

Title: Smith, Tom_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
Publisher: Catcher Media Social CIC
Tags: May Fair, oral history,
heritage, PV, participatory film-making,
community film, Herefordshire, Bishop
Eastaugh, childhood, best years, history

Identifier: Smith, Tom_Interview_Complete
Interview Date: May_08_2018
Location: Hereford Town
Source: Catcher Media Social CIC
Interviewee: Tom Smith (speaker, male)
Interviewer: Marsha O'Mahony (speaker, female)
and Julia Goldsmith (speaker, female)
Camera & Sound: Richard Goldsmith (male)
Producer: Julia Goldsmith
Language: English

Type: Video
Video Format: MPEG-4
Bit rate: 22.23 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: 44.100 kHz
Audio Bit rate: 192 kb/s
Stereo/Mono: Mono
File Size: 3.94 GB
Duration: 25 min 21 seconds

Type: Audio
Audio Format: MP3 audio
Audio Sampling rate: 44.100 kHz
Audio Bit rate: 256 kb/s
Stereo/Mono: Mono
File Size: 47.1 MB
Duration: 25 min 21 seconds

Original copyright: Catcher Media Social CIC CC BY-NC
Holder: Catcher Media Social CIC, Herefordshire
Libraries, Herefordshire Archive and
Records Centre

Transcript:

I'm a sixth-generation showman. My family have been coming here since 1850 at least and we've been travelling since about 1850, originally with horse and carts and that and then obviously went into steam travel and now it's a modern way of life. But I'm still doing it six generations down the line, my sister, she's having a child, seventh generation. I don't think there's many businesses that can trace their roots back at least seven generations coming up now, doing exactly the same thing, obviously modernised, what we was doing all those years ago. I'm proud of our heritage, it's a way of life.

What was it like growing up a child?

You just do it. You're not anything different. Obviously, all your friends are in the same business, you're travelling around, that was my business. But it was different in a sense that we were settled just by Cardiff and we used to commute to different fairs, while a lot of my friends used to travel from fair to fair. So, I was a bit of an outsider in that sense. I had the best of both worlds. I had the settled lifestyle and the travelling lifestyle, which was really good. And when I was school I got picked on, called all these names and that, and it was just my job. And all I used to say was the difference between you and me is my job, and that's all it is. You learn everything, you pick it up: you're starting, helping set up, pulling down, in the packing up you're doing just the little jobs. The safest place for a child in a busy fair is in the stall. You know where they are, they are there with you, or they're in the pram. And you learn to count, you're working with money, you're working with people. There aren't that many businesses where you're covering so many ranges at such a young age. You know you're doing it all from a baby. You pick it up like subconsciously, you just do it. You don't know you're doing it, it just comes to you.

Have you ever thought of doing anything else?

No, because we've never known anything else. It's like farming. There's a big connection with showmen and farming, it's a lifestyle, it's what you do, it's how you're brought up. I would love to carry on what I'm doing, but then again then again modern times, you don't know what's around the corner. But at the moment it's a great way of life. [The connection between showmen and farming] well there was the hiring fairs at the back

end of the year, September time, to hire the workers, the labourers to go on the farm. And then you get the mop fairs where you would carry a mop if you didn't have a trade, and then some would carry an ear of corn on their thing. Then you'd have a fair a week later which was called the runaway mops, if you didn't like your employer, you'd go there again a week later to get hired again and you'd have that and you'd have your season's work.

I'm Tom Smith, we've been coming here for six generations, since the 1850s I can trace my family back in this business. I've come here all my life, literally with the same stalls. My grandfather, my great grandfather, coconut shies, rifle ranges, that's what we've always done in this business, and I'm still doing it now exactly the same. Modern prizes, modern lights, you know, but in essence it's exactly the same as what we were doing 150 year ago.

I'm really passionate about what we do. It's a way of life. I've been in it all my life. As a child you're bought up on a fairground. Can you imagine being a child and anything better to do than being on a fair? You've got all these lights, there's music. Everything around you is what any child would want really. It's a fantastic way of life, it really is. You know it's been going for hundreds and hundreds of years, thousands of years, you know started with jugglers, went into markets, trade fairs, and it all rolled on. But the fair as you see it today, is turn of the century you know, 1850 steam powered, that's when fairs really took off. But then the life of the fair was in 1950s, you know the music, the modern life. After the war years we had lots of hard times with the war years, the fifties comes along, fashion changed, attitude changed, it was the year of the teenager. You know teenagers come around, that was the height of the fairground, in the fifties, the sixties, that was the best times. In my dad's opinion as well, he lived there, he was there. he said fairground in the sixties was the heyday. They will never be matched again. They was the rock'n'roll years.

