

Friern Barnet & District Local History Society

INTERVIEW BETWEEN PERCY REBOUL AND JOAN HIGGINSON AT HER HOME AT 51 FRIERN BARNET LANE MONDAY ON 3 JANUARY 1994

- PR This is the 3rd January 1994 and this afternoon I am talking to Joan Higginson at her home at 51 Friern Barnet Lane, N11. Joan, among other things, is known to me as an Old Woodhousian and as a stalwart of All Saints' Church, Whetstone but we are really going to talk about her life and hard times because I know both she and her family have interesting backgrounds. Joan, where and when were you born exactly?
- JH In Sydney in Australia in 1918. My mother and father were out there during the war and got stuck out there, you see, and couldn't get back until after the war.
- PR So presumably you have no early memories of that?
- JH No, I was back home at about 9 months, I think I was. We came across the Pacific Ocean and across the Rockies, that way.
- PR Let's talk a bit about your earliest memories. I want to talk about your mother and father. What did your father do for a living?
- JH He was an actor. He played in musical comedy. I mean that's what he did in the end. He started off by being a secretary to a lady in France. His father was a shipbuilder in Liverpool and he died quite young.
- PR So you never knew your grandparents?
- JH I only knew his mother. She left Liverpool which she shouldn't have done because the partner then took over the whole business and in those days widows didn't get much help. She had a whole lot of sons and one daughter. The daughter came with her to London. I don't know what's happened to some of the sons, but my father was almost the last one. He was at Cambridge at the time at Trinity Hall College and he had to come down because they had no money, you see. He was very good at languages and he became a secretary to a French lady. I think she wanted to marry him, but he wouldn't have any of that and then he turned to singing.
- PR Had there been any theatrical people in the history of the family?
- JH I don't know about then.
- PR But he obviously must have had a good voice....
- JH Oh yes, he was very good. According to my aunts and the younger people in the family when he was over here he would entertain people on Sunday evenings with the piano and so on. All the old girls were always weeping.
- PR All these Victorian ballads....

JH Yes, and he was awfully good at make-up and he'd go and make himself up in different characters.

PR Was he trained at one of the musical colleges?

JH No, no. I don't know the link, after college. I don't know why we didn't discuss it but I know he was taught by an old Scotsman called Murray Moncrieff. They were in Nice. I think he probably met him there. Murray was trained at the Naples Conservatoire and then he taught singing a lot and he taught my mother as well.

PR So your mother was a theatrical as well?

JH Yes. She went on the stage as a small child when they had to have chaperones and people to go with them.

PR Was the theatre in the blood of her side of the family?

JH I don't know. I don't think so except she was good at dancing school as a child. My mother's side, my grandmother's side I know more about. They're interesting. I know more about them than the Higginsons.

PR Did you actually know them yourself? Did you ever meet them?

JH Which ones?

PR Your maternal grandfather.

JH No grandfathers. He died very young. It was very sad. I suppose it was TB. He had a haemorrhage shifting some furniture, so he died very young. Another widow left, you see. She went to work. She was almost one of the first women.....

PR What sort of year are we talking about? Before the turn of the century?

JH Oh yes. There were six children. He was the second husband because her first husband again died terribly young. He's a Beddington that one and I've got one of the Beddington great grandchildren staying in London now, but they went to South Africa but that's really not my side of the family. My side is the Revetts. He was mother's father.

PR And what did he do for a living?

JH I don't remember.

PR: Where did he come from?

JH Oh dear, where did he come from. I don't know. You know they didn't ask questions. We should have asked more questions. The aunt that never married and lived with me most of my life, she said "we ought to have asked more questions. Mother didn't like to ask people too much. She thought it was being nosy".

PR Well it is in a way, but I make no apologies for it because in a hundred years' time we'll say: "Was that the way things were done?"

