Melvyn Kear_1

Key:

I: Interviewer
R: Melvyn Kear

I: Start by telling me your full name and when and where you were born.

R: My name's Melvyn Albert Kear. There was a big family of Kears around that area at that time. I was born in 1941. Right through the war years I was still living at the back of what was the Essoldo, which is now the bingo hall.

I: It's closed down I think now.

R: That was my first memories of running around those two alleys that surround the picture house. My childhood was great. I came from a pretty poor family I suppose and we did progress to get a little bit out of the doldrums but generally we were okay. We did okay. My father opened a shop in the end. I became a senior (unclear 0:00:57) person with the (ph 0:00:58) *literacy* companies but in general my childhood during the war was brilliant.

I: So you were born in the war period?

R: Yes, '41.

I: Both your families were from that area?

R: Yes. The Turners, that's my mother's side there. They're Cotswolds people. All on my dad's side were Kears and they're all from that area. I think if you look at the Kear population from days gone by, it's all concentrated heavily in Gloucestershire, the Forest of Dean. We haven't got any people in the Forest of Dean but if you look at the population, it's all centred around the lower end of Cheltenham.

I: So what did your mother and father do?

R: My father was an electrical engineer. My mother worked in all different kinds of jobs, from an usherette in the cinema to cleaning jobs. She also worked in the aircraft factory, which was in the lower end, called (ph 0:02:06) *Turnlams*. It was at the back of The George, the top George, which is an Irish pub now I think. There was a little factory there and she used to put the linen on the wings and she used to come back and say, 'I feel a bit strange because of the fumes.' Generally, it was great fun.

I: Did you have brothers and sisters growing up?

R: I didn't have a sister until I was eight. Then she was born. We were still around there then. I was born in my auntie's house. My aunty owned two houses in the same street with different addresses. Hereford Place and Nailsworth Terrace were separate in those days in the same street. I was born in 15 Hereford Place but we lived with my granny in Number 8 Nailsworth Terrace, which are dead opposite in the same street.

I: That's right opposite where I work then. The campus is just across the road.

R: Of course it is, yes. All that area, the Elms as it was then, that was a big house, empty place at one time when we were young. Then it became flats I think and now it's all sheltered housing or something. The college figured quite a lot because we always looked, 'Oh, that's the college.' I can remember the work house being there. The Spike. That's what they used to call it locally. It was called The Spike.

I: You do remember that then?

R: Yes. I remember vaguely because my grandfather was born in the workhouse. I don't think he was baptised so that's why we had trouble getting back past it. Anyway, there's so many Kears down there but there are big families of Kears. I mean 12. They lived in (unclear 0:04:08) Way later on.

I: Moved out to it, yes?

R: But they all lived around the Moors and the gas works and all around there. We weren't a big family, none of us. None of my father's lot were big, only having two or three children at the most.

I: So when was it that you left the area?

R: When we left my gran's house, I was going to the local parish school then, by St. Gregg's, Parish Infants. So I was sort of four or five, I suppose, then. We stayed there until I was old enough to go to infant school. Then my father opened a shop up in Sherborne Street in Fairview, an electrical shop. I went to Holy Trinity. My father then looked to build his own house and I had to go back to live with my gran. So I went back to live with my gran. So I went to Elmfield so I transferred to (ph 0:05:13*) the end of the town* sort of, and I went to what was The Practice, it was called, but the year I went it was Elmfield, and that was quite a good memory. We had some good fun. It was a rough old school, mind. Bloody rough, yes. They're saying now about the children misbehaving, but it's just aggravating stuff now. I don't know. It was physical then between the teachers and the boys.

I: They could put their hands on you back then.

R: The first day I got there, I was only 11 I got knocked out for saying something.

I: By a teacher?

R: I just remember lying on the floor and this big lad, he seemed about 7 or 8 foot in those days, I've met him since and frightened him because I said, 'Did you remember doing it?' and, 'No.' I said, 'Well, I think I'm going to get my own back now.' He was big. I remember them saying to him, 'You've knocked him out,' nothing was done about it. All the teachers there, there were a lot of sadists I think in those days. They loved to hit you. The maths teacher was great. He was there for a long time.

I: So you said earlier at the beginning that you've got really fond memories of your childhood in that area.

