

MR JOHN ELLIS

Born 1921

The family lived in Portsmouth when John was born. His mother, Mary, married George Thomas Ellis when he was already a widower with a grown up family of four children, one of whom subsequently died.. John was the only child of the second marriage and, because of the large age gap, he was never very close to his two step brothers or to his step sister. George Ellis was a haulier at the time and the family lived in a corner shop, off licence; due to his chronic asthma, his doctor informed him that he had only six months to live and advised a move to the country. Loders was the obvious choice, as there were close family connections, going back several generations. George's father, George Gale Ellis, lived next to Pine Cottage, Uploders, his cousin and his wife, John and Kitty Fry farmed at Home Farm and the family often used to come on holiday to stay with Sarah Hansford at Higher Yondover Farm.

They moved to Loders in 1928, when John was seven, and lived first in number 3 Box Cottages. His father then bought a piece of land opposite the forge and built a wooden bungalow called 'Cosy Cot'. After six months, John's father was tired of doing nothing, so he became the village carrier. Anyone needing his services would put a letter 'E' in their window and he would collect their list and do their shopping for a few pence. He also delivered coal, carrying the heavy sacks to people's coal sheds and lived until 1955, in spite of his doctor's prediction!

John attended Loders School until he was fourteen and was a keen sportsman. He played for Loders Football Club and was a good cricketer, playing for the RAF against Southampton University, before he was demobbed. He started work the day after he left school, as a 'jack boy', making ropes. He then had a spell working for a builder and after that worked for the Town Council until he went into the RAF in April 1940. He served in the Western Desert, Palestine and the Lebanon and then in Italy, where he joined 178 Squadron and flew 28 operations.

After the Second World War, John came back to Loders and worked as chauffeur/gardener to Billy Lowl, a Bridport butcher. He then started his own haulage company, delivering lime all over Dorset, Devon and Cornwall and later, when he could no longer carry on this business, he chartered a fishing boat in West Bay, taking people out on fishing trips.

In 1955 John married Elizabeth Stewart who, at that time, managed a jewellery shop in Yeovil. In 1958 they bought Home Farm House, where they still live and, after the haulage business finished, Betty did Bed and Breakfast and they kept as many as 80 pigs. Apart from his other activities, John has been correspondent of the Angling Times and the Angling Mail. They are both keen gardeners and sell their flowers, generously giving the proceeds to the RNLI.

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MR JOHN ELLIS, Born: 1921
Home Farm House, Uploders.

Interviewer: Pat Hughes
Yondover Farmhouse
Loders

Date: 1st November 1990

1. Int: How long have you lived here, Mr Ellis?

1925* JE: I've lived here since 1958. When I first came here, I was about 3 years of age. My father and the family lived in Portsmouth and father was a chronic asthmatic and he was told that, if he moved down into the country, he could expect another six months of life. Well, he came here, and the of course, he lived a long, long time after that. This was a farm then being run by his cousin, Mr John Fry, as a farm and father used to bring me here, more or less on holiday, which was a sort of recuperation thing for him, and a holiday for me and we used to spend our time either here, or at Yondover Farm, with Sarah Hansford.

Int: This is now Higher Yondover Farm?

JE: That's right. Of course they were all part of the family, because father's side of the family goes back, dear oh lor', yonks, yonks, yonks years, if you see what I mean. I well remember as a boy, leaning out of what was then a bedroom window, which is now a bathroom window, and picking grapes and some of those leathers are still sticking in the wall now, where we are now, at Home Farm.

Int: Where did your father actually live in Lodgers?

JE: When the doctor told him about this lease of life business, he got in touch with Johnny Fry and he then arranged that we moved into the little cottage, then called number 3 Box Cottage, which is now where the Skeets live and that was our first home in this village. This was in 1928 and we lived there then, I think it was two years. Then father bought a piece of ground opposite the forge and had a wooden bungalow put up, which was called 'Cosy Cot' and that's where he started his carrier's business. Having been told he only had six months to live, he came down here, if you like, and after six months it was a case of, well I must do something, so he became the village carrier. In Portsmouth he was a haulier and we lived in a shop off-licence and of course this was quite a move for my mother from, what in those days was all mod cons and she came down here to paraffin and what have you. This was in '28.

