

## START OF TRANSCRIPT

Facilitator: Hello, you're listening to Oral Histories and today we are talking to Marcia Egar. And Marcia was born on 19<sup>th</sup> March 1925, and that makes you how old, Marcia?

Interviewee: 88

Facilitator: Talk to me about your early days, growing up in Spalding.

Interviewee: I went to the Ayscoughfee Gardens at a very early age, I learned a lot about that history there. And I went to the Council School at the age of 5 and I had two or three classes and I went up into the junior department. I didn't go to the High School because I was ill for a year or two, and so I stayed on to the age of 14. Up to that age I used to do shorthand typing in the headmaster's room - I was a typist anyway, and I started shorthand about 1937/8. My father died in 1939 and I started work at Soames Brewery as a secretary/telephonist and the war had just started.

Facilitator: So you would have gone to the Westlode Street School, would you?

Interviewee: Yes.

Facilitator: And did you go over the Chain Bridge every day to school?

Interviewee: Every day up Albert Street into Willow Walk, into the second Willow Walk, and over the bridge and up Westlode Street. Every day.

Facilitator: And obviously there was a lot of shops around the area of Westlode Street?

Interviewee: Yes, there were sweet shops. They were prolific. The Ship Albion was a pub opposite my father's shop. My father's shop was 44 / 45 Albion Street. He was a master tailor and he sat on a big wooden bench, cross-legged, doing his tailoring and he had a rather strange little man who was his assistant. And I used to go opposite our shop to Mr Calvin, who was a sweet shop-cum-green grocer. Further down were Humphrey's, further down east, and they sold sweets. Further up the road on the left hand side was Liam Green's who were real water manufacturers. And across the bottom of Double Street to a shop on the corner there. There was another grocer's and two grocer's shops, sweet shops, on the right hand side which was by the school which is now the police station.

Facilitator: So as a child, where would you have played?

Interviewee: Well in those days we used to play on the road. Sometimes we were allowed to go up to Ayscoughfee; we had parents who'd play. But mainly it was in our gardens or on the main road.

Facilitator: And were there lots of other children who lived close too?

Interviewee: Yes, there was Gwen Tomlin, the Harpum family. There was the Leevesley family and the Manning family, one of whom has only just died in their 90s. We had a man at the top of the road called Captain Hayes who was a seafarer. He was interesting. And I knew most of the families by name.

Facilitator: Do you remember ships coming up the river?

Interviewee: I do. Mr. Birch, who owned Clay Hall, had three daughters. He named each barge after his daughter. And there was a Fish & Chip shop on the right hand side of Commercial Road, and Commercial Road ran parallel with Willow Walk. But on the left fork there was a willow basket maker, Mr Aistrup. There was 2 willow basket makers along there. And there was a shop – a sweet shop – at the top of Willow Walk and on its right was Osier Road, which is another name for willow. And on the top of Osier Road was a sawmill where they made crates for horticultural goods. We used to go and watch that. And across between Willow Walk and Albert Street was a road called Marine Road that had two warehouses in. And across Albert Street into Marine Road was – I can't call it a modest place – people kept chickens along there. So Albert Street went right up the road to Commercial Road, and turn left there and there was a post office-cum-general store, next to the Vine Inn. The Vine Inn was adjacent to this sweet shop, so we were well provided with sweet shops.

Facilitator: So you remember Geoff Dodd and the blacksmiths?

Interviewee: I remember Geoff being born. I remember his brother Barry and his sister, Pat. And there were several girls, well they were aunts to Geoff Dodd.

Facilitator: And would you have gone to the blacksmiths to watch them?

Interviewee: I went to the forge to see the horses shod.

Facilitator: And the bakers across the road?

Interviewee: The bakers was in the fork of the High Street and Commercial Road. I knew mother and father and Ralph. Molly was a sister. I remember Tom, her brother and I was saying the other day we used to have the Free Press delivered by the agency. And my mother used to say to Ralph Seaton "The Free Press is tuppence and if you come back in half an hour you can have it for a ha'penny!" There was so little in it. And opposite on the southside, there was a slaughterhouse. There was a slaughterhouse in Willow Walk and there was Laws the butchers, who is still in existence in Hall Place in Spalding. So we used to go to their shops.

Facilitator: So later in life, you went to work at the tax office?

