

Name: Victoria Holton
Place of Birth: Stony Stratford
Date of Interview: 18th January, 2018
Duration: 00:11:45

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My name's Victoria Holton. I'm not going to give you my date of birth. Today's date... – *[laughs]*...you've already got my date of birth on another recording – today's date is the, I think, 18th January, or 19th January, 2018.

So, were you born in Milton Keynes, or actually you're from Stony Stratford?

I was born before Milton Keynes. Milton Keynes was still a twinkle in the developers' eyes...Milton Keynes was still a twinkle in the Development Corporation's eye when I was born.

And did you see many differences between the old villages and then the..?

Well, the first we heard about Milton Keynes...

Repeat it.

Okay. The first we heard about Milton Keynes coming to the area, so to speak, was...I suppose, actually, there was quite a lot of mud and vehicles but I remember going on a walk on a Sunday afternoon with my parents – a beautiful country walk – and we looked on the horizon and there was this enormous red building, which was Tesco's at Kiln Farm. And it was just incredible. Why would they put a huge, big red block on the skyline? Well, a block and a blot. So that was like, "Oh, it's coming. It's coming to town, Milton Keynes."

So do you, as a native, would you like to tell me something, in your opinion, about the new citizens? Did you find any, kind of, something interesting about them?

When...I suppose when I first started to drive, a bit like Moss, we had to go to Bletchley to learn how to drive because that's where the roads were...the ordinary roads were 'cause Milton Keynes was all straight roads and roundabouts. But I can remember once

getting lost in Milton Keynes when the estates were still being built and it was darkish and I turned left at a roundabout and I was in a field. There wasn't...the road just ended in a field; they hadn't built the estate yet. And I was like, 'Oops,' so, like, three-point turn and back on the road again. I was quite scared actually 'cause I used to get lost quite a lot in those days.

So you've lived most of your life here in Milton Keynes?

No, I went down to Brighton. When I was a student I went down to Brighton. When I came back I lived in Northampton because I went to school in Northampton and my friends were all in Northampton, so I was always gravitating towards Northampton. I mean, my early connection with Milton Keynes wasn't particularly high, actually. I was in...I used to get involved a lot in the Wavendon music scene, which Cleo Laine and John Dankworth set up, so that was really great and that was actually the one thing which I really did enjoy. So I did a lot of learning jazz singing and things like that. I did all that sort of stuff from the age of about thirteen onwards. I did a gig at The Stables with John and Cleo when I was about thirteen or fourteen, the Christmas concert. New York, San Francisco, Old Stratford: that was the billing. *[Laughs]*

So I reckon that you went through the eighties here in Milton Keynes. Can you tell me something about the craziest things, or..?

No, I mean, I only really went...I went to The Point but I only really went to The Point a couple of times – it was a couple of openings and things – but I remember it being glamorous. I mean, it was very sort of...an iconic place in those days and we were kind of New Romantics. I was never cool enough...I mean, I missed punk, sadly, but we were New Romantics and we had sort of, you know, asymmetric clothing and frills and the boys used to wear eyeliner and things, so... It was a very glamorous time, actually. I mean, The Point was quite glamorous then, I think.

Could you remember something [unclear 00:03:48] happening during those days?

When I...when I left school I was just doing odd temping jobs and one of the temping jobs that I had was to be a bus surveyor, which ties in with my...what I was saying about the estates not being built and the roads being built – 'cause the roads...presumably, the infrastructure of the roads were put in before the people came – and they started building estates and they started running buses before people lived in the estates. So I spent some very nice summer weeks going around on a bus with different buses – I'd have a schedule with different buses – and I had to hand out

something, to people who got on, to say which stop they got on at and which stop they got off at and then collate all these little bits of information. I mean, I was with some other people. We didn't meet up very often but when I did meet up with them I think some of them had flushed theirs down the toilet at Bletchley. But I was quite good, I did try to...*[laughs]*...I did try to be good with mine but there were certain estates, you know, where the bus drivers would say, "You can have the door open and put your feet out," and it was lovely, actually, 'cause it was really quiet and sunny. But there were other estates, a bit like Lakes Estate, where we kind of...it wasn't quite so nice, in those days.

So you see lots of differences between the central part of the town and the outskirts?

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I think it's quite shocking because my family, historically, are farmers and my grandparents that live in Stony Stratford – they came from Stony Stratford, my great-grandparents, etc. – in those days it was quite tough. I mean, they were farmers but they also worked in the Wolverton Works. My great-grandfather was a night-watchman in the Wolverton Works and then they bought land and they were farmers but they...you know, times were hard. And I know a lot of farming people, a lot of local people, and when Milton Keynes was envisaged on the horizon I don't believe, our area, we were told it was a utopian...I don't believe we were told that it was a utopian vision. We were told it was clearance from London; a load of people would be moved down here; they were building, possibly, sink estates – we didn't know what they were building – and they were going to be filling them up with people who they were moving out of London. That's what we were told. Whereas I feel a little bit jealous now, when I hear about people...since I've been doing this project, I hear about people that were sold a utopian vision and that there was lots of arts and culture and all sorts of excitement going on in Milton Keynes that I never really knew about. So actually it's been quite a learning curve and quite interesting doing this project.