Today it is different, it's a lot harder. There is so much more out there. there's theme parks out there, there's package holidays, X-boxes. People still enjoy a fairground to come into their town, the local people enjoy a fairground. But I think the attraction of a fair, the charter of the fair, people don't get that, they don't know why it's here. They don't know if we roll into town and we go again, they don't understand what we're doing here. But it is different. We've got the big rides now, the thrills. The side stalls make a fair. You can have all the big rides, but if you don't have your candy floss, your toffee apples and the side stalls, it's just a lot of big rides. You need to have everything to fit in. everything makes a fairground. All the little parts they all click together.

Showmanship is a great word. I've been bought up with an old-

fashioned way of life. I'm talking to the public every day of my life, meeting new people, then I go back and see them grow up, they see me grow up, and you see the same families coming back time and time again. You work with your hands you know. It's a physical job. You're out in all weathers. When it's sunny it's the best job in the world, you couldn't wish to do anything better. When it's pouring down with rain, you think to yourself, I'd love to be in an office. You'd give yourself an hour in an office and you'd want to be out in the rain. You know, it's a total way of life. Like farming, they go hand in hand showmen and farmers, there's so many comparisons. It's totally weather dependent, it's seasonal. You know it's generations passed down in families. There's so many similarities with the farming heritage and showmen. It's all there together.

Spieling is what you done to coax them on your stall. I'm doing it now, I'm talking to you, I'm doing it now, I'm giving that bit of showmanship, a bit of a story, a bit of banter, history. And that's what you have to do to get them to come onto your stall, you know, roll up, roll up, three balls for a penny and all that. That's what you've got to do. But if you don't they will just walk past you and go to the stall next to you. You've got to give them a reason to come to your stall. I don't think you learn [spieling] I think it's ingrained in you, it's there. You know, I've seen my dad do it and I've seen my grandfather do it, and then you learn yourself. You be putting your own spin on things. You know my father might say it this way and I might say it a different way. But it's all the same. You've just got to try and get every penny out of them as you can. It's your business at the end of the day. You're there as a job and you've got to earn your money. It's a great saying: It's not the show that gets the dough, it's the flash that gets the cash! Which is you have to have the best lights, the best prizes, all of that, you need to get the best front on the shows with all your signage, parading girls on the front of the shows, to attract people in. and once you've got your money off them, you can do what you like then. You know you can have nothing at all inside. There could be the most trivial, the most menial thing whatever inside, but you've had the money, that's it, next please. So once they're in, they're coming out the door in the back but you've had the money, you've got to get them in. the main thing is to get them there.

Competition is rife. It's like any business you know. You look down this line there is so many of the same thing. There's so many hook-a-duck stalls, there's so many shooting stalls, it's all the same. So again, you've got to work at it to get them on to your stall. It's healthy to have a bit of competition. If you had it all on your own you just get lazy and it'd be just old hat. It's healthy to have competition, you've got to be one step ahead of the game, you've got to have the newest thing, the newest prize, you've got to be top of the market. It's like any business, if you let yourself slack, someone's going to step in

front of you and they're going to have it.

The parading shows as we call them, with the dancing girls on the front of them, if there was going to be a line of three or four of them in the same fair, they had to do something different to get the public to come to theirs. So if it was quiet they would literally go all the way. Like I said they would have nothing on but a smile! It would literally go down to nothing. And fan dance, sometimes they would move their fans a little bit slower so you would get a little bit more of any eyeful. Then the word would go around and they'd say, don't to them they're not too good, go to the stall next to them, they'll give you a better show. You know, it's in and out. You've got to try and get them in and out as fast as you can and give them what they want as well. It's burlesque, it's the can-can, it's like the pole dancing nowadays, that's what it is but in a travelling show, that went from village to village. It's like a burlesque show instead of being in like the Moulin Rouge then, it was the Moulin Rouge that went to your village. So once a year you'd be seeing some beautiful women doing their thing in your village.