

Name: Peter Errington

Interviewed by: Olivia McKee

Duration: 00:19:21

(00:00:00) *Can you give me your name and why you need to [unclear].*

Yes, yes. My name is Peter Errington and I moved to Milton Keynes because I was looking for a job and I got the job with the Health Authority and from there I moved on to the Centre, Milton Keynes, where I looked after the plants.

[Unclear 00:00:28]

Well, I had not much of a team, only one other person working with me when I was doing some of the plant maintenance but the camaraderie within the City Centre itself, the cleaners, the painters, the plumbers and all the rest of them was second to none. We had a wonderful time.

And what was the period you worked there?

I was there 1983 'til 1987.

And could you go through a day to day run through of what you would do in your job?

Day to day?

Hold on, there's a train again!

Oh, yes! Wait for the train ... wait for the train!
Well, my day used to start with the train [unclear]

(00:00:27)

Well, it would have been, yes, yes. I caught the 9.30 from
ha ha ha.

[Express Train? Unclear]

Did you go through a regular day or routine day?

A routine day would consist of me getting there about 6 o'clock in the morning where I would be cleaning leaves from the plants etc., which was quite extensive (there were some fantastic plants there) and/or if insecticide needed to be used I would get there even earlier, so that we would be there before the general public as we didn't want them dropping dead with nasties, did we? And then that would carry on through feeding, watering, although the watering became automatic after a year or so and then it would be weeding, pruning, etc., etc., and this would go on to about 4 o'clock, 5 o'clock in the afternoon, where by that time we had had enough of the general public and we were on our way ... ha, ha, ha!

Lunchtime we would be in the mess room with all the boys and girls that worked for the City Centre, painters, decorators, etc., etc., etc., and we would be involved in games, as well as eating a drinking and there would be darts tournaments, chess tournaments, card tournaments ... what else was there? Drafts, ... I was a demon at drafts! And arm wrestling ... we'd do arm wrestling tournaments ... you name it, we got involved! It was absolutely fantastic! What a laugh and it was one of the best jobs I think I'd ever had.

And going back to [Unclear 00:03:34] and how many different types of trees or [Unclear 00:03:36]

Hundreds! I have a full plant list and it goes to about 2,000 different varieties of plants and trees that were planted in the City Centre while I was looking after it, both sides, which was half a mile either side and believe you me, some of the trees, for example, Robinia Robusta would be up to the ceiling and we would have to maintain that, high prune and insect treat, etc., etc., to ensure it maintains its integrity, (lovely word) ... integrity!

And do you have a favourite ... is there a favourite section that you liked going to?

Yes, John Lewis ... at John Lewis end because they had the biggest trees and it was more quiet, people weren't about because they were all down the other end, all hustling and bustling at McDonalds and all this, etc., but they used to leave us alone when we was up the top there. And with trees to maintain and I would be in the cherry-picker, up aloft, doing what I do! Not every day but that was a good place to be!

As [unclear] early on, do you have any story for the kind of things [unclear 00:04:51]

Yes! The mad train driver no!

One day while working near Middleton Hall, this character drove past me in a Mini and this was before we had doors fitted, they were thermal blankets, or thermal curtains that were supposed to keep the place warm and the drafts out but because it's the most exposed place between here and the Urals, you can imagine the wind just blasting through. So they put doors on but before the doors this chap drove through by John Lewis, down the aisle and parked in the middle of Middleton Hall!

"What you doing then, Pal?"

"Er, ... well, I'm just parking! Why?"

"Well, this is not a car parking place. The car park is outside!"

"Yes, but it's raining!"

So a security guard came along. "What's your game? What's your game, Pal? Clear off!" and he escorted him and his car out. I mean, would you believe it?

That's one of the favourite things that happened and it's just a marvellous memory of a 'numpty' ... literally, a 'numpty'!

Do you remember any of the coaches or buses coming in to see them? Were there lots of people excited going to the big shopping centre?