- JH His mother ran away from her husband when she had the first child. I bet she was very young. She knew people like Madame Tussaud and the Empress Eugenie. I've met somebody since who met the Empress Eugenie down in Cirencester. I didn't realise that's where she was for a long time. That Grandma, Grandma Yvette, was very clever, could talk on all sorts of things. They didn't do too much of the enquiries because grandfather, I think they first lived in Kensal Green near the cemetery in a house with big walls and gardens and at the other end of the road there was another family of Revett and he was terrified that it might have been his father, bigamously married because there was never a divorce. That was a sort of hush hush scandal so he never got to know, although they met some other young men in Ilfracombe..... the girls, my aunts, who thought they really could have been their brothers. That's the sort of background we had. That's why we didn't.....he was something in the City. Grandma went to work in his firm after he died. He was in printing and things like that in the City.
- PR Let's just come back to your mother and father who we have established were a musical family. What sort of years are we talking about?
- JH Yes, well father became famous in 1908 in Australia. He went off. What happened was Joe Coyne was playing the Merry Widow over here which was a musical comedy and not an operatic thing. Romberg wrote it as one of these light operas and it's been revived as a light opera since but at that time they made it into a kind of play with music.
- PR Was he taking leading roles?
- JH He was Prince Danilo and he was absolutely the rave of Sydney and Melbourne or wherever it was. The gallery girls dragged his car around the streets.
- PR Your mother was in the same productions, was she?
- JH She wasn't in that one I think.
- PR You were really very much a baby. Have you any memories at all of those days?
- JH They had another child before me which unfortunately they killed in the birth. She should have had a caesarean operation and they were terrified of her having another one. When I was on the way in Australia it was the wartime here and she never let her mother know in case anything happened. I was a caesarean baby.
- PR So you came back here?
- JH We came back straight away as soon as the war ended in 1918.
- PR Where did they move to then?
- JH Kensington. They were all living in north Kensington, Ladbroke Grove.
- PR Moving you on a bit when did you come to Friern Barnet?
- JH 1922. We were living in a big house and various of the sons in law they all seemed to be in this house and another of grandma's sons came over and insisted that he bought her a house and moved her out of that part. He thought it would be better for her rheumatism which, in actual fact, eventually it was here.

PR Did you move into this house?

JH No, 80 Oakleigh Gardens. The first little bit. It was 8 in those days and then it became 58

PR And you moved from there to here when?

JH Well, we had troubles. We were there all the time I was at school.

PR We'll come back to that because I want to get you to talk

JH We didn't come here till 35 years ago

PR O.K. So, you were living in Oakleigh Gardens and how old would you have been then?

JH I started Oakleigh Gardens at about 4 years old.

PR And when you went to school, where did you go?

JH All Saints' because mother talked to various people and she met the headmistress at the time.

PR Do you remember the name?

JH Mrs. Forth. I was always afraid of her. She said to mother: "Don't send her to any of the private schools. She'll do far better at the church school" which we did, and we really found it was so. I don't think I've ever been so confident in my life over things and exams by what we got taught there

PR Did you feel that you were well taught?

JH Exactly so, yes, especially coming up to the eleven plus exam which I managed to pass, of course.

PR You were one of the very few that managed to pass. Talking about All Saints and I think that's fairly well documented.....

JH I was on the Honours Board. They had an Honours Board.

PR Yes. You saw the appeal we made because the Honours Board has disappeared. In fact, if you read Mrs. Constable's piece it finishes up with her sister was the very first student on the Honours Board. What happened to the Honours Board? It disappeared and whoever has got it would they please return it.

JH It was hanging up for a long time in the old building.

PR We don't know, we'd love to find it.

JH I'm one of the last ones on the board. There wasn't very many on there.

PR We're really talking in the early twenties now, aren't we?

