

# Synopsis of interview with Joan Smith

Born: Henlade, Somerset, 1918

Lived: Countisbury, Porlock

Recording made: 2001

Length of recording: 3 hrs

Joan Smith's father came to Glenthorne as chauffeur/handyman to Miss Halliday when she was nine. They moved to Porlock a few years later. She went to Countisbury school, climbing up through heather higher than her, clutching at tussocks, and running and jumping on the way back, carried by the wind. The milkman, walking down through the trees in the morning light, was a knight in shining armour. Miss Halliday befriended her, inviting her to tea and telling her about the house and its furniture.

At school she was taught by Mrs Beck and her daughter Muriel. Inspired by them, and her parents, she went on to grammar school and then trained as a teacher. Her last position was deputy head at Wiveliscombe, where she drove up onto the Brendons to visit the parents and some of the boys took a week off at lambing time. She designs and makes all her own clothes and says her one regret is not being able to sing.

*postscript - Joan Smith died in June 2007.*

## CD 1 (62 mins)

**1.1** BORN HENLADE, SOMERSET 1918 / FAMILY BACKGROUND / AUNT'S DRESSMAKING / BROTHERS / FATHER'S OCCUPATION / FRANK PEARCE-GROVE / PRINCE OF WALES / MOVING TO GLENTHORNE / SCHOOLS

**1.2** THE KNIGHT IN ARMOUR / BROTHER TOM'S ILL HEALTH / MRS PEARCEY / TOM'S JOB / COUSIN JOY

**1.3** GLENTHORNE BUNGALOW / MISS HALLIDAY / GLENTHORNE FURNITURE / MUSIC / BEN HALLIDAY / FRIENDSHIP WITH THE GARDENER, MR SHARLAND, AND HIS WIFE

**1.4** JOURNEY TO COUNTISBURY SCHOOL / BAD WEATHER / MRS BECK AND MRS PEARCEY / SCHOOL COMPETITION

**1.5** PONY RIDE TO SCHOOL / FRIENDSHIPS / LESSONS / DISCIPLINE / COCOA / REPORT ON COUNTISBURY SCHOOL / TRAINING IN SALISBURY

**1.6** MRS BECK'S INSPIRATION / MAYPOLE DANCING / SCHOOL LUNCHESES / VISITING FOR THE REPORT

**1.7** BAD WINTER / FISHING AND CATCHING BIRDS / CHANGING SCHOOLS / COPING IN THE BAD WINTER

**1.8** FATHER'S BACKGROUND / LOSING HIS EYE / PARENTS / MOTHER COPING / TRANSPORT / VISITING MISS HALLIDAY

## CD 2 (58 mins)

**2.1** REVISITING GLENTHORN WITH MRS PEARCEY AND BEN HALLIDAY / RIDING PONY TO SCHOOL / SCHOOL TRANSPORT BILL

**2.2** MOTHER'S HEALTH / GRANDMOTHER AT NORTH CURRY / MOVING TO PORLOCK / FATHER'S EMPLOYMENT / MOTHER'S INVOLVEMENT IN VILLAGE AFFAIRS / RED CROSS AWARD / MOTHER'S DEATH / FATHER / EXMOOR WALKS / FAMILY SINGSONGS

**2.3** DISCIPLINE AT HOME / FRIENDS IN PORLOCK / SOCIAL LIFE / THE READING ROOMS / WHIT TUESDAY

**2.4 VILLAGE ENTERTAINMENT IN THE WAR YEARS / THE FORCES / CHURCH AND SUNDAY SCHOOL**

**2.5 BROTHER GORDON / FATHER'S DRIVING JOBS / WALKING / BROTHER TOM**

**2.6 MINEHEAD GRAMMAR SCHOOL / MUSIC / TEACHER TRAINING IN SALISBURY**

**2.7 SUPPLY TEACHING / GREAT TORRINGTON / STOKE GIRLS SCHOOL IN COVENTRY**

**CD 3 (60 mins)**

**3.1 IRISH FRIEND / ASQUITH SCHOOL, TAUNTON / GEORGE MOSEDALE / CASTLE SCHOOL**

**3.2 DEPUTY HEAD AT WIVELISCOMBE / HOME VISITS ON THE BRENDON HILLS**

**3.3 TALKING TO PARENTS / PROBLEMS AND ABUSE**

**3.4 BRENDONS, QUANTOCKS AND BLACKDOWNS / PORLOCK PEOPLE / REVISITING EXMOOR**

**3.5 WORKING AWAY / WEEKENDS AT HOME / THE MIDLANDS / MEETING HUSBAND JIM / TORRINGTON SERVICE MEN'S CLUB / JIM'S WAR EXPERIENCE / PRISONER OF WAR / TRAINING AS A CARPENTER / JIM AND FAMILY LIFE / SONS' EDUCATION**

**3.6 BENEFITS OF COUNTISBURY SCHOOL / PARENTS' ENCOURAGEMENT / POSITIVE ATTITUDE / HEALTH / LONGING TO SING**

**3.7 MAKING CLOTHES / RECREATION / BEING DICTATED TO / REFLECTIONS / GARDENING**

**3.8 REFLECTIONS / OIL PAINTING OF PORLOCK HOUSE / ALEX CARRUTHERS GOULD / VISITING HIS STUDIO AS A CHILD**

**CD 1 (62 mins)**

**1.1 BORN HENLADE, SOMERSET 1918 / FAMILY BACKGROUND / AUNT'S DRESSMAKING / BROTHERS / FATHER'S OCCUPATION / FRANK PEARCE-GROVE / PRINCE OF WALES / MOVING TO GLENTHORNE / SCHOOLS**

Recorded Wednesday 26 September 2001, Taunton.

