

Name: Ron Unwin
Date of Birth: 14 September 1928
Duration: 00:20:17

00:00:01 The year I was born was 14 September 1928 er and today's date is 4 November. My name is Ron Unwin er what else do you want to know [laughs].

When and why did you first move to Milton Keynes?

Er I didn't move to Milton Keynes, I was...Milton Keynes appeared when I was here already. Er I was. I came to Nash when I left school. I worked at Whaddon, Whaddon Hall. I, I left school at 14 actually and I started....I, I, I was evacuated to the Rhondda valley er during the war and then later on the family moved down there and me father worked at Whaddon Hall. He was working at Whaddon Hall and er he er, he worked there from about 1941. And er when I left school the choice was to go down the mines or...and there was no other work in, in, in South Wales so I applied for a job at Whaddon and, and because me father was working there and I got it. I, I, I got the job as apprentice electrician. Er and er I stopped there till...er I left...I worked there all during the war and after the war. I was called up, I went into the army. So er er I went to er. I was living in a place called Tattenhoe camp at the time when I....I was very good, me father was living in, in Nash in a place called Elmcroft. And then later on they built a camp at Bletchley called Tattenhoe camp with all the, all the employees, a lot of the employees were from, from Whaddon went to live in Tattenhoe camp, it was virtually a semi-army camp. And I lived there until I, until I er left and joined the army. I, I, during the time I was in the army me father went back to Nash and bought the house he was billeted in during the war. So when I came out the army I naturally came back to Nash and I've been there ever sin....that was about 1948, no '48, and I've been there ever since.

Take a moment. Um what do you associate with Milton Keynes? If you were to sum up Milton Keynes what do you...?

Well, I was very relieved after the, after the er, after they'd published the Pooley report that Milton Keynes wasn't going to be at Nash 'cause I, I, I opposed Milton Keynes. I didn't like, I didn't particularly like the idea. And I certainly didn't want Nash

to be part of Milton Keynes. So, so er I was quite relieved when they decided that it wasn't, it was, that was the Pooley report, the Pooley report and he, he decided that there should be a big. A big area across North Bucks. Then when Milton Keynes came er it was quite a relief to me then that, as I say, that Nash wasn't included. So er, er I have mixed feelings about Milton Keynes still. I, I don't want to live in Milton Keynes. I've never....I've lived in London, I was born in London so er I was not very keen on living in a town anyway and so my idea of er of a good life was to live in a village so which I'm still doing now. So I hope to to my dying day. [Laughs]

So, what special memories do you have of Milton Keynes Ron?

Well not a great deal of memories of Milton Keynes because I, I haven't got any great memories of Milton Keynes apart from the fact that, that er I say I didn't like...I don't often go to Milton Keynes. I always used to do our shopping in either Bedford or Northampton, mainly Bedford and er the only great advantage of Milton Keynes is it's got a local hospital there which is quite useful. But even then er I used...if you had to go to the hospital at all it was Aylesbury and so yeah I, I'm quite happy about Milton Keynes being at the moment but I don't really want to live there.

So, what part have you played in the development of Milton Keynes? Any role in the development of Milton Keynes?

00:05:00

I'd say no roles in Milton Keynes apart from....I was, I was on the, I was a founder member of the er committee that set up Milton Keynes museum. So this was my great interest. Before Milton Keynes was envisaged I was very keen on, on er collecting er old farm....farm stuff and when Milton Keynes came along I realised that er all the farms were going so I decided that I should start collecting er stuff before it all disappeared. And then when they decided to start a museum here I was, I was, I was quite involved in that. And so er before that my, my inter....my main interest became when I went to St Fagan's museum in Cardiff. And I was very thrilled with that. And from that day onwards I thought that Milton Keynes should have a museum similar to that. It never appeared actually because they've got a lot of buildings there and we haven't got any buildings here. Er so, but my main interest was the er getting the museum going. My main, my thought at that time was Whaddon Hall was empty and I thought it'd make an ideal place for a museum. Again that never materialised but when Milton Keynes came along and they decided they....the gang of people decided they wanted a museum I joined them and I've been there ever since. I'm the, I'm the only surviving member of the original committee actually.