- JH I went to Woodhouse in 1929. They were going to get a new board and they never did.
- PR I want for once and for all get another point of view about Mrs. Andrews because, as I made a point in the book, you either loathed her or you loved her but whatever you thought of her, she was a remarkable woman.
- JH Very remarkable.
- PR Now what were your views on Mrs. Andrews?
- JH Well when I first was there I was in Mrs. Wallace's class of course and they made such a fuss of me. It was very very funny. I got picked on in Mrs. Andrews' class and my mother was then travelling in the Far East and.....
- PR Sorry, when you say: "picked on" what do you mean?
- JH Well I seemed not to be able to succeed at all in whatever it was. I was getting told off or something like that. I can't remember too much about it except that my aunt went round in high dudgeon and said: "why was this?" and I don't know what was said but it turned out that they became immense friends and I was fine after that. Everything was o.k. We were taught in an entirely different way than they are now with our standards. You know all about that. She took the second after the babies and she was a very precise person, beautifully turned out all the time. She told me lovely stories of where she lived on the High Road and coming across the fields and sitting on the stile looking at the people coming into church on a Sunday evening.
- PR Where did she live, as a matter of interest?
- JH In a house called Avoco on the High Road between where the film studios used to be and those houses on the left hand side - that bit between Friern Barnet Lane and...
- PR I know where you mean.
- JH What's the next road along? It's on this side of the road. I'm thinking of the High Road Whetstone, you know to Finchley. In those days there was the doctor's house behind a big wall. I think they turned them into film studios, didn't they?
- PR No, the film studios were at Coldharbour. Opposite where Mann Egerton's is today.
- JH Yes, that's right. Well the doctor's house was one of those houses. Dr. Winkfield. He came to me when I had Measles and Chicken Pox.
- PR Just talk about what kind of home you had because here you have two parents in a profession which is, let's say, notoriously mobile so here you were in Oakleigh Gardens.
- JH In Oakleigh Gardens with my grandmother and all these things are hers.
- P: And they were away, were they on tours and things?
- JH: Yes, most of the time.
- PR So you were really brought up by grandmother?

JH In a way. Early part, yes. They used to send us marvellous things back from the East as you can see.

PR They were touring the world, in fact.

JH Yes, they went right through the Far East.

PR How often did you see them?

JH It wasn't all that number of years when you look back. I didn't see my father after I was very young because he accepted a job to go back to Australia because they wanted him back there. Mother wanted to come back and see me. So she came back and then, unfortunately, there was some scandal or other about him having another girlfriend or wife or another child and there was a divorce. I've even got the little bits of paper from the *Finchley Press*.

PR So did your mother ever remarry?

JH No, and they all said she should never have divorced him. She should have stayed.

PR Did she carry on with her career?

Yes. Then it came to the 30s and life was very difficult in the 30s. Just as difficult as it is now for getting jobs and she went round one or two companies and I can remember well that she was paid sometimes if there was a proper audience. She went all round England, otherwise they didn't get paid.

PR Let's talk about the home that you lived in because presumably being with grandma, it would have been very Victorian

JH No, it wasn't. It was like this. It was Victorian I suppose. The furniture has hardly changed.

PR Did you have any servants, for example?

JH No. We were terribly poor. We hadn't got a bean. They were well off in spasms, you see and there were big spasms where they hadn't any money. Grandma was a widow and in those days all she had was a... I can remember she had ten shillings a week. Aunt was working in the City in Pinner's Hall. Grandma got a bit ill at one point, I can't remember so she gave up her job to stay at home with her mother. The other sister got married and went to Brighton. She was working in telephones. She was a telephone person. When I first went to Oakleigh Gardens there was Grandma and Aunt Ivy and Aunt Phyllis who were the younger members of the family. Uncle Frank, the only brother, had gone over to America, driving a great limousine for one of the famous actresses. I've got a picture of him. He stayed out there working on a big estate. Aunt Lily, mother's next sister, she'd had to look after all the children when Grandma went out to work, mother having gone on the stage.

PR Did they all live in this house?

JH No. I'm going back now. What happened was when we came home when I was a baby there was mother, of course, and Lily the next sister who married and had two boys. We sort of mucked in on this big house and then there was talk about it ought not to be and they went off on another tour. Meanwhile while they'd gone off to the Far East,

we were moved out to Whetstone. They only ones left were Grandma and Ivy and Phyllis. They went off to the City to work, walking down to Oakleigh Park station to get the train to the City. That's when we found out which was our parish church because we had thought it was St. John's Whetstone and it wasn't. We found out and met old Thatcher and so forth.