R: Yes, because we all played in the street. I think there was one car in the street. I've got a picture of a motorbike in the street with just my motorbike. That was '56. My father had a motorbike with a side car. That was quite posh. You go down Nailsworth Terrace now opposite the campus and it just seems so small. Cars both sides of the road and as you go to the little car park space at the back of the cinema, we used to have a massive bonfire there with fireworks going off. You think you could hardly have a little fire there now without causing trouble. So my granny lived all around there. She was a (ph 0:07:37) *Stealon*. She came from Charlton Kings. She moved down there quite early and she lived in different places. She lived in that row of cottages, Roebuck I think it is, down the end of Nailsworth Terrace in that little square. She also lived up in St. Paul's Street South I think at some time. Generally it was great. I haven't got any bad memories until I was about 11.

I: If I asked you what kind of people live in that area around you when you were a kid, how would you describe them now?

R: Lower middle or working class people. Working class, I suppose. There weren't many middle class people around, all doing various jobs and families. I've got a picture of the Coronation. My sister's not on there. I have memories of running up and down the street and playing and having just a great time. Nobody locked their doors.

I: I keep hearing that. Every person I speak to said it.

R: It sounds a cliché. When I was small and we lived with our auntie and my two cousins, I used to sleepwalk when I was five or six. They very often found me sat by the range in my granny's house in the morning. So I walked out of the door and across at five or six. It would be unheard of now, I suppose, really.

I: Fortunately there weren't many cars about to knock you over.

R: Well, no. It was a very quiet road. It's a cul-de-sac anyway. There was no traffic at all. I think the milkman used to come up. The horse and cart used to come up and then this old guy bought an old Morris 8 and then my dad had his motorbike and sidecar and that was the only... and they were parked in garages because my father owned a yard opposite where we lived and it was a mechanical yard of some sort but he did his electrical bits and pieces in there before we bought the shop. I have great memories. There's nothing I can't... some of it was rough. I tell you one thing that sticks in my mind, because on Radio Gloucester they've been playing all the old hooters and whistles from the factories and an air raid siren goes off. I think it was Dursley. I still have a peculiar feeling when an air raid siren goes off, because they were all about (ph 0:10:53) *towning* in those days, up to the '60s I think.

They were mounted in different places. The fire station had one. The (ph 0:11:04) *MEB* I worked for, they had the job of dismantling them all and they were coming into the yard and seeing them, great double electric motors like. That's one thing that really sticks in my mind. When the bomb dropped on the Ritz, I was only one so I can't remember. I remember my mum saying she could see like a football tumbling over in the sky and she ran in and the ceiling, some parts of the ceiling fell in, in my bedroom. So I was scooped out of the cot and then we were evacuated. I can't remember that but I was told we all went up to the grammar school for a night I think it was.

I: Was that further up the high street the grammar school?

R: Yes.

I: Before they knocked it down.

R: It was a beautiful old building. I remember that quite well. We spent the night in there and the bomb was de-fused and put in the cinema foyer for a while. I can't remember then.

I: I've heard a similar story about that today about people seeing it come down.

R: My mother always said, no reason to not believe it, she said it was tumbling, and obviously it tumbled and hit the (unclear 0:12:33) instead of the detonator, I suppose.

I: Fortunately, yes.

R: Other than that it was all great fun.

I: Obviously, most of the people were working class, obviously living in mostly two up two down houses?

R: Yes, two up two down terraces. My auntie owned a bit of property down there on the left, which is all gone, those houses now. She had a massive garage where they used to repair the old-fashioned caterpillars, well before they were caterpillars, all those. My granny's lodger used to work for them. I forget what his name was. He was quite posh, (unclear 0:13:19) and stuff. He used to come and he used to take us out in his Rolls Royce and we went on holiday in the old Rolls one day. They were all working class. There were no business people I suppose in the road.

I: The impression I get is that back in those days, you could say it's still like that a bit now, but it sounds like that area of Cheltenham, the Lower High Street area and the streets off it was almost like a little self-contained town in itself.

R: I think it was, yes. Probably, way back in time, it was a separate, like St. Paul's and Peter's.

I: You had all the shops you needed on the high street, didn't you?

R: Oh yes, everything.

I: Do you remember some of those?

R: I remember most of them. It's getting the names. If you went down the left-hand alley from the (unclear 0:14:13) down the left-hand side there was Matthew's, sweet shop, and then as you go on the right-hand alley there was a butcher's, a grocer's.

I: Everyone talks about the fish and chip shop. Is it Iddel's?

R: Paul's. Paul's was at the top of St. Paul's Street South in the high street on the corner and Bottom Paul's, same family, had a fish shop on the Lower George. It was called the