JS was born at a little village called Henlade, about 4 miles out of Taunton, on 17th May 1918. Her mother was Florence Rook and her father was Gilbert Thomas Bellringer. Father was the youngest but one of a Victorian family, 7 in his family. Mother was the middle of 3 girls who were almost like a second family. JS grandparents had 1 son and then years later had these 3 girls. She only met her uncle once in her life because he lived in South Wales. Her father's brother lived at Thornfalcon, about a mile from where they lived, and she spent a lot of time with his wife. She was the village dressmaker. The sitting room in her cottage was the sewing room, always gorgeous dresses hanging around. She used to make dresses for all the debutantes in the area when they were going to the balls. JS loved going to her house. She had 2 daughters, one was the same age as JS, born the same month, and the other one was 2 years younger.

JS had 2 brothers, one born when she was 3 years old and the other was very much an afterthought, born when they were living in Porlock (he is now 67, JS is 83).

When they lived in Stoke St Mary, the village outside Taunton, her father was the driver/companion to a young man who was at Cambridge and who was a great friend of the Prince of Wales (as he was then). The prince used to go to the house at Stoke Court to stay. To JS he was just Uncle Teddy; he used to carry her around. When the young man, Frank Pearce-Grove, was at Cambridge, her father did various jobs in the house. He helped the butler with the silver.

The Prince of Wales was great fun. He used to go there incognito. Her father used to drive him back to college. He would take the prince and his friends to a race meeting somewhere. He had a very interesting life. In the 1920s when things got very bad, the family decided to leave England, to Kenya JS thinks. They wanted her father to go but he was a very true blue Briton and was not going to have his children growing up in Africa. He refused to go. It was then that they went to Glenthorne. Her father was appointed as the chauffeur/handyman to Miss Halliday who owned Glenthorne. They had a cottage down at Glenthorne. It was about 1927. JS was only 8-9 years old.

JS went to Thurlbear School, near Stoke St Mary, until they moved. When they went to Glenthorne, she had to go to Countisbury School.

### **1.2 THE KNIGHT IN ARMOUR / BROTHER TOM'S ILL HEALTH / MRS PEARCEY / TOM'S JOB / COUSIN JOY**

JS doesn't remember being upset when they made their move. The only real memory is of her first week at Glenthorne. Their cottage was at the foot of one of those very steep Exmoor hills with a zigzag path going down through the woods to it. She was so excited by what she thought was a knight in armour on horseback coming down through the woods. It was the milkman, the farmer from Ashton Farm on the Porlock to Lynton Road. [Laughs]

Her time at Glenthorne was very, very happy. The whole thing was too much for her brother Tom, 3 years younger than her. He suffered poor health. He spent most of the time at Glenthorne in the children's home at Lynton. It was run by a doctor and called the North Devon Convalescent Children's Home. Tom lived there because there was no way he could make the journey to and from school. Her mother used to walk into Lynmouth from Glenthorne to visit him.

Mrs Pearcey [then Miss Beck] was in the school when JS went to Countisbury School. She was the headmistress' daughter and used to visit Tom in the children's home. JS maybe visited Tom once; she has a mental picture of children going around in a circle all with a lamp shining on them. It was part of the treatment, there was suspected TB.

Tom grew up all right but never wanted to talk about his illness or his frailty. In the end he did a full time job. He became the area manager for all the Booker establishments in the south east of England. He didn't have as good an education as she did. By the time he was 11 and taking the 11-plus exam, JS was in the 3rd or 4th year with lots of homework every night. He was not going to [didn't want to] have that sort of life so made sure he didn't pass the exam.

She doesn't remember missing her brother. Thinks she was just one of those people who lets things wash by her a lot. As long as she had her mother and father there she was all right. She had a cousin the same age as her, who lived just outside Taunton. She used to come and stay with them. She went to Countisbury School with JS when she stayed, often for a month at a time. JS had company quite a lot of the time. Her cousin eventually died when she was 23 years old; she had cancer. Her name was Joy. JS still sees Joy's brother quite often.

### **1.3 GLENTHORNE BUNGALOW / MISS HALLIDAY / GLENTHORNE FURNITURE / MUSIC / BEN HALLIDAY / FRIENDSHIP WITH THE GARDENER, MR SHARLAND, AND HIS WIFE**

The house at Glenthorne was more like a bungalow. They lived in a big, detached house at Stoke St Mary. The bungalow seemed small. It was semi-detached; they were level with the upper storey of the other house. Another man, who also worked for Miss Halliday, and his wife lived in the attached house. He wasn't the gardener. The gardener lived in a cottage along the hillside by the kitchen garden.

JS's father was very much involved with Miss Halliday herself. Miss Halliday was a very dignified old lady. She took an interest in JS. She used to like her to go down to the big house. There were all the usual servants quarters in the big house and servants hall which had an organ in it. She kidded herself she could play the organ and drove everybody mad sitting and hammering! She is not musical at all [laughs]. Miss Halliday

took her around the big house and would explain all the furniture to her. There was a set of dining chairs, which had tapestry or embroidered seats, only one other set in the world like them in Hampton Court Palace. She had letters that had been written by Lord Nelson. In one of the bedrooms there was a four-poster bed. She explained that in the olden days they always had somebody standing in the four-poster bed to guard the people sleeping in the bed.