Now, my research shows that Wolverton Archaeological Historical Society is one of your interests?

It is.

What about your role there?

Well er again just going back to the early 1960's I, I, I joined the Wolverton Archaeological Society and er later on er I became there er photographic secretary, so I took lots and lots of pictures. I've taken probably thousands of pictures of, of er old postcards of Milton Keynes and um I'm still photographic secretary but I don't do an awful lot of work these days for them unfortunately.

So um....

And this is, this is where my interest came because I, again I was interested in history, I hated history at school actually but when I realised what it...how interesting it was I sort of joined the gang sort of thing and er, and er became very interested in it. That's why, my interest. Then I became interested in photographing, in photographing the old parts of Milton Keynes and the area. So our collection went from Winslow to Olney virtually. So I took pictures everywhere there and I gave talks on various villages, so that's it.

So any particular site or find when they were unearthed in Milton Keynes that made you really excited?

Not really, no. I was, I wasn't involved in any digs, I mean in the early days they were, they were doing er, er excavation at er Stanton Low, I was involved in that. They also did one at Cosgrove er the Cosgrove er there, they found a bath house originally then they found, they eventually found a, a villa there and but again I've got lots of photographs of it and....they took but I didn't take any, I wasn't involved in that either. I wasn't involved in the archaeology of Milton Keynes I was, I was interested in the past of Milton Keynes...you know the photographs of Milton Keynes.

Um, if you could go back in time is there anything you would change, you know, transport, infrastructure, community of Milton Keynes?

The, the, the.....

If you could go back in time....

Yeah.

.....is there anything that you would change in Milton Keynes, you know, the transport, the community, the infrastructure, you know....

Um...

...you think they could have done better, if anything like that?

Er, not a lot actually I don't think. No I don't....I think they've done as well, as well as they could do probably. Er I don't know...I'm not been really involved in Milton Keynes quite honestly so... [Laughs]

[Unclear] What do you think the next few years has in store for Milton Keynes?

00:10:00

They're going to expand and expand and expand. And that's all I can say. If they started off with a target of 150,000 and now 250,000 and in probably...it's going to go up and up and up. So they're going to take over as much ground as they can and build as much as they can in the area. So...yeah I think they're.....they've got lots of green spaces in Milton Keynes that they could build in but they are all er they're more interested in expanding outside than they are inside.

[2nd interviewer] Be careful because your hands on the mike.

Sorry.

If you could tell us just in your own words, about laying the foundation for the new building and digging the...

Well, again er I was, I was...the museum has obviously been one of my main interests in the last 40 years so, so yes I was, I was very interested in any new buildings in the museum. Er I put up the first new building in the museum actually. Er I'd, I'd er we had, at one time we were offered a water wheel from, from, from er Rakeford Lodge and we, we got, we acquired this, got out from Rakeford Lodge, we took it to one of the farmers, John Sailsborough's farm and rebuilt it. And then when we brought it over here they decided that they would, they wanted a place to put it, obviously. And they had an architect who designed a very small building and er it was only 6ft wide and you couldn't see the water wheel in it. So I made a model of what I think we should have had and they, he put a round roof on it which was virtually impossible to build, so I then got a site drawing and made a drawing of the new water wheel building and then made a model of it. And then we started building it, the architect then

came back and took my model and re-drew all his, all his drawings and now his drawings are what I did on, on, on the water wheel. So yes, I was interested in building because again I'd built me own house actually in Nash. I rebuilt me own house in Nash so I knew a little bit about building. Er so er I was interested. So er, I say, I drew up the plans for it er and we started building it and er we've got builders out the front now so it was virtually the first new building in Milton Keynes museum. And from then on I've been doing all sorts of projects here that...ever since. So I laid the floor in um....when the Development Corporation took over they ripped everything out of the kitchen er, er the fireplace, the oven doors and ripped up the floor and put a concrete floor down there. Eventually we er, we er found somebody in Nash who had taken up a tiled floor and we scrounged that off them and I laid that floor in the kitchen. Then we found a...there was an old stove that we found and er we put that back into the kitchen. The oven door they ripped off - we had that welded back on again. The oven door, the oven, the bread oven door itself, the bread oven itself, well they'd brick walled halfway across it because they wanted to you know, to save fuel when they were baking bread, so we took that out and put a light inside so you could see inside it. And there's other various jobs I've done around the museum obviously. So I've been doing work at the museum for a long, long time.