PR That's Bill Thatcher, the verger?

JH Yes. At that time, I don't know how much money was sent home to my grandmother. She was supposed to have some money from her son in Africa, the older one who was doing very well, but as he bought the house he expected not to send any more money. Uncle Frank sent money but not much to her. The other two working. That was alright but when it came to the thirties Auntie, having stopped work, didn't go back. The other one was married and gone off and mother did come home and life was very difficult trying to get jobs. More or less all we had was the old age pension.

PR But I imagine that you never starved?

JH Oh no. You see at the end of my time at Woodhouse Miss Shaw said to me: "Oh my Goodness, you should have been having school dinners all this time". So I mentioned it to my Grandma and she said: "If I can't give the child a dinner, it's a poor show". What we did was amazing. My auntie was brilliant at sewing and did a bit of sewing for us but we had all our clothes made.

PR So you were always well turned out?

JH Yes. She taught me certainly colours and that sort of thing and co-ordinates and that. They were all very artistic in different ways. I had some piano lessons from Mrs. Hutton, a very famous lady from Burley Road. £1 2s, a term or something like that. She was great. I got her name put on the Register of Teachers in the musician's church and that thrilled her family.

PR Tell me something about sitting the 11 plus. Do you have any memories of that?

JH Well we had one part of it in the school, I suppose. The preliminary. Then we went to other schools.

PR How many of the children at the school took the 11+? Presumably they sorted the wheat from the chaff?

JH Yes, they weeded out. My particular year there were two of us.

PR What year are we talking about now?

JH 1928/9. Whatever it is. There might have been four of us at that time and if you didn't sit the Grammar school one you sat for Holly Park.

PR There was an exam for that as well, was there?

JH Yes, I think so. I don't remember all the details. All I do remember was that I went to Finchley County School and sat the exam. We had to read, we had to answer questions on the reading, comprehension. My maths was perfectly alright.

PR You obviously passed.

JH Yes. I had chosen Finchley County. It was a girls' school then.

PR Oh, was it!

JH Yes, all girls and the new one was Woodhouse and that was mixed and nobody had heard of such a thing before and they put me into that and we were rather surprised but afterwards I was very glad because I hadn't brothers and sisters at the time and it knocked off of edges because my other friend went to Queen Elizabeth's and I remember the sort of different age gap in social life. She was going soppo about boys when we'd got over it.

PR I think we had some comments on that very thought in the book. But was there any thought that you might not be able to afford to go to a secondary school like that?

JH I got a free place. If you had some money you had to pay a bit and then you had to pay a bit more if you'd got a bit more money. I was lucky because we had friends who were kind enough to help. We'd got a friend who was working out in India and he sent over a lot of lovely materials. Yards of beautiful cream silk which my aunt made me my blouses of. They lasted the whole of the time I was there. I had to be very careful what we bought for uniform and look after it. I remember getting a tunic but in only half the year it started going at the front and they darned it all.

PR Did you have blazers and a hat, which would have to have been bought, presumably?

JH Yes.

P: What colour was that?

JH Royal Blue. I've got the band for a Panama hat for the summer and those Panamas, they weren't really panamas, they were straw, we scrubbed and washed and actually you could stretch them and they did me for the whole of the time till I left.

PR Can you remember where the blazer was bought?

JH Yes. Priors or one of those. I've forgotten There were three shops along where Smiths are and all that long there. Haberdashery and clothes and all that and one of them, I don't know whether it was Priors or the other one, we had our uniform there.

PR How did you get to school?

JH On a bus to begin with. Finchley was all trams. Yes, they were there.

PR Did you go up the High Road?

JH I went up Oakleigh Gardens and went to High Road and came to Finchley and very often on top of the bus when it was raining we got under the covers and they didn't charge us. They were open top and that had like mackintosh covers and if we got under there then the conductors often didn't charge us our penny. Half fare you see.

PR Have you any memories of your first day at school?

JH No, I haven't, strangely enough. I was very thrilled with the house

PR Give me your impressions of the house.

JH It was lovely.

