, and start to sing hymns, some had quite good voices. And of course, you know, there was elderly people, there was people with children, and families. There was a family I knew from Quarry bank they had twins. They used to boil the napkins and wash the napkins, I've seen them hanging on the line, hanging from the tree above the barracks. But they managed to do it, you know.

Well Gilbert had got red hair and he was a bachelor. On the very last day of the hop picking, the very last bushell, all the women used to get hold of Gilbert and throw him in the crib. He knew it was coming but they managed to lift him up. And it was a family of girls but they were all married these girls, they'd got children, but that was a bit of fun for us, because everybody was screaming.

Every so often Gilbert would let the bull in the yard where the cows come out of the cow sheds to have their drinks and things like that. Well, he'd had the bull out in that yard and somebody had gone through the gate and left the gate open and the bull had run from one gate to the other gate on the other side of the road. Of course, they couldn't get the bull back in. They was all frightened to go to the toilet because the toilets was down there. But they did get it back in the next day. But of course bulls are expensive, aren't they?

Mrs Stafford was lady who was the agency for taking all the hop pickers from Quarry Bank are and she did a job as well and she was an enameller for doing pots and pans, kettles, you name it. And she was what they called a pickler and the pickler I hear is not a very nice job. But she did that and they allowed her to have that time off from that factory to go hop picking for the three weeks. She went because her husband in a way he was a sick man, he didn't work Mr Stafford. For every client that she took she used to get a shilling for every client she got and that would be another part of her wage. And her husband used to have a shilling for lighting the fires every week, one shilling every week just for lighting the fires. There was a devil and then it was under the shanty. It wasn't so good as having the fire outside, because it was arranged better.

We did have travellers on the farm. There was the Griffiths. There was a family called Griffiths. We used to see them. They had a lot of children. I can pick them out in Tenbury, I can pick these children out. They were very hard workers, I'll say that about the gypsies. I think they were Romany because they were very swarthy looking.

Sylvie looking at photo: what I remember about that photo was that it was at the end of the day. I remember having this photograph. A gentleman came in and asked my mother. He came in a car and asked if we would like our photographs taken. It was supposed to be professional and if he'd took it he'd send it on after.

You know when you had babies you'd put them in the side of the crib and they reckon that the fumes off the hops was good for you.

11 years of age and of course that's when they stopped because they was prosecuted. Because my mother had been a lot of years and had taken the lot of my sisters earlier on in their life. And they all liked it. It was good fun. There would be arguments. If they were in certain rows. Because, if you think about it, there was a crib and you used to have to share a crib if there was two separate people, they used to have to fetch their hops bines they liked to keep the hops level. And of course, if they thought you was having a bine where the hops looked bigger they wouldn't be very pleased would they? So, they'd be having arguments. And of course, we used to have pole pullers. Well pole pullers it was a hook with a big pole on it and if they got stuck on the wires the pole puller would come and shoot them off cut them.

At the end of the day when we know the bushler is coming, come down on his tractor, and when he came down do you know what the pole pullers used to shout? Pick them up and clear them out. and that means to say, clear the leaves out of the hops out of your crib and pick the hops off the floor. Never wasted nothing.

Watch the video interviews on the project website:
www.herefordshirelifethroughalens.org.uk