Miss Halliday was tall, though JS was small for her age (until 14, the smallest girl in her year group). She was very upright, very definite in all her movements. She was very kind and very interesting. She seemed a very old lady, but maybe in her 50s or 60s. She lived at Glenthorne on her own. JS doesn't remember any other servants living in the big house.

Her father and mother were both very musical. Her father always sang in church choirs and always played in the village band. Her mother had a beautiful singing voice. JS and her brother were absolute blanks!

She only went to Glenthorne when she was invited. There was a very definite social structure on the estate. She and her brother found their way to a kind of cellar underneath the big house, through a back door. They used to go and play in there. Miss Halliday was a lonely old lady. She had some relatives who used to go and stay at odd times. She thinks Ben Halliday went as a boy (a bit younger than JS), though his name was not Halliday then. [Note. JS is confusing BH with his father, who changed his name from 'Hoffmeister' to 'Halliday' - see Ben Halliday recording]. He was her [great] nephew. JS and Ben never had anything to do with each other.

JS thought Miss Halliday was her best friend. The other couple, who were her great friends, were the gardener and his wife, Mr and Mrs Sharland. Quite a walk along the cliffside to the kitchen gardens. They were good living people, would never say anything wrong about anybody, always had the best to say about people, didn't interfere. JS always got the feeling that they were religious. They had no children. Most of the time, there were no other children around Glenthorne.

#### 1.4 JOURNEY TO COUNTISBURY SCHOOL / BAD WEATHER / MRS BECK AND MRS PEARCEY / SCHOOL COMPETITION

Most of the time JS had to do the journey to Countisbury School by herself. Her mother used to go part way with her. If the weather was bad, she walked to the top of thecombe where the big gate was to Glenthorne Estate to wait for JS. Mother waited in the gateway because if the fog came down they could pass each other. JS thinks it was 5 miles to school; the drive was 3 miles long, but she walked paths up the sides of the hills. The gate at the top was called Black Gate, led into the estate.

One day was a very bad hailstorm; the wind was blowing in off the sea, so strong she had to battle against it. The next morning she was black and blue all over where the hailstones had hit her. If the wind and rain were really bad she used to shelter under a bank hoping it would clear. She never felt frightened. She was a very trusting child, thought everybody would be nice to her. She thinks her mother took her to the main road on her first day at school. Then she had to follow the main road and cut across Brendon Common to the school.

JS doesn't remember her first day at school, a lot of general memories. It was run by Mrs Beck. She had her daughter (probably in her teens) in the room to help. She became Mrs Pearcey who took on running the school afterwards. Mrs Beck was a really motherly, oldish lady who came from the north country she thinks. There were very few children, all in one class. Everything was very orderly and they knew exactly what was expected of them and did it. No spite or antagonism. One girl lived in the lighthouse, people from all the farms around, a little group from Brendon. Happy memories. Only once was JS unhappy. As a competition they had to collect leaves and press them. Living at Glenthorne she had access to rare trees from all over the world; the gardener helped her with it. She was so proud of her wonderful album. One of the boys took and damaged her album, John Barwick (lives in Porlock now).

#### 1.5 PONY RIDE TO SCHOOL / FRIENDSHIPS / LESSONS / DISCIPLINE / COCOA / REPORT ON COUNTISBURY SCHOOL / TRAINING IN SALISBURY

Most of the children had little knowledge of each other before they went to the school. The school took them from 5 onwards if they could make the journey. They all had walks and all had long distances. They evaporated into space at the end of the day! Miss Halliday found a pony on the estate so thought JS should ride to school. There was stabling at the school. She was told the pony was 35 years old and she pleased herself what she did. Mother put JS on her in the morning but at the end of the day she wasn't having any of it. JS had to lead her all across Brendon Common. A lady had spotted what was happening and met JS half way across the common and put her on the pony.

They all lived in such scattered places that they didn't really develop friendships. They worked together quite happily. They did a lot of joint things together. They didn't have a playground; the school was on a very steep hill.

They were all in one group for the lessons. Miss Beck (Mrs Pearcey now) used to sometimes take some of the younger ones. It was unofficial, she wasn't trained. Eventually she did her training and took over the running of the school when her mother died. Miss Beck was very friendly, very kind and always busy, always helping her mother. JS liked them both very much; she always did like people who could be orderly. She doesn't remember ever there being a problem with discipline. With a group of less than 20 children, each one could be treated as an individual. All their backgrounds were known.

JS was the furthest away from the school. Everybody walked. Mrs Beck used to make hot cocoa for them when they first arrived in the morning or the morning break.

When JS was in college as a trainee teacher she had to choose a school in the area she lived and write a report on that school. She chose to do Countisbury School and arranged to go and spend a day there, looking at it from the point of view of a partly trained teacher rather than a child. Mrs Beck and Miss Beck were at the school then, 1938. It struck her how well the school was run, how the lessons were very productive, how the children respected the teachers and each other and the friendliness of it. JS was trained in Salisbury and had done some practices in big city schools in Salisbury. Countisbury School hadn't changed since she was there.

#### **1.6 MRS BECK'S INSPIRATION / MAYPOLE DANCING / SCHOOL LUNCHESES / VISITING FOR THE REPORT**

As an adult going back to the school, the feelings she had about it just carried on. As a teacher she has found it amazing that Mrs Beck could inspire them to work as hard as they did there. They felt it was important to do their work properly always. They had to make so much effort to get to school that somehow deep down maybe they felt they had to repay that effort. JS has always been very conscientious. It was like one big family.

They used to dance the maypole [laughs]. They had a maypole that fitted up in the classroom. Mrs Beck taught them how to do it. It was a little bit of exercise; they couldn't go out to play, couldn't have normal games. All got plenty of exercise getting to school and home again!