PR Had the new wing been put on by then?

JH No, that came afterwards. There were two large reception rooms. One was the dining room with dark panels all the way up and, of course, the windows. There was a great big bay and curved glass. When they got broken, my Goodness me, they had to pay for it. The drawing room was in light colours with gold tips and a beautifully carved ceiling. The library was upstairs. There was a billiards room.

PR Had the hall been built then?

JH Yes, a small one. There was a hall and on top were the physics and chemistry labs. My room as a first year was the billiards room which was beautifully panelled and we were off the conservatory which was lovely. It had a grotto and I think they still have it, with fish in it and so on and then this great big circular conservatory with the weather vane on top and when the wind blew it creaked and made noises and we call it the Woodhouse ghost. Then they took it away when they built that first wing which is out of that conservatory part. There was a big block of classrooms.

PR Can I just ask you about the music room? You called it the billiard room which of course it had been.

JH It was then, we didn't call it that. We did art in there.

PR Did you. I've been looking at the original plans of that. It had, in fact, at the back a recess for an organ.

JH It must have been a music room, but I called it the billiards room.

PR It was the music room in my day. It was told that in the last extension in the sixties what you and I know as the music/billiard room was taken down and the lovely panelling just simply disappeared. Anyway, let's get back to Woodhouse. So what about the staff there? Who was headmaster when you first went?

JH D. Barlow Butlin.

PR Your mouth hardened slightly there. Did you not like him?

JH Yes, I liked him very much. He was great.

PR He seemed to be very popular.

JH Oh, he was. He was so good at starting the school that they sent him over to Harrow Weald. We were very sad about that. He loved teaching and when we got to fourth year he was our maths teacher and he'd tear up and down the room. When he had a lot to do he would say "Oh dear, nice children but so slow". And then there was Mr. Mellor. He was good at planning sports days. I've got some photographs. Some of the boys were killed in the war. There was some good runners. Adams was a lovely runner and of course Philpot and Davidson. He didn't come till after I had left. He followed me to university. I remember Mr. Philpot and his running but it all went like clockwork, our sports days. George Mellor was excellent. He gave us talks when we

were in the sixth form. Discussions and things that were quite useful about life in general and what we thought about politics and things like that. He ought to have been the headmaster afterwards. There was a bit of resentment when Mr. Davy was brought in. Incidentally, he was deputy head to Mr. Wallace, was it? The one who was the ex-headmaster of Willesden County Grammar, yes, Wallace. Lovely man. He kept in touch with the school and he knew Mr. Davy and we all went to Mr. Davy's funeral. Mr. Wallace and Helen Wallace, the daughter, he must have been headmaster of Finchley County.

PR He was at Finchley County. John Davy was. I think he might have been deputy head.

JH He was deputy and then Mr. Wallace must have been the headmaster and then Wallace went over to Willesden. It was a bigger school and Helen, of course she's quite famous. She's with the British Museum. She's the keeper of something. I can't quite remember.

PR Now what about the Great Shover...

JH She terrified us for years until we got to the top of the school.

PR What did you think of her?

JH She was pretty good. She was a scream really. My family were rather amused by her. They went to see the school before. I think my mother must have been home and aunts as well. The way she was wearing her Liberty silk dresses all off one shoulder. She was untidy. I don't think she had an academic degree. She had a certificate of some sort but she did teach English, but I got in with her especially when she found out I was interested in church. She used to see to it that if we wanted to go off on Ascension Day we would go. I went out to a number of city churches after the war with her. She was quite amazed that I knew all the music and everything and she was very very keen on that. She made great friends with us. There was nothing in the rumour that the work 'Shover' has anything to do with the French 'chauffeur'. I always remember Mr. Birchener: "Who's been putting dangerous explosives in the ice box?" There would be shows where they took the staff off. Miss Shover used to say "It doesn't matter what you say about me but be careful about so-and-so. She was very good about that.