Int: No electric light, I suppose?

JE: No, no electric light. I well remember when the electric came through the village. I don't remember exactly when they put the electric light in; it would be somewhere in the early '30s, because I remember these buildings opposite here, as a boy I used to play in those, what they called the ruins. I remember that all being built up into two cottages. They were burnt down before I came here. This house that we're in now, this was burnt down in 1900. This was the thrashing tackle that came through and the sparks from the thrashing tackle set fire to the thatch and that's why this house was rebuilt in 1900, but the barn wasn't. That's why I'm having a new roof on the barn now.

Int: This is a brick house.

JE: To my mind they did it the wrong way round, it's brick at the front and stone at the back. If they'd put the stone at the front, it would've been so much easier for me when I put all the mod cons in, because I had to go through 18" walls.

Int: What year were you born?

JE: 1921.

Int: Did you have any brothers and sisters?

JE: My mother married a widower with a grown-up family. She was one of those who married into a grown-up family; in fact, after the wedding reception, she went home and cooked for about five, or something like that. Anyway, by the first marriage, father had four children, one of whom died, three survived, that was two brothers and a sister, so I had two half-brothers and one half-sister, all since dead now and I was the only child of the second marriage, so we weren't a close family at all. Father's oldest son was older than his second wife, my mother, so there was that much discrepancy in the ages.

2. Int: Tell me about this carrier's business of your father's.

JE: Well, father started this business about two years after we came down here, so this would have been 1929, 1930. He had to do something, obviously, to earn a living, so they said, why don't you become the village carrier. There was a carrier at the time, an old lady* by the name of Macey, who had a very old grey cob, I remember, very erratic delivery and what have you, but never mind, so father said, yes alright and he got this horse and cart and he then became the village carrier. If you ordered an intimate garment, if you like, of a certain colour and a certain size, he would go to all the drapers in Bridport, until he found exactly what you wanted and that would cost you 2d. That was the charge. If you wanted him, you put - he had them printed - a big 'E' in the window, so he would stop the horse and come and knock on the door to see what you wanted. And the same with coal, he would deliver the coal, he got tuppence a cwt for delivering the coal; some of these garden paths are half a mile long, but that was another matter.

Int: He had to carry the coal up in sacks, having been given six months to live.

JE: You're too right, that's it. But anyway, he confounded the doctor. The doctor died, apparently, a year after, but that's neither here or there, but father died eventually in 1955. It was in 1958 we bought this place, so he never saw this, which was a shame. He would love to have seen all the family ties and what have you, all back here together again.

Int: For how many years did he run the carrier's business?

JE: He ran it from 1930 'till, I suppose, 1941 and quit. The man that he literally gave this business to was a man called Archer, Stan Archer, who then became the village carrier and I well remember his vehicle was a hearse. This as converted into a van and a funny story about this; after the war, I met this man, he didn't know me and I didn't know him, until he started talking and he offered me this carrier's business for £1000!

Int: Your father started with a horse and cart and then he went mechanised, didn't he?

JE: Yes, this was so funny, I can tell you when this was, this was in 1938. He bought a little Morris Minor car; well, he couldn't drive, so mother had to be the driver. She, of course, was in the royal Flying Corps in the Great War, as a driver and she, so called, taught him to drive, but he could never get hold of it, so he never did. He had a built in chauffeur! She did the driving. But of course, like I say, they moved to Portsmouth and that was the end of that.

Int: I have seen photographs of both the horse and cart and the car.

JE: I haven't had a chance to sort them out, but I will let you have them.

Int: That would be really great, for the village.

Tell me a bit about your early life.