Mrs Beck had a system where she would warm pies up for them sometimes. JS hated cocoa but used to drink it. She thinks they used to take packed lunches; no school meals in those days. Mrs Beck would heat up a big pan of soup on very cold days.

When she went back to the school to write her report she was greeted as a long lost friend. The children all wanted to talk to her. It was great. She didn't stay the night but can't remember how she got to the school; probably got the Porlock to Lynton bus.

#### **1.7 BAD WINTER / FISHING AND CATCHING BIRDS / CHANGING SCHOOLS / COPING IN THE BAD WINTER**

There were no other children at Glenthorne. They had one really bad winter there when they were snowed in. Nobody could get down to Glenthorne for about 6 weeks. When you live on Exmoor, you get in vast stores, something to cook if the weather gets bad. After 6 weeks things were running very low. Her father

used to take her on the beach and he would catch fish. Her father would use a garden sieve to catch birds. Her mother would make pies with all the little birds that he caught. It must have been late in the 1920s. They left Glenthorne in 1928 or '9.

JS went to the grammar school in 1930. Devon had a different date for the 11-plus. She was too early to take the Devon one when they moved to Somerset and the Somerset one was over. The headmaster of Porlock School got special dispensation for her to take the 11-plus although she was 12. She passed and had to do the 5-year grammar school course in 4 years as a result.

In the hard winter they were all so busy coping for themselves. She imagines that Miss Halliday in the big house would have had masses of stores. Presumably JS couldn't get to school during that time. No food went their way from the big house. Her father worked in the big house, the snow wasn't too bad down there because they were on the cliff right by the sea; met the worst of the snow when they came up.

## **1.8 FATHER'S BACKGROUND / LOSING HIS EYE / PARENTS / MOTHER COPING / TRANSPORT / VISITING MISS HALLIDAY**

Her father was the driver/chauffeur/handyman to Miss Halliday officially but ended up doing all sorts of odd jobs. He hadn't had an easy life. He was the youngest but one of a Victorian family of 7. When he was 14 he was apprenticed to a shop in North Curry. He was using a knife to cut a piece of string and cut his eye; he lost one eye at the age of 14. All through the first world war he wasn't allowed to go in the forces, but he was directed to work on farms. He had become very proficient at fitting in wherever he was. JS was born in 1918 as war ended. Her father got a job then to Frank Pearce-Grove at Stoke St Mary and then to Glenthorne.

When he was driving her father had a chauffeur's uniform, a nice colour fawn, very clean looking; a peaked cap, breeches and polished leggings. He was very adaptable, very intelligent. If he'd had opportunities he would probably have ended up being a professor in a university. He had a great deal of common sense as well.

Her mother was very intelligent. When her parents were at school, there was an examination they could take at the age of 12. If they were good enough they could leave school at 12. Her mother left school at 12 as a result. Her mother never said much about the move from Taunton to Glenthorne. It was very hard for her. They lived right in the village at Stoke St Mary and moved to being 5 miles away from the nearest shop. Hard to cope and with Tom being ill as well. She had no transport except to walk; mother would never have got on a horse. Her mother was quite fit, she enjoyed the walking. Not so much fun when you have to and it is pouring with rain.

JS never travelled in Miss Halliday's car. She can't remember about her car. Miss Halliday had a sister who was married to a man called Cosway; they were the parents [grandparents] of Ben Halliday [see Ben Halliday recording]. JS can remember their car, big and luxurious.

When Miss Halliday invited JS to the house it was just her, not her father as well. Father never talked about his work very much. He did anything she wanted him to. Miss Halliday was lonely and it pleased her that JS was interested in what she told her. She told JS about the history of Glenthorne, how it had been built.

## **CD 2 (58 mins)**

### **2.1 REVISITING GLENTHORN WITH MRS PEARCEY AND BEN HALLIDAY / RIDING PONY TO SCHOOL / SCHOOL TRANSPORT BILL**

JS met with Mrs Pearcey and Ben Halliday [more recently]. The 3 of them spent the whole afternoon going over Countisbury and Glenthorne and so on. In September, she went to Ashton, where Ben lives now, and he drove them both to Glenthorne. They were just like overgrown school children, both going over childhood memories. One enormous building they used to call 'laundry'. Bats used to go in there. Ben and JS both remembered the building. They had a wonderful afternoon together. The property belonged to Arditis, the

carpet people [incorrect], when they went back (about 3 years ago). Ben had sold the house, but still owns the estate. Farms have been sold off one by one. All the stone cottages were lying idle. She went to the one she had been brought up in, derelict. They went back to Ashton for a nice cream tea!

When JS met up again with Mrs Pearcey, she was able to ask her all sorts of questions checking her memory. She [Mrs Pearcey] could remember her brother Tom in the children's home.

In her last term at college JS got a message that the Director of Education for Devon would like to interview her. When she walked in, he knew her from riding her horse to Countisbury School. He told her that when Parliament was discussing the school transport bill, JS was one of the cases that came up and her photograph with her pony was passed around the House of Commons to get the bill through. Mrs Pearcey remembered about the photograph, they had to get JS mother's permission for it to happen.

## **2.2 MOTHER'S HEALTH / GRANDMOTHER AT NORTH CURRY / MOVING TO PORLOCK / FATHER'S EMPLOYMENT / MOTHER'S INVOLVEMENT IN VILLAGE AFFAIRS / RED CROSS AWARD / MOTHER'S DEATH / FATHER / EXMOOR WALKS / FAMILY SINGSONGS**

They left Glenthorne because her mother's health broke down. JS and her brother were sent to her grandmother's at North Curry. They went to North Curry School. Mother virtually had a breakdown, the whole thing too much for her.