Interviewee: After I left the brewery I went to work temporarily, but it's two years, for a tailor and outfitter Hector David & Sons Spalding Ltd. I was requested twice to go to the tax office to work. And I didn't have to have much qualification, but I got shorthanded typing exams passed, because it was war time. And this office, the tax office, was opposite the Johnson Hospital, the old one, Priory Road. And I was too young to be legally be a fire watcher, but I used to be a fire watcher there at night. I don't know how often our rota came. But we used to have to go. By fire watcher, I mean, incendiary bombs being dropped on a building. And we were in old office included the customs and excise. And it's had two or three buildings on it since, opposite the old Johnson Hospital. It was an old school that had been turned into this tax office. And I can remember my time there very well. And then we moved to the corner of Holland Road, where the building still stands. We went there in 1960. The date's on the front of the building. Next to Holland House, which is still there. And I was sick retired by Somerset house in 1977, August. And I was never so glad to get out of a job in all my life. I certainly found plenty to do because I had a Wolf cub pack for 17 years in Spalding. And I assisted cub master; I used to sit in for free for people. I used to be in several voluntary jobs. In the war years I was at the Mail Cart public house, Pinchbeck Road near the railway crossing. The executive Park Side Tennis Club. I was in the Spalding Town table tennis club as well. And later when I was in the business and professional women's club on their committee.

Facilitator: Talk to me about some of the characters in Spalding.

Interviewee: Oh, we had one character called Snowball Smith. Why Snowball, I don't know. And

he had a shop in Spalding, next to Adams the butchers, where he repaired umbrellas. We don't get umbrellas repaired today, we throw them away. But of course I knew Sheddy Turner and his family. I knew the Scuffhams from the butchers in the market place. I knew Pilkingtons of Bridge Street, they were a butchers, a pork butchers. I knew Penningtons. I remember the famous night it got blitzed. In the Bridge Street / High Bridge area there was Beryl's and we had a Woolworths that got blitzed, and Mr. Brown, who was a men's hairdressers. We had a huge building which I remember was called Bratley's, we had a lot of grocer's shops, we had Melia's, we had Hunter's tea stores, we had Star Supply Stores International, we had a Perks store, a big one. And a huge Penningtons which got badly blitzed, and the Free Press was in Hall Place as well, and hit was the men's outfitters.

Facilitator: Was there a shop called Keightleys?

Interviewee: After the blitz, that was bought by Keightleys of Boston. I don't remember much about it. Albert who had the White Hart Hotel, which was a huge place then. My brother was on the blitz night on fire watching, putting fire incendiaries out. There was the National Provincial Bank, later the Westminster, there was Lloyds Bank, there was Midland Bank and a smaller Boots. And round the corner from the Sheep Market was another branch of Boots which got blitzed. There were a lot of pubs, there were about 6 pubs in Westlode Street. There was Hall Place, the Butcher's Arms and The Crown and the Still Vaults, which was next to our school. The Quaker meeting house was opposite the school. Levertons became a big agricultural implement firm funded by Mr Myers who set it up from America. We had a lot of slums in Commercial Road. They got cleared out. And we had some very disreputable places in Westlode Street.

Facilitator: In what way were they disreputable?

Interviewee: They were slums. We remember the large families and how poorly they lived in Spalding.

Facilitator: Was there a lot of poverty in those days?

Interviewee: A lot. A tremendous amount. Children without proper shoes on, walking about in bare feet.

Facilitator: Wasn't there any work for a lot of these people in those days, do you think?

Interviewee: Well of course they had the sugar factory which started in 1925, my birth year. And my brother born in 1903 became an agricultural secretary. He used to receive the beet and be responsible for contracts with the farmers. Also in the 30s we had the canning factory, which gave a lot of employment. It was a prosperous little town in its way, I suppose.

Facilitator: So Marcia, talk to us about the changes you have seen in life and how they have affected you.

Interviewee: Well the Savoy picture house in Westlode Street was started by a company from Boston who had got the Regent cinema in Sheep Market, and because the Savoy had come up new in 1937, it was because the Odeon in London Road was coming to town, and we wanted to not keep them out, but be a competition. And the Regent Cinema was opposite where the Sheep Market was on New Road where my grandparents lived many many years. There used to be sheep in the sheep market and cattle in the New Road, and the cattle in the New Road used to walk into the open doors of the shops, which was quite a hoot, I would have thought. And on that New Road was a man called Greenall and he was a regular known for having a fire, so when the fire brigade were called out they went to him first to see if it was his fire. And there was a pub called the Black Swan which was at the top of the big field that went through to Kings Road. And that's where all the fairs went and the circuses and things like that.