JE: I was educated, as I am pleased to say, in Loders University. The same old hierarchy, you know, the Mrs Hinks and Miss ? and Miss Wilks, the same as everyone; a fantastic time, I quite enjoyed my school days. I was a little bit on the unlucky side, I think, if ever there was any trouble, I was always the one called in to to get the share of the stick.

Int: You don't think this was your fault?

JE: Well, in some cases it was, but in nine cases it wasn't. I was a bit of a scapegoat. I think it was because I came from Portsmouth and not from Dorset. There was a little bit of prejudice! We always used to say, I've lived here since 1928 and you're just talking to me now, are you! There was that little bit of aggro at that time, yea. But it soon wore off.

Int: you had lots of playmates, though.

JE: Oh good 'or', yes. Of course, Sir Edward le Breton, at the time, he ran the scouts, he was the finest man I've ever known. The children of this village could never be grateful enough. I well remember, just before Christmas every year, the Gamages catalogue would come in and you had to choose your prize. Down in the squash court we used to have the boxing lessons and squash, of course, and we became quite good. When I was in the airforce, I did quite a lot of boxing for the airforce.

Int: Who taught you to box?

JE: Sir Edward, and squash and tennis. We used his tennis courts on Wednesdays and Mr Lesser of Matravers, his tennis court on Saturdays. This was the Loders Club and, of course, we became quite good. There must have been about a dozen or more in the club at the time, must have been, easily. I've sort of lost touch with everybody now. The last one I can remember talking to is Austin Paul, that's George Hyde's brother-in-law, who died just recently. Austin was one of the leading lights of that time, yea.

Int: And Bill Budden?

JE: Yes, Bill Budden. I don't remember Bill playing tennis very much. I used to love my football; I played for Loders. The least said the better about that, because I was very young in those days, but we used to have Mr Crabb's 'bus to take the team. The team manager, I remember, was a man called Macauley, Mr Macauley. Well he lived in the cottage under the railway bridge at Yondover and he was the leading light for the football. This little 'bus, it was only, I would say, a 24 seater 'bus, as far as I can remember, with a boot. We always had the crates of beer in the boot; I can well remember this.

Int: Which Mr Crabb was this?

JE: Well, this was Mr Stephen Crabb, who lived where Mrs Stack now lives. Funnily enough, it was from Stephen Crabb that father bought the first cart that he used for the carrier's business.

Int: Is he related to any of the other Crabbs?

JE: I wouldn't know. I'm not very strong on relationships. There are more Crabbs in this village than there are in the sea! He lived at Brook Barton at that time, and he ran this 'bus. The 'bus driver was Bert, Bert Crabb, I think. I think it was an old Ford. It was closed in, what we would call a proper job!

Int: This Loders Football Club, you played other villages, did you?

JE: Yes, well the ground was at the bottom, near Loders Mill, that was the football field at the time, donated, I believe by Mr Lew Hansford, he was the benefactor in those days and, of course, we used to play our home matches there and then travel all round the villages that were in the league, I've forgotten what sort of league it was now, happy days!

Int: Did you play cricket as well?

JE: Yes, I used to like my cricket. I played for the RAF against the Southampton University, just before I was demobbed. The sports officer was an ex air crew bloke an' 'e said would I join in to make up the numbers. I said, cricket's not really my game, but 'e said it doesn't really matter, it's just a question of making up the numbers and I took on the wicket against a coloured bowler. The first ball 'e put down, clipped my ear and I lost my temper and I knocked him for three fours and the next one literally smashed the stumps. So that was the end of my career.

Int: You've got quite a lot written down there. Is there anything you'd like to tell me about?

JE: I used to love my writing, scribbling things down. There was a time when I was on the Parish Council, secretary to the Sea Angling Club, chairman of the Boat Owners Association, a leading light in the RAF Association and doing all this property business at the same time and I don't know how it was done, because now I have all the time in the world, but I haven't got time to do anything!

Int: You were at Loders School. What did you do when you left school?