Father got the job as the chauffeur to the village doctor at Porlock who covered the whole of Exmoor in those days. He needed somebody to drive him. His name was Idris, one of the Idris soft drinks family. When Dr Idris left Porlock, Dad got a job as chauffeur/handyman to a lady who knew of him and whose family he knew at North Curry when he was a boy. It was in Porlock, her name was Miss Cartwright. She was one of the Barrett family who lived at Morden (big house on a hill just outside North Curry).

The move was made mainly because of her mother. Her mother liked Porlock, she was very happy there. Mother always had a lot of energy and she became really involved in all the village affairs. During the war, she ran village dances and whist drives in aid of the Red Cross. She was given an award by the Red Cross because she had raised so much money.

JS and her brother were probably only away a month or two when her mother's health broke down. Her grandmother could not have coped with Tom; he was difficult, terribly spoilt. It was never explained that her mother wasn't well. When they went back, they went to Porlock. They found a little house and she grew up there. It was still her parents house when mother died comparatively young, 63.

Her father went to live with JS when mother died. There was Gordon as well, her other brother, in his 20s and he went too. Father stayed until he died. He lived to be 85. It didn't matter what happened to father; he took it in his stride. She never once heard him complain about anything.

Mother used to have people on holiday staying in the house and Dad used to take them for long walks on Exmoor. He made it so interesting. He started a village band in Porlock. He taught all the boys to play the instruments. Every boy he taught was put in a regimental band in the army.

On Sunday evenings they had a little singsong with Dad playing his cornet, mother singing and JS and Tom groaning away in the background [laughs].

JS never saw Miss Halliday again.

## **2.3 DISCIPLINE AT HOME / FRIENDS IN PORLOCK / SOCIAL LIFE / THE READING ROOMS / WHIT TUESDAY**

She enjoyed Porlock School. As a child, she just took everything as it came. There was a basic soundness in the family relationships. Her mother was very, very strict, but her father was a diplomat through and through. He could arrange a little bit more freedom for JS than mother would let her. They lived about 5 minutes walk from the centre of the village. Dad would suddenly find he hadn't got a cigarette to his name

(he only smoked one a day!) and ask her to go and get some (only to give her a break from homework). Mother kept her at homework all of every evening, 4 hours.

They were in Porlock for 2 years before she went to the grammar school. Mother kept her very much within the family. Another girl lived 3 or 4 doors away from them. She and JS had nothing in common but they did things together. Her name was Nita Piper. JS still keeps in touch with some of the people who were at school with her and grew up with her in Porlock. Her friend Betty married and went to London to live, but JS suspects she has died. Her father was the village tailor. His name was Damond. She lived down in Sparkhayes Lane. Peggy Westcott grew up in the village and they were friends until she died last year.

There was a social life in the village, whereas no social life in a place like Glenthorne. Tom and JS used to go to the Sunday school. There were 2 reading rooms, Doverhay and Victoria. They were rooms equipped with billiard tables and card tables. They were kind of men's clubs, no women allowed in those days. They organised various social activities in the village. Victoria Reading Room had a social every December, like a big Christmas party. 12 hands of whist followed by a good meal followed by dancing till midnight. You buttered up one of the members to get a ticket! One of the highlights of the year.

Porlock always had a big occasion on Whit Tuesday. Had a new summer outfit and went in procession all through the village in the morning. Stopped at Court Place Farm and given a threepenny bit. Stopped at the rectory and given another threepenny bit. Then went to the recreation ground and spent it! [laughs] They had sports and races.

## **2.4 VILLAGE ENTERTAINMENT IN THE WAR YEARS / THE FORCES / CHURCH AND SUNDAY SCHOOL**

During the war soldiers were stationed in the village. Her mother used to put on dances nearly every night of the week. Mr Ireland kept the shoe shop at the end of the village, opposite the school. He had all the equipment to play music for dancing. They had village concerts. There was a funny old man called Mr Phelps who was the village chemist and he always used to sing the song 'My daddy wouldn't buy me a bow wow'. Tom Cooksley, the tailor, had a very good voice.

JS mother used to organise whist drives and the dances and the village fete on Whit Tuesday. The fete used to start at 10 o'clock in the morning when the children processed. Various side stalls in the recreation ground. Sometimes they'd have a baby show, a raffle for a baby pig. One year, JS won the baby pig, but she went home and tore her ticket up and never claimed it [laughs]. It was great because it tied things together for the village.

The war years didn't affect her all that much. She used to go home for her holidays because she was teaching. The biggest problem was she was not allowed to go into the Forces. She wanted to go. All her friends were in the Forces. All her best friends had volunteered, in the Women's Services.

Her mother was strict about everything. She had very definite ideas. On the other hand, she would always try to make sure JS was well dressed and certainly made sure they were well fed. JS father was Church of England; her mother was Baptist, non-conformist. In Porlock they didn't go to church. Tom and JS were allowed to choose which Sunday school they went to. They went to the one with the best summer outing!

## **2.5 BROTHER GORDON / FATHER'S DRIVING JOBS / WALKING / BROTHER TOM**

Gordon came along as a surprise when Mother thought she was well past child bearing. JS was 16, something like that. He was a gorgeous child. He had a mass of beautiful golden curls, bright blue eyes. JS mother couldn't let him grow up. She over-mothered him. She had been very possessive of Tom; there was reason for Tom because he'd been delicate. JS was always the one who had to give in to the boys, always the tough one of the family. She doesn't think it harmed her at all.