And actually what kind of future you see in Milton Keynes? You see an agricultural/rural future or a..?

Well, they're just building over my great-uncle's farm at the moment, just outside Stony Stratford, and I didn't think that was going to be the plan, that they would go out beyond the Watling Street, out towards Calverton. I didn't think that was going to be part of it but they've pushed that through as Area 11 and that's quite a big estate and it's built over a beautiful farm where we used to go mushroom picking; and I just think, I don't know where it's going to end now, actually, and it's made me wonder, 'cause I always thought that was the end, on that edge.

'Cause actually maybe the utopia would be mushroom farming?

I'm very fond of mushrooms actually. I think...I feel sad that they've let things like the Milton Keynes Point go into disrepair because, as I mentioned earlier, I always think that was a beacon. I think, if you flew in, I seem to remember it being lit up when you flew into Luton. I mean, to me that was an iconic and it was an early...and it was an eighties icon. And I think things like that are really bad. And what have we replaced it with? I'm not entirely sure. I don't know what iconic...we've got the Buddhist temple and things. We have got some interesting cultural features in Milton Keynes but I'm just a bit sad that we've let certain things like that go to wrack and ruin. And also the pyramid that was the Bletchley swimming pool. That was another incredible thing. We used to go there and it was the most beautiful place, when it was new. Obviously that went to wrack and ruin as well but it had a skywalk to get to it and everything; it was quite futuristic.

Do you see yourself living here, or..?

I've been away a lot. I've lived in Australia and I've lived in Brighton, France and I've kind of washed up back on the shores of Milton Keynes 'cause my family are here. But the more I find out about current things that are happening in Milton Keynes I feel a bit more excited actually. And since I've been on this project and met some local people and I feel quite welcomed into...which I kind of felt like an outsider to be honest with you, for most of my life, and it's quite nice to feel welcomed into Milton Keynes. So I *would* like to do more in Milton Keynes. I *would* like to be more involved in the museum, 'cause I love history, I love archaeology. I've got some archaeological artefacts as well at home, so I've got old Milton Keynes and the future of Milton Keynes. I was laughing about the car that was on television the other day that was using the red roads because the minute it saw a person it stopped; it stopped short. And I thought, 'There's so many people walking and cycling on the red roads, every time it sees a person or a bike it's going to stop.' But I do like the idea. Maybe they could be more like trams or something, down the side of the red roads, or something; electrical trams or something maybe. That would be great, possibly.

[Unclear 00:09:09]

Lead coffins; what was that about lead coffins?

When you said they were excavating somewhere and they found loads of lead coffins.

Oh well, yeah, I mean, my father's company...basically, my family, they stopped being lorries...they stopped – sorry. My family stopped being far...they...

Start again.

Sorry. In Old Stratford, my family were farmers and, in Stony Stratford, the other side of my family were farmers but my grandfather didn't really like the farming so they set up a lorry company, which I suppose in a way Milton Keynes was very useful for because that red box on the hillside was Tesco's and we got the contract for shipping Tesco's. We also got the contract for shipping Coca-cola which, as a child, was quite exciting for me because we had a fleet of lorries, all in Coca-cola colours, which is quite an iconic sort of look. My father also had a company called 'Milton Keynes Transport'. They managed to get in there and get the name, so that was quite a good...they were based near the M1. So that was quite a good little company but obviously my father's retired now and that's all gone (and I can't remember the question). They also carried gravel for the M1 in the 1960s and they went to Linford Lakes, and my father was saying that they just went to pick up the gravel and round the back of the office there was a pile of lead coffins which they'd dredged up when they were dredging up the gravel. But no one spoke of them and nothing was ever heard about them again but my father saw those.

00:10:32

[Unintelligible]

Well, you know about lead coffins. Is that Roman, is it, possibly?

Sounds like plague pits, radiation...

No, it will be monks; it will be monks 'cause it's Linford Manor, Linford, isn't it? It was like an ancient manor.

Because if they had said anything they would have had to spend money excavating and it would slow it down.

...and close down the site and the M1 thing was under such a strict, tiny, tiny deadline, it had to be done in months and months and when it was actually finished, the guy who was running the works on this particular leg said to my dad, "It won't last, will it?" And my dad's like, "No."

And within so many years they had to resurface; it just all fell apart. They'd built it during a flood, it was absolutely ridiculous...*[laughs]*. They had to drag the lorries onto the site because the lorries couldn't get through the mud, to put the surface on. But that's not really Milton Keynes-y, is it? Possibly.

Building in a hurry.

Very Milton Keynes, yeah. Building in a hurry, isn't it?

Future of Milton Keynes: electric cars possibly; pizzas going on robots. It's all happening now, isn't it? It's all just starting. Better surfacing for pavements; better surfaces for roads; and less traffic congestion at the roundabouts. They need to sort that out.

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END OF INTERVIEW