Well, I wasn't interested in the people so much because sometimes it would be mega-busy and sometimes not but I arranged my day so that where the majority of the people would be, i.e., round McDonald's area, British Home Stores (gone), Woolworths (gone) but, that's where the people would be generally so our day would start there early and then we would finish up at the John Lewis end, where it's nice and quiet. [Unclear 00:06:48] hustle and bustle.

Great! Going back to the team behind, how do you think that team [unclear 00:06:57]

Well, I became self-employed for a number of years, worked with my wife as a (00:07:06), as a [unclear] landscape maintenance construction, etc., etc., etc. for twenty odd years. We retired, we had our allotment down here ... after the train

.....EXPRESS NOISE!

'That's the 5.45 from Birmingham!!!!' "ha, ha, ha, ha". That's a long one – that's a local – he's got it organised!" ... Where was we?

You had to be self-employed.

Oh, yes, self-employed ... I was involved in teaching evening classes, part time ... teaching at HM Prisons part time, as well as running a small business with my wife; that ended when we retired and then the allotment took over. And the allotment was our life! We were down here ... ah! We met Barry (dare I mention it?) ... anyway, we met Barry and we've been pals ever since. And we've developed this allotment, not just Barry and I but all the other chaps, and the 'chapesses' ('cos there's ladies involved as well) and we've engendered a sort of community spirit here as well; we haven't so much got a club, a society, a hierarchy ... it's just a group of us that get on and do things. If someone is passing ... "Do you think you could do? "Yes, no problem!" and it gets done! It's marvellous! Lovely!

What do you think of Milton Keynes? Why do you think [unclear]? Is there a reason that it's got it?

Yes, Wolverton's got a specific community. We have the community lunch time ... that's ... that was today; we didn't go today because we was there last week and we were doing other things ... but that's good. We have ... on Sunday we have another train going by! Ha, ha, ha! Hey, what's that one Barry? That's a freight-liner! There we are, that's a freight liner, see, we're getting all the It is a railway town, yes ... it goes on. It is a railway town. It's a good job they're not shunting, isn't it. Because that would go on for hours! (Blom, blom, blom, blom, blom ...) Oh, dear, that drives us round the bend! Amazing, so ... where was I?

(00:10:00)

It's Sunday! It's Scarecrow Festival and ... after this train's gone by ... we've got ... outside my house will be a 9ft high witch, pointy hat, all the business, you see and there will be three or four up the road and groups of people come walking round and last year I collected in a bucket, 'cos I had a different character and a fishing rod. We were sat there and over two gardens with the fishing rod and we collected £25 for Willen Hospice! So this year, hopefully, we will collect a similar sort of amount.

But Saturday, we will have our open day on this allotment where we've got quizzes, competition, ugliest fruit (and I'm looking in the mirror then when 'ugliest fruit, etc.) and a bunch of flowers, the best prettiest bunch of flowers ... what else ... a walk round and we got a barbecue going, somebody said they're going to bring some beer ... we've got the teapot organised and Donata, who is going to teach us all how to play Boules, 'cos he's got a French influence, although he's Italian.

So, it's all going to be happening this Saturday, so it's to be a busy weekend, community-wise, for Wolverton. Not only that, the Erb Farm has got their open day on Saturday as well, so it's going to be busy, busy, busy, busy! Yes, fantastic! That's what I like! Clantastic!

And can you just do a description of what we're standing in now?

This is our community poly-tunnel and as you can see, lots of plants that people have left here because they're going to be planted up or whatever they're going to do. It's ... it was the Council's ... it was the Council's, wasn't it Barry? ... it was the Council's, they used to grow their plants for hanging baskets and plants all around the town but now they put them out to tender. Then it was taken over by the Urb Farm and they rather let it go to rack and ruin ... shouldn't say that, should I? Wash my mouth!