Mother almost lost Gordon twice during the pregnancy. Gordon is still suffering from it; he's had to be taken into care now, he can't cope with life. He was an absolutely brilliant sportsman. He was put on the county staff for Somerset Cricket Club when he was 16. He played 12th man when he was 16. That was it,



he couldn't cope with the social side of it. Now he is just pathetic. He just exists through each day. He was intelligent, got a place at the grammar school, didn't make the best of it. When he was 15-16, he had the scouts from 5 of the top football teams in England go to sign him up, but Mother wouldn't let him go. He's never faced up to anything in his life.

The doctors and Social Services decided there was no way JS could cope with Gordon any longer and he was taken into care last year. Now she goes to see him once a week at least. Now he can't even talk plain. He gets so frustrated. All because Mother didn't let him develop normally. He's been a liability all his life. He's in Taunton.

Father treated them all in his quiet dignified way, being a normal father. No way that he could influence what Mother was doing. He was always there when you wanted him. He was still a very sound mind right up till he died. If Father favoured any of them it would have been JS because she was the girl. He didn't show favouritism, did his best for everybody. Father was very interested in nature. When Peter, her son, was a little boy he loved going down to Porlock and her father would take him for walks. Peter has got a love of nature; Dad put that into him.

Father had to drive the doctor wherever he had to visit people, all over Exmoor. When he went to work for Miss Cartwright she gave up the car more or less immediately. He stuck with her, very loyal. She eventually sold her house on Bossington Lane and went to live in Taunton. Then she didn't need anybody. Then Dad went to work for Mr Westcott. He used to go all over Exmoor then with the fish and fruit. He was a real authority on Exmoor her father.

Dad and JS used to walk quite a lot. Tom and JS walked an awful lot. She didn't live in Porlock from the time she was 18 when she went to college, except she went home every holiday. She and Tom used to walk miles on the moor. Then Tom married and went to Brighton to live.

## **2.6 MINEHEAD GRAMMAR SCHOOL / MUSIC / TEACHER TRAINING IN SALISBURY**

She went to grammar school in Minehead. It was marvellous, a new school. It opened at Easter 1930. She started in September 1930. When she got to the 6th form she was the only girl with 4 boys. Until then, if you passed the scholarship, you had to go up to Taunton as a weekly boarder. Peter Robjohn, the village butcher in Porlock, passed the scholarship the year before her and had to go to Taunton. She was lucky.

Minehead school was only little, 30 pupils to start with for the summer term. It gradually built up. She was always interested in languages and science. They had a music master who went down one day a week; he was the organist at one of the churches in Taunton, an enormous man (Mr Knott). Every week, without fail, he kicked her out of the music class because she sang out of tune. Every week for all those years she had to write an essay saying why she did not like music.

Her favourite aunt had been a teacher in the village school, her father's youngest sister. JS had always wanted to be like her. Never any question that she would do teaching except for a period in the 6th form when she thought she wanted to be a real scientist. That passed over. In those days Salisbury was reckoned to be the best training college in the country and you were jolly lucky if you could get in. The headmaster decided Salisbury was the place for her. She got accepted and did her training. It was like being in a nunnery, very much church orientated. She was happy with it.

She left home at 18; it was just the next stage. Mother knew it was what JS wanted to do and she was so involved with Tom and his various illnesses; she was quite glad not to have to worry about JS. Mother wrote her a letter every day she was in college.

## **2.7 SUPPLY TEACHING / GREAT TORRINGTON / STOKE GIRLS SCHOOL IN COVENTRY**

From teacher training college JS had her interview with the Director of Education for Devon. They were building a brand new school, first of a new generation of schools, children from 14 villages would all go to that school every day, the beginning of modern education; he wanted her to be part of it. The school was not ready for a year. He gave her a whole list of options for filling in the year. She went on the permanent

supply staff, because she recognised she had very little experience. She was sent to a school in Ilfracombe. She did 3 weeks there teaching about 50 little 7-year olds. That broke her in [laughs]. For the spring term of that year they wanted her to qualify to teach in a fully equipped gymnasium. They sent her to London on a 3-months course. Not her first visit, Mother had taken her to London when she was 12 and they had done the sightseeing tour.

The new school was in Great Torrington. She had to formally apply for the job and be interviewed. She was given the job. It was the first big school that had been built in Devon where children went from all the villages from 5 to 11; they then went to central schools. Each village had to be represented on the governing body. When she went for the interview she was ushered into the school hall. A great horseshoe shape, 2 out of every 3 of them were wearing dog collars; each village had sent the vicar [laughs]. Each village sent 2 representatives (28), various people from the education department, the headmaster and various other bods, so there were about 40 odd of them sitting in the horseshoe.

She was at Great Torrington for 3 years, started in 1938. The war was on. She had got involved in so many things she was half running the town. She decided she'd better have a complete change. She wrote to 6 cities and got 6 application forms. She filled them all up. The first one to reply got her; it was Coventry. There she landed in Stoke Girls School teaching everything, a school of very high reputation. The headmistress was one of the characters of this life. JS taught 50 odd 8-year olds.

### **CD 3 (60 mins)**

#### **3.1 IRISH FRIEND / ASQUITH SCHOOL, TAUNTON / GEORGE MOSEDALE / CASTLE SCHOOL**

JS had a friend who came from Ireland. She was Roman Catholic and had been teaching in a little Catholic school in Devon. She applied and got a job in Warwickshire. They were both working in the same area. JS wasn't happy in Coventry because she didn't like teaching the little ones. She had trained to teach 14 to 16 year-olds.