With the new building....

The new building? I'd nothing to do with the....

....have you been proud to be involved in that ceremony. Tell us a bit about that.

I'm, I'm glad they had the new building here. Er I'm quite glad, you know, we're still expanding and it was quite nice to have a couple of new buildings there. Er and I was obviously well honoured to be asked to lay the foundation stone for the, for the new building, which was quite an honour to me because er I, I say I done quite a lot of work here and I thought it was quite an honour to be asked to do that.

[Background chatter]

That's really interesting Ron.

Er.....

[2nd interviewer] Can I just ask you Ron, what, what sort of type of stuff do you do in here?

00:15:00

I do....

[2nd interviewer] What are you working on now?

I'm working on, I'm working on the Murray's Shutter Telegraph at the moment which you, which you can see on the be...on the floor there. And I...that was pre-built, that was built by one of our members but it wasn't very successful. It was wires on it and er it didn't work, it only worked about a week at a time and it broke again. So I decided to re-build it, re-design it and er hopefully it will work in future for longer than a week. So this is Murray's Telegraph, it was, it was des...it was...during the Napoleonic wars the French had...Napoleon had a system of telegraphs and we hadn't. Took about a week to get to...it took a long time...you had to send a horse from London to Dover and all other ports to get messages. They decided that, this Murray decided that he would build a telegraph and er this was, this was, this was the telegraph he used. They had stations, about thirteen stations from London, London to, to Dover and they er, they had obviously on, on, on hilltops and it was all done on line of sight. So he had one man on a telescope looking backwards, one man in, operating the telegraph and another man looking forward to make sure they got the right message. It took about six minutes to get a message from London to Dover which is an amazing time considering it took probably half a day to get a message before that. But it didn't last very long, they changed the system. But it was, it was in use, say during the wars and after that, after that about 1900 they changed it, they scrapped the system and er went to a different system again. Eventually radio came in obviously and telegrams but er up to then the only way was line of sight.

[2nd interviewer] So how does it work? Can you demonstrate how this....does it work yet?

No. [Laughs] Well it does work. What happens is various, various letters on the, the outer bit and you, when, when the thing...that is flat there, that's the flat thing. When it's that way that denotes a different er a different er letter. So you've got all these ones, there's six of these on there with various dots, so you put theses up and down. So if...so wherever the points are, there's six flaps on there so if...if you can see through it there's one less, it's the six, six boards virtually make a letter up. So you, by moving all these things around it gives you a letter to...I don't know how they did quite frankly, but that was all done by ropes actually. So er ours is obviously that one, that's all it does and all these do exactly the same on the various flaps.

[2nd interviewer] So would they have been brightly coloured?

No, no, they would, they would have been just black. They...you would look against the skyline and it would, you'd just either see a blank there or see that flap there or that. You wouldn't see anything, just see straight through it. So, so that would give you the letter you were talking about and er that's it I think. So that's, that's, as I say there's six of those and you, you, wherever you put those letters those, those, put those boards gives you a letter in the alphabet. So er that basically is how it works.

[1st interviewer] Yeah. And then obviously telegraph then became electronic.

00:20:00 And after that they had a different system that was just two types of...like a railway signal, like a....which was in a different place, different area on the thing and eventually er telegraph came along and it did away with this and obviously once, once you'd got telegraph this was, and all the. Because this relies completely on line of sight, you've got a foggy day you couldn't do it, you couldn't use it. So it was, you know, it was completely useless, you couldn't use it at night, you could only use in daylight hours and provided it wasn't foggy. So provided it was, provided it was, it was clear you was OK, but once the fog came down or night came along you, you'd had it, you couldn't do anything about it at all. So that's it.

[2nd interviewer] Well thank you very much

00:20:17 [tape ends]