Anyway, so I persuaded the Council like I said to Mandy, "Now look here! We will ..." no, I said to Mandy, "Can we have the poly-tunnel because it's going to rack and ruin and we can see that it's got a community situation within the allotment". Great! So we cleared it all up and there's the photographs to show you what it was like beforehand ... uuugh! ... Dear! But we cleared it all up, we made it respectable, etc., we installed the shed there and the water butts, etc., so anybody on the allotment that has not got a poly-tunnel or a greenhouse can use this at any time to grow their plants, propagate their plants, seeds, etc., etc., ... and all these, as you can see, lettuce here that has been potted up ready for growing somewhere.

So yes, this is it, our little bit of community. Fantastic!

Right! Can you introduce us to George?

Yes, I'll introduce you to George. Here's George, my best mate! He never argues, that's what you call a good mate. I can insult him as much as I like and he won't turn a hair and he keeps an eye on the allotment. He frightens the life out of some people when they come creeping past here ... "Uugh! Gosh! Dear! ... What's that?" He is totally articulate ... he can sit down, stand up, etc., etc. But he can't talk which is ideal.

And was George just made on the allotment or is it an [unclear 00:14:0] of scarecrows?

No, he was in the Scarecrow last year and he was fishing in a bucket in my next door neighbour's garden and he collected £25 for charity which was very good.

(.....FLYING SCOTSMAN?.....)
They're all at it!

And what's so special to you about the allotment?

The allotment? The community spirit, the camaraderie, all my friends and I hope and I think they regard me as their friend as well and we just get on, we do what we do and how on earth we ever manage to keep our plots looking as good as we do in amongst all the coffee breaks, I have no idea!

(00:15:00)

Cheerio, Geoff!

I have no idea at all but we manage it somehow.

And what is your favourite place?

My favourite place on the allotment? Down in Barry's shed drinking coffee, that's the favourite place on the allotments. Although, I've got my wife's garden, which is just down there with the lawn and the decking, etc., and our little shrine ... that's a nice little spot.

Why did you get [unclear 00:15:35?]

No, there wasn't really a community, was there Barry? It was just a sort of a [unclear 00:15:45] negative! There was a negativity here but I got myself elected as a rep and ... about January time ... and we've progressed from then onwards. So we've developed all this between me, Barry and a few of the other fellows and we just love the place, really; if we're not here because we're on holiday we get withdrawal symptoms, so we've got to be on the allotment!

And you talked about SHAVE earlier; can you tell us a bit more about that?

SHAVE? That's the Stacey Hill Allotment Volunteer Ensemble, which is my general term for all the people that just help and communicate with each other and have fun and enjoy the place. That's important! SHAVE! And I can't do without a SHAVE first thing in the morning, I tell you! Ha, ha, ha!

Has SHAVE got any plans for things for things in the future, [unclear 00:16:49]?

Yes! We're going to put in another disabled raised bed, hopefully that will be next year, won't be this year

because it needs funding and we will expand the community tunnel down there and ensure that people really know what's going on so they can use that facility and just progress from there. Great!

And [unclear] why do you think this [unclear 00:17:36?]

Why does it work? I think it works because a few of us, including Barry, Brian, Donata, Phil, etc., etc., etc., etc., we've all become good friends and Graham, who has got a plot just there, have ensured a good welcome to anybody that comes down here and they are made to feel welcome and there is no prob; as you have seen, the tool store that we've got and the poly-tunnel, etc., the wood chip piles, plenty of parking ... yes, the camaraderie down here is fantastic, I think.

Do you think it's the people that make the place, particularly in Milton Keynes?

Yes, it's the people. You get the right people; if they are talking in the right way and they're that way inclined, we can only get better, can't we? If you've got right grumpy old, moany-groanies, I am afraid we're going to go down the pan. But we've got no moany-groanies on site- have we Barry? It's *all* fantastic, yes!

Can you go over it again, because you started with ... yes, 'it's the people that make the?

Yes, sorry! It's the people that make the place, it is definitely the people that make the place because without the people there would be no place would there and all those folk that contribute to what we're about is important; not so much the place, because this could be the desert somewhere, couldn't it? But if you've got the right people here and they're all getting on, it will flourish.

END OF TAPE (00:19:21).