She decided she wanted to go back to the West Country. She wrote to Taunton Education Authority. They sent application forms, which she filled up. Invited for interview during the Easter holiday. She was offered a job at Asquith School. Small school, about 140 children, Church of England. The headmaster was a brilliant man, far in advance of his time educationally. Many of his ideas are still in practice. She spent a lot of time fighting him, but at the same time admired him and gradually learnt that his values were perhaps better than the ones she arrived with. His name was George Mosedale. Her appointment was to teach boys physical education and science. This was the end of the war when there'd been no men to take boys for physical education anyway so she was very popular!

She stayed at Asquith until the school closed in 1966. She was then appointed to the brand new Castle School in Taunton, which replaced Asquith and a girl's school, North Town. North Town Girl's had 400 pupils, all girls; Asquith had about 200 mixed. 4 girls to every boy when Castle opened. That presented quite a problem over time tabling and everything for the organisation of the school. JS helped a lot with getting it sorted out. She was appointed as the head of pastoral care, 4th in the seniority line. She was very happy there, very challenging.

#### **3.2 DEPUTY HEAD AT WIVELISCOMBE / HOME VISITS ON THE BRENDON HILLS**

She kept getting suggestions that she should apply for more promotion. She was happy as she was and didn't bother. Then the deputy headship came up out at Wiveliscombe. A very young headmaster who had no experience was appointed. JS was encouraged by the County Inspector to act as a kind of mother figure to him. She applied and got the job. That's where she finished. That was a very rural school. They had families who lived on the Brendon Hills whose parents went to Taunton once a year. They had to adapt school life to fit in with the fact it was so rural. The children would slip out of school during the lunch hour (couldn't allow) because it was the only way their parents could get any shopping done. She had to bend

the rules and let them. In the spring, boys would be missing for a whole week, lambing time. She had to develop a flexible system.

JS was time-tabled to teach half-time. The other half of the day, including a whole lot of her own time, was to be spent visiting the families on the hills. She still knows her way round the Brendon Hills quite well. She enjoyed doing that. She went to the parent's homes; most of them had no cars, they had no way of getting in to her. To start with, she was the teacher, somebody to be fought. If she lapsed into a little bit of Somerset dialect, she was their friend. The Somerset dialect was her biggest asset in that job.

She retired in '73. Even then, a lot of them on the Brendons hadn't got cars. She went to see them about any problem that was between school and home. Her job was to build up bridges in 5 years until she retired. Personal contact, very important. If they were on the phone she would ring up to say she wanted to see them; she had to be very persistent and very tactful. After about 18 months, they would be ringing her. She was as informal as she could be.

### **3.3 TALKING TO PARENTS / PROBLEMS AND ABUSE**

JS would talk to whichever parent was there. Very often they started with a very irate parent. She had to let them work that temper out first and not react in the same way. Reason had to be applied. She always gave them the opportunity to talk about anything else. She used all the skills she had accumulated to get them to talk about what it was they were really worrying about.

The problems could be anything - child not eating their school meals, bus leaving early - she never knew what she was walking into until she got there. She had to judge how important it was to them. She sometimes had to help the teacher see the child's point of view, very carefully and had to take time.

She never came across a case that was serious abuse at all. The only way to deal with abuse was to be open and honest, without feeling and not make accusations at all. She would talk with the children first to establish whether or not there was an agenda beyond what they were saying. It was a very challenging job. After she retired teachers and parents still rang her up. The person who took her place needed constant support for the first term or two.

### **3.4 BRENDONS, QUANTOCKS AND BLACKDOWNS / PORLOCK PEOPLE / REVISITING EXMOOR**

The County Council built the school at Wiveliscombe in 1953; then they had to fill it. In order to make it viable they needed the children from Norton Fitzwarren, Chipstable and that area, from the top of the Brendons, Milverton and Wiveliscombe, Stawley up on the Blackdowns, and from Bagborough on the Quantocks. Each of those sets of hills have their own set of behaviour patterns and attitudes. It was fascinating for JS to work with them all. The people from the Brendon Hills were an odd lot, independent, self-contained, not terribly sociable. It is becoming much more mixed than when she first went out there. The Quantocks has always been a much gentler kind of society, closely connected with Bishops Lydiard and Taunton. The Blackdowns tend to be a little more with Wellington and that area.

Brendon, Quantocks and Blackdown people didn't mix very well to start with. They had different expectations. The only contact she had with other villages when growing up was with the local football team and cricket team.

Porlock people have an 'end of the line' fierce independence about them. They tended to be very self-contained and in a sense, inward-looking. It's probably changed a lot because so many strangers have gone to live in the village. As they grew up in Porlock, everybody knew everybody else, knew their business more or less. You accepted people for what they were. You never felt very at ease with people from Minehead. They were a different lot; they came from a town! A lot of people who only grew up in the villages didn't travel out of the villages for anything much, kept that narrow view of life.

Porlock's always had the influence of people going on holiday, people from the outside looking in. In a way it hasn't really changed the attitudes in the people all that much.

Whoever goes to stay with JS, the one place they want her to take them is on Exmoor. She takes everybody down onto Exmoor and tells them all about it. She goes over the Brendons and down to Porlock that way.