Facilitator: What do you think to the idea of them disposing of Haley Stewart field?

Interviewee: I think that's ridiculous. My grandfather in the 30s spoke at Hyde Park Corner one Sunday morning about his beloved Spalding. He said we've got our own gas works, our own water works, our own this, that and the other. Even our own little field in the centre of the town. And it didn't go down very well, it was going to be taken away.

Facilitator: Was that then or is that now?

Interviewee: I don't think they're very pleased with it *now*, if somebody wants to build on it. And it was an excellent little field. All the town football matches were held there. As I say, I can remember going to circuses on that field in the 50s. And Fish & Chip shops, we had three on the New Road and two or three grocers on the New Road – Chesters

was one, and of course where Longstaffs is now has been a photographers shop and an auctioneers now. And there used to be a pub – the White Swan, which is called the Bass House now, and Kingstons Corner was known as the dividing line between New Road and Hall Place. Hall Place had Gibbs shoe shop. It still has Laws the butchers and its own dry cleaners and all sorts along there. It had a big pub called the Cross Keys, it had two shoe shops together, it had two dry cleaners and after the blitz of the Free Press in Hall Place, the Free Press went into The Crescent, where they are now.

Facilitator: Where Boots is, in the middle of town, there used to be a Tescos there. Can you remember Tescos opening?

Interviewee: Yes, I can. I can't remember what year but I remember it opening.

Facilitator: And was that a big change for Spalding, do you think?

Interviewee: I think its one of our first, Tescos.

Facilitator: Was "Fine Fare" there before?

Interviewee: Fine Fare was opposite, the other the side of the road. There had been a pork butchers shop along there, near the dry cleaners. And the Lloyds Bank was on the corner of Hall Place and Market Place. Elsoms in the 1930s used to have a corn merchant's shop and rope walk, which they called it. I had my first skipping rope from there. Toyntons used to be where Classic News is, and next door to there was a tiny sweet shop. And opposite there, there were, in Hall Place, Market Place, there was Freeman, Hardy and Willis and there was another shoe shop, Timpsons, and Smiths, the dry cleaners were along there, and another grocer's shop. Boots was next to the Midland Bank. It got moved down, further down into Hall Place. Hall Place had got a men's outfitters similar to where the bookmakers is now. And the pub which was made a shopping thoroughfare through to Swan Street some years ago. Their premises were made into Pied Calf Yard and that's where Whites the auctioneers was. The British restaurant that sprung up all over Britain during the war, that was on Sheep Market, and the Ladies and Gents toilets were put there. JT White was a huge emporium and that got taken over by Polish people only recently. And the Prize Oven which has historical links in the Middle Ages, that's had different tenants.

Facilitator: There was a lot of talk about there being tunnels underneath Spalding.

Interviewee: Oh yes, that tunnel down to Monks House Lane, down Bourne Road.

Facilitator: Was that the case?

Interviewee: I don't know. It used to be – was said to be – from the Monks House. Monks House Lane, which goes on to Bourne Road. Opposite that Poppyfields estate. But I don't know if that was ever true or not.

Facilitator: So you've seen a lot of changes in technology over the years?

Interviewee: Much. We had one of the finest cattle markets in England and I can't remember just how long ago that went, but there's a lot of photographs of Christopher Longstaff taking his last auctions.

Facilitator: In the Sheep Market?

Interviewee: Yes. I mean, where Sheddy Turners is now, next door to that was a baby linen shop, near the Punchbowl pub. And opposite Welec, next to Welec, was a bird museum, an overflow from Ayscoughfee. And that was there in the 30s because I remember going. And you could go in the Hall street Place entrance of Laws and go right through to Red Lion Street. Red Lion Street had a big private business of furniture and it had a ... Pacey's was there in the 30s, I remember. I went to school with one of them.

Facilitator: Because Pacey's is one of the oldest original shops in Spalding, isn't it?

Interviewee: It is. It was next to a Veterinary Surgeons. And across were a famous family of solicitors along there. What I thought was used to be opposite the Constitutional Club, and people get mixed up with the Gentleman's Society and the Gentleman's Club. We used to have bridge and snooker and all sorts of games in that one.

Facilitator: Thank you Marcia.

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