JE: Well now, I left school at 14 and I started work on the following Monday at the factory, William Edwards & Sons, ? and I was very interested to see in the paper last week, Mr Sanctuary and his wife making a rope. This took my mind back to when I started in the factory, because I was 14 years of age then, the weekly wage was nine and fourpence and I started as a 'jack boy'. A 'jack boy' is what Mr Sanctuary is in that photo, he's got the little jack, that's what it's called, the little machine that was on rails, you see. If you can imagine, there's an electrically driven machine down here and a mobile, manual machine that end. As the rope is twisted, it gets shorter, obviously, so this jack has to be brought in slowly to make up for the shrinkage, you see, so this jack boy has to turn the wheel to get the opposite twist to the machine at one end, but it has to be at the right speed, because if he goes too fast, they touch one another and get together and jump over the hoops, all the way down, because the rope was 200 yards long. So this was how I started, as a 'jack boy'. There were two of them, a man and a boy. The man did the 'laiding', as they called it and one of these laiders was taken ill and the foreman said, would I do it, so I said yes and so, being big headed, I'm doing a man's job and apparently doing it quite well. Now we always stopped for our lunch break at 10 o'clock and whilst having this bit o' bread and cheese for the 10 o'clock break, one o' the men said, "you are a so and so young fool, you're doing a man's work for a boy's money", so I said, "that's right enough," so I says, "I'll go up and see about it". I walked up to the Managing Director, who was Mr Billy Edwards and 'e says, "what do you want?" I said, "I want more money". He says, "more money!", 'e grabbed me by the shoulders and says, "there it is on the wall". This was so much per hour, but it worked out at 9s 4d per week. So I said, "oh well, that's fair enough, I'll give you an hour's notice". "Oh", 'e said, "you can't do that, you've got to give me a week's notice". So I said, "no, there it is on the wall, I'm paid by the hour, so I'll leave by the hour", so I said, "I'll come back in an hour for me cards". So 'e said, "you can come back in an hour, but you won't get any money". So I said, "don't worry about that, because Sir Edward le Breton owns nearly all this factory, I shall get me money, not to worry". So before I was 15, I'd walked out of a job.

Anyway, then I started to work for Montague's the builders. Now somewhere in your records, you'll find the Symes family; well, Bill Symes was the instigator of this. We were playing tennis, funnily enough, at Lodors and I said, "well why don't you get me a job on your firm?" So then I became what they call an 'improver' in the building trade, which stood me in good stead for later life. I stayed with them until the very bad winter of '38. John Montague, the boss, had to stand everybody off because there was nothing else to do. So 'e said you'll have to go and sign on with the rest of the men. So I went down to the Labour Exchange, Arthur Pomrey was the man at the time, and I said, "Good Morning Mr Pomrey" and he says, "hullo young man, what do you want?" I says, "I've come to sign on". "Sign this piece of paper," he says. So I'm reading the paper that I'm going to sign and somebody came in and said they wanted someone on the outdoor staff of the Bridport Town Council, so I said, "hey, Mr Pomrey, I can do that." So 'e says, "you sign that paper" and made me fill the form in. Anyway, I got the job and filled the other form in and that was it; that's the only time I've been on the dole, for about an hour, in all me life! I stayed with the Town Council then, in the same line, building, until the war broke out, then I joined the air force, then I went back to them afterwards. I found there were too many bosses in the Town Council. Whatever you were doing, there was somebody saying, "what are you doing here? You shouldn't be doing that," so, I'm sorry, I'm very independent, I'd just come out of the air force, so it was a case of 'on your way'.

So, I then took a job as a chauffeur/gardener to Billy Loud, he was a butcher from Bridport, until he died, and then I started my own haulage business. This was hauling lime for a firm called 'Lifters' at a Long Bredy pit, where they dug the lime out of the pit there and we distributed that lime. The farmers were getting subsidies, there were subsidies from the government and we were delivering this lime all over Dorset, Devon and then Cornwall. We were working 18 hours a day. In fact it was white slavery, under a different name.