### **3.5 WORKING AWAY / WEEKENDS AT HOME / THE MIDLANDS / MEETING HUSBAND JIM / TORRINGTON SERVICE MEN'S CLUB / JIM'S WAR EXPERIENCE / PRISONER OF WAR / TRAINING AS A CARPENTER / JIM AND FAMILY LIFE / SONS' EDUCATION**

When she first went back to Taunton, until her parents died JS went home nearly every weekend. Her parents needed her to. It is still very much the place she grew up. She didn't feel comfortable in the Midlands at all and wanted to move back to the West Country. Her impression was that everybody only thought about the money they could make and how they could use people. To her it was shocking, none of the give and take you find in village life.

JS married, her husband came from London. He adapted very quickly to the West Country. He was a soldier stationed in Torrington when she was there. Amid all the other things she did in Torrington, she ran a club for service men in co-operation with the church. They were provided with writing paper and refreshments, somewhere to go in their hours off duty. Her husband used to go in there a lot. He was taken prisoner very early on in the war and kept writing to her. She kept writing to him, a sense of duty at that stage. When the war ended and he was released from the forces, he went down to Taunton and they decided to make a go of it together. He was an absolute Londoner, didn't know one end of a cow from the other! But he learnt.

Her husband was known as Jim but his name was Terence. He was of Irish Catholic descent, but he abandoned that one. He decided it wasn't special to be Catholic the day he was taken prisoner. He was taken prisoner before Dunkirk even. His group were sent over as a suicide squad to deflect the German forces from Dunkirk so that they could organise the evacuation of Dunkirk.

When he was discharged from the army (only 19 when he was captured) all the tests he did said he should become a chartered accountant. The thought of sitting in an office all day he wouldn't have anything to do with it. He decided to train as a carpenter. He ended up being in charge of Penny's Workshops where he did all sorts of woodwork. He was happy enough. He was very, very practical, forever working on the house.

She had 2 sons. Her husband died in 1982 after she had retired. She always believed you couldn't do 2 full time jobs. As teaching was her full time job she always employed somebody to run the house. The business side of life was so easy for her. Her husband was very helpful and very keen to do what he could. Her sons went to school in Wellington. They both got free places.

### **3.6 BENEFITS OF COUNTISBURY SCHOOL / PARENTS' ENCOURAGEMENT / POSITIVE ATTITUDE / HEALTH / LONGING TO SING**

JS probably succeeded because of Countisbury School. She thinks it was a super little school. She is full of admiration for Mrs Beck and Mrs Pearcey. She believes a lot of children fail in education because they are in too big groups; they can't be treated as individuals. She has always been able to learn quickly and therefore never had to struggle. She has been able to interest herself in things, a tremendous advantage. A lot of that was the attitude of both her parents. She used to do a lot of her college work during her holidays sitting at the kitchen table. Her mother was interested whatever it was. Her father was always interested in everything she did. She doesn't think she was anything special, she just took advantage of opportunities and used them properly. She has had people anxious to help her.

All her life she has tended to look at things constructively and been thankful for things she can be thankful for and dismissed the others. She had a fall a few years ago that affected her legs, but she still is fit. She is diabetic. She doesn't think that's a hardship; a good job it was found out. She doesn't have any great longings. Some things she wishes she'd been able to do better. She longs to join in singing but knows she can't, a minor irritation. She has a daughter-in-law who's a concert pianist.

### **3.7 MAKING CLOTHES / RECREATION / BEING DICTATED TO / REFLECTIONS / GARDENING**

She is interested in nearly everything. She has always made all her own clothes, made the patterns, designed them. A certain delight in making things well. She has always done quite a lot of embroidery and so on, but her sight isn't as good as it was. She enjoys reading but she is not a great reader of novels. She likes to read for the sake of knowledge. She is not as energetic about that as she used to be. She tends to listen to the television instead. Most days she doesn't read a newspaper because she quarrels with the journalists. She has this awful feeling she is being dictated to. She usually buys the Somerset County Gazette every week and buys the odd newspaper in between times. She is very cynical about journalism, so disillusioned with the press. She does have the television news on; it seems to be less biased than most of the press. She is a pretty independent person and an independent thinker.

If she were feeling miserable she would tell herself not to be so darn stupid; at the end of the day it's in your head. Her garden was her great thing but now she doesn't have a garden. She had got to the stage where she couldn't cope with the physical side of gardening. About a year ago she moved into a flat. She doesn't expect life to be perfect but generally has so little to complain about.

### **3.8 REFLECTIONS / OIL PAINTING OF PORLOCK HOUSE / ALEX CARRUTHERS GOULD / VISITING HIS STUDIO AS A CHILD**

She has quite a few very good friends. She has got her car, which is a great consolation. She can be very happy even on a rainy day. She feels lucky to live in this area.

JS has an oil painting of where her house was in Porlock [shows painting, which BJ has taken down from the wall]. The old artist Mr Gould, Alex Carruthers Gould, had a studio on the hill at the back of them. When they were children, she spent hours in his studio as all the village children did. He loved having children around him. He was partially paralysed; he'd had a stroke. Every year he painted a picture, which he submitted to the Royal Academy. The children had their own artist's chest with all the equipment for drawing and painting. As long as they were quiet they could stay there all day. He had a box of toffees; they were allowed to take one. He had another box full of dog biscuits. Any stray dog got a biscuit.

JS lived in a row of 8 houses called The Poplars. Mr Gould painted the most beautiful pictures of bluebell woods. He sold a lot of pictures in one of the village shops. When it came to their 14th birthday, he would give the regular children one of his pictures. The oil painting was the picture he gave her on her 14th birthday. Before they went home from his studio, he would pick a bunch of flowers from his garden for their mothers. She has wonderful memories of him. She values her picture quite a lot.

[RECORDING ENDS]