PR Did you ever see – there was one – someone described how he absolutely fell about laughing to do with George Mellor. Fletcher was doing a mad conjuror and brought Mellor up on to the stage and did this rather old trick where he said raise your right hand and he starts to pump Mellor's arm up and down and ostensibly out of his left ear comes a spout of water into a jug and he said something like "I always knew he had water on the brain" which bought the house down. Mellor was a jolly good sport. The book is full of things like that. We've got lots of anecdotes so I am just interested particularly in what you have to say about Shover because she's a very dominating character in the story in more ways than one.

JH Certainly she kept us in order and she was a very good teacher and at the end she became a real friend to any of us who responded.

PR Do you remember Miss Evans? She was P.T.

JH Ah yes. Now she was a tall one, wasn't she?

- PR Yes and she had a..... not page boy, the style of the 20s. Short.
- JH Yes, and she taught us. was no good at PE as far as I can tell. I had a terrible complex about that but she taught us military PE .
- PR What do you mean by that?
- JH Well I mean it was exercises.
- PR Marching?
- JH I don't know about the marching so much as. Some people were absolutely brilliant at going over horses and things like that. I did high jump, that was my best sports thing, but I couldn't do this wall bars business, pulling myself up by arms. I never thought that she liked me, but I was alright in the hockey team and she was quite nice about that. I played tennis. I preferred netball in a way. When I got to university we had to do P.E. because we were going to be teachers and much to my amazement I was called out to demonstrate. I never thought I was any good, but she must have taught us well, you see.
- PR When you mentioned hockey, what years would you have been in the first eleven?
- JH I wasn't in the first eleven. They would have been about fourth year and fifth. I played tennis a lot. I loved tennis.
- PR Were you in the tennis team?
- JH I wasn't in the team. There was a girl called Betty something. She was brilliant from second year onwards. And then I was playing tennis when we had our French orals for A level I think it was. Each time I got through those with distinction. The only thing was my oral French and I remember Miss Durn carefully coaching me on what I had to say when I fell over playing tennis and got a nasty cut elbow.
- PR This happened to someone else actually who failed miserably. He'd got some injury or other and all the questions were directed and he didn't have the terminology but Durn learnt from that, you see.
- JH Yes, she was great. We all did very well with her. I was very happy with her but I wasn't happy with Miss Marjorieson. I was working with Dorothy.... Oh what's her name, the two of us in the sixth form doing the Arts A level. They wouldn't let me do art in A level; they made me do academics. If they'd given me art I should have been able to fly through it like I don't know what but instead of that I had French and Latin we had to do. Marjorieson took Latin did she?
- JH Yes and she talked baby talk to my other student all the time. I was sort of ignored, you know? As a matter of fact I failed my Latin in the fifth year in O level because I was just petrified. I couldn't think of anything. My mind went a complete blank and it followed me right the way up to my finals because we had to take Latin and it was only the professor that came to me at the end and said "What is the matter with you? You're alright", but I'd got a thing about it and was sure that I couldn't do in in an exam and it all started with her down in the third year.
- PR Do you feel you had a good education at Woodhouse?

JH I think so. We had the first biology lesson with a lovely lady. We all liked her.

PR Do you remember her name?

JH Miss Gibson. We were the first school to do anything like that and we got all the students from other schools who were going to be doctors. I loved that biology and I took it in A Level. I shouldn't have done.

PR What about Miss Hughes? Was she there when you were there?

JH Was she English?

PR Yes.

JH I thought nothing of her. We played her up like Old Harry. I felt terribly guilty.

PR It's just that she's still alive and she lives in Brighton and I will hopefully go down to see her.

JH She was there not long before I left and we did.....

End of first side of tape

PR remembered any of your classmates.