Int: It was a successful business, though?

JE: Well, not really, because the distance involved and the amount they paid and the repair bills on the truck, it was a shoestring business and because of this, I managed to get a contract with Woolaways, the concrete people. They made houses and bungalows and what have you, down West Bay Road and I managed to get a couple of trucks down there. So, I'd got two trucks on the lime, two trucks down at Woolaways and I'd also got a spreader and I'm still running a shoestring business, in other words, once I started paying wages Then came the bad winter of 1962/63 and that put paid to me completely. Three of the wagons were on HP and I didn't expect this weather to go on as it did, for 11 weeks. 'Cos we were in concrete, you see and you couldn't produce, you couldn't do anything and, of course, I didn't sack the men. It was a case of oh, it'll be alright next week, you see, so paying their wages and paying this and paying that, I nose dived. The man that took over the Woolaway concern, down there was John de Savory, that's the father of Peter de Savory. I said to him one day, "would you like to buy some very cheap vehicles?" because I was under contract to him and I couldn't work for anybody else, neither could I work on my own and tote for trade, it had to be contract for him, you see. So he said, "well, what do you want me to do?" So I said "well, if you pay the outstanding HP, I'll quit". This is what we did; 'e paid all the outstanding HPs, well this left me £2000 in the red, so I went to the Bank Manager and told him what I'd done and I said, "now I want an overdraft of £2000". He said, "whatever for?" "To Pay my bills". He put 'is hand on my shoulder and 'e said, "this is not business"

Precis of next section:-

JE chartered a fishing boat in West Bay and took people out. He also did building repairs. His wife, Betty, did Bed and Breakfast in their home. They kept pigs - 80 pigs in 1970. Eventually the total became quite a good business. 1956 - 1982, when he retired. Correspondent of Angling Times and Angling Mail. International Angling Club. Attracted people to West Bay. Arthritis, hip replacement. Garden flowers to RNLI.

Parish Council at death of Mr Miles. Deafness caused him to give most things up. RAF Association.

4 Int: Do you remember any personalities in the village?

JE: I well remember the little bungalow opposite the Crown. A Miss Lockwood lived there and she gave piano lessons and my father said would she take me and teach me how to play the piano. So she said yes, so I had 4 or 5 months of weekly tuition with Miss Lockwood. She eventually asked my father to stop sending me down here, as he is not learning to play the piano, he is imitating me. In other words, everything I play, he then plays. He has a fantastic ear for playing by ear. This dear old lady was so upset to think that I was just copying her. The next person to live in that cottage was a Miss Chilcott. She always had an old school marm type bicycle, with a carrier each end, in which she had her two dogs, one dog at the front and one dog at the back and her favourite hobby was hatching tortoise's eggs in the bed! She would be most gratified to tell you how many tortoises she had hatched out in her bed.

Personalities, yes, Mr Gillard, the butler, one of the finest little men I've ever known. I call him a little man, because he was very short of stature, very rotund and, as boys, we led him an awful life. He must have been absolutely sick and fed up with the boys running through the house. Of course, in Sir Edward's house we could do no wrong and poor old Gillard! We would go into the billiard room, press the bell, summoning the butler and then go out the window and then watch through the window when he came there! We were always in the billiard room, but always by invitation, we didn't just march in, you were invited in.

The last time I played Sir Edward was in 1959. The vicar came along and made my acquaintance and I told him that I always went to church once a year and he said, "oh, good, everyone comes on Harvest Festival and I said, "I'm not talking about Harvest Festival, I'm talking about Armistice Day". I went to Loders Church on this Remembrance Day ceremony, I'll never forget it and his sermon was all about Alfred Nobel, that he should never have made that Peace Prize, because he made his money making munitions and quite honestly I'd never heard so much drivel in all my life.

etc
Resumé:- told Sir Edward, who asked him to play billiards that night. Joins the Armistice Parade in Bridport, with the RAFA.

End of Tape.