JH Well, that's one of the things which we didn't get in this comprehension, you know. A steady class. We had a character, our class did. One Alpha was not the same as one A at all and so on up the school and we kept with those people right the way through. They changed over, of course, if they were doing science or art higher up. Yes, I remember the Nash brothers going through with me. I remember going home on my bike with Philip Nash who lived in Oakleigh Park. He said to me "You know, everyone with big noses does well. Yours will grow". He was only 12 when he said that to me. He went in the Air Force and he married Pickering, Margaret Pickering, I think. John Nash did very well and Eric Boon found in South Africa. He wasn't very far from here and he was very busy with the Friern Barnet Operatics. I hadn't seen him for quite a long time but we renewed acquaintance. I went to his fiftieth birthday party for instance and things like that. He was in my form and then there was Frank Bettin, called Jumbo. I kept with him and his family. I still am friendly with them all the time and see his wife a lot. He died before and it so happened I was visiting the hospital. I had my eyes done and she was there dying. I was able to go and see her quite a bit. He died before her. A nice family, really good. Although they were Roman Catholic they invited me to everything that was there. His father and mother were founder members of that church but that's another story. He was there all the time. His birthday was 5 days after mine. There was a little boy, they called him Weed or something, poor little chap. Muriel Tozer, Rene Tozer, for some reason, was not in the same year as us.

PR That's right. They're still around.

JH: Yes. I see Rene quite a bit.

PR I must get these addresses from you.

JH She gets her greengrocery from the chap who brings mine here. What's her other name. Begins with E doesn't it? Her mother lived in the lane here. She was a wonderful old

lady. She was brilliantly active until she was quite old. They didn't marry Old Woodhousians. It was a great form. We used to do each other's work. I'd help the Nash boys and they'd help me with maths and I'd help them with English when nobody was looking. We were often left alone.

PR Who was head boy and head girl about that time? Do you remember?

JH No.

PR Do you remember anything about Speech Days at all?

JH Oh yes. We had wonderful Speech Days which they don't seem to have these days. There was a Mr. Appleton came once. Ritchie Calder?

PR There is a Ritchie Calder.

JH Yes because he came and said my mother was a witch. She knew all herbs and everything you see. I remember Mr. Martin, of course. I had to play a hymn for the first time and I got myself in a tizzy, very very nervous and scarlet in the face because I'd made a mistake. He had to come and whisper sweet nothings in my ear to chivvy me up to keep going. I can remember I felt I was a failure, but I think it was alright. I was in the choir there of course. He taught us a bit of music in the first and second years but we had no music really after that. He was really a science master – chemistry. But I kept up with them for ages and he was organist for a time at All Saints. He died and his wife came and did some supply teaching and I got on well with her.

PR That's his first wife?

JH No, second wife. She was doing geography. She was very complimentary because I could draw you see.

PR Tell me about Mrs. Debenham. You remember her.

JH Yes. She was lovely

The conversation is interrupted by someone coming into the room

PR I know from the Woodhouse log that you matriculated, Joan but tell me something about the Higher Schools Certificate. What happened then after you had matriculated.

JH You went into the sixth form and I was doing Arts. I wanted to do English and French and I would have like to have done Art you see. A nice easy sort of option, as it were. Then we chose what subjects we were going to do and in those days we did three main subjects and one subsidiary and I had to do Latin so I chose that as my subsidiary and I was interested in Biology. I liked all the animals and plants. I really enjoyed that, so I took that with it with the French and English.

PR But you couldn't take Art even though you were very good at it.

JH No, they wouldn't let me. They just sort of said "Oh no, you've got to do these things and that's it". Now there was Keith Hughes, he was a friend of mine. They let him do it. I don't know why.

PR It's because he was a man (*laughs*)

JH I don't know what's happened to him. I'd like to know. He was a very nice boy.

PR So, did you get your Higher Schools?

JH No. We all failed. So many failed that the university sent round to all the headmasters and said "Please send back the marks. We want to know". And they sent for reassessment of our papers. Apparently, Miss Durn said she was proud of us having got through er..... I failed, apparently, by about one mark in the practical biology, something very small but I didn't get the Latin very well because I was terrified of it but you can be referred in that. You can take it again, so it was alright, they didn't mind that, but it was extraordinary. We decided we couldn't go to university, we couldn't do anything. We were planning to do Teacher Training at Holly Park and things like that and this message came through for the head to send back our records. That was a Monday. On the Friday I had two offers on the mat; one from London University and one from Bristol.

PR And you took Bristol, I believe.

JH Yes, well my mother said "If you go to London, and I think it was over Goldsmiths, somewhere like that, you'll be spending your life on a bus whereas if you do go away you will have the proper university life.

PR What did you read there?

JH There again, you see, we were never told anything. We just imagined that we'd got to take the Higher Schools Certificate again and the equivalent of that was intermediate and as I knew that I was not going to be able to afford to stay more than 3 years, or 4 actually it was with the teacher training. They hauled us all in with the Dean of Arts sitting there. He was a strange creature too.

PR And then you became a teacher. I'd like to just come back finally because we've got to wrap it up, just perhaps a general comment looking back. You've been in Friern Barnet an awful long time. What are your views about the changes? Can you put that fairly succinctly?

JH Well it hasn't changed an awful lot round here except the people coming and going. Strangely enough there are a lot of people still here, aren't there?

PR Yes, they tend to remain here.

JH You haven't mentioned Wally Allan.

PR Yes, I know Wally very well.

JH And, of course, Olive was in my form. That's another one.

P I'm in correspondence with her.

JH And I got him a job at Mount Grace, by the way, and he taught with me up there and also sent some of his boys to be soldiers in the ?????? at Sadlers Wells

PR Rather to my surprise Wally and Oliver wrote to say that they knew Ben Wright and Rita very well.

- JH Well Ben, of course, was a church. And Rita is Wally's cousin. Mrs. Wright was Brown Owl and then there was Ben and he was very good at school. I remember him making great speeches at an Old Woodhousian dinner bringing me into it and making me laugh but they were always friendly, they were lovely. That was church and the Woodhouse connection then of course the ones that came after and the various old boys and girls living around, we've kept in touch you see with Muriel and those people and the Boons. Such a lot of them living in this district.
- PR Well as a final point I've got to home in on All Saints and I know that that's a very central point of your life, but what about the changes in All Saints, the church? I mean how vicars have you had? You've had Cameron and Miles. Have you seen a different style in..... I suppose each vicar brings in his own personality.
- JH At first, you see, there were certain rules and regulations. They were very fussy about it. Father Miles wanted much more high church than he was allowed to have because you mustn't have incense and so forth and he said, when we built the hall, "You're going to have to pay for that hall because. Get used to paying for something", because he never took a salary and he said: "You'll have to learn to pay for something because the next man's going to have to have a stipend". When Cameron came he chose it, more or less, I think he chose it in conjunction with the Bishop of London because it's in his gift. And he went on to 1928 I suppose. We changed the Order of Service by having....They used to have the Eucharist first on Sunday mornings and then Matins; the children's service in the afternoon, then Evensong and we had choir boys and they all came. What's the matter with boys and men, they won't sing these days? We had a wonderful choir. Bennett and of course Mrs. Lee. She's nothing to do with Woodhouse but she was the assistant and she trained the boys a lot. I was away a lot of that time. My own church was the only one in which I didn't sing.
- PR It was all boys and men.
- JH Oh, heavens above! Arthur Walton didn't want us to not even set foot in the chancel and certainly not in the choir vestry and I said "How are we going to get water for the flowers and that? And what about cleaning? You don't mind us cleaning the floor". [He said] "It should be the servers who did it". Then we had Father ?????? (*could possibly be Rowntree*) who did mess things up rather a lot, I must admit but I said "this is our church. It's not really his and we're not going to be turned out of our church by any incumbent who comes who's going to go at some time or another, which he did. Most people left. A lot came to St. James's. It was sad. Some of the Fletchers..... we've got a big connection there that's extraordinary. Henry left and went to St. Mary's at Finchley because he didn't approve of Father Cameron. When Adrian came, he's obviously gone more free and easy but he is much more to our ideas than ????? but he was amazing, quite frankly. I don't know whether he was ill but he wouldn't arrange the music or anything like that and he'd say to Dorothy and me "You choose the hymns tonight". No plan about it. Socially we got on very well. He'd come down here and sit here and was great fun but in the church.....
- PR Well, I think, Joan, at that point I'm going to have to close this but I'm hoping we may do another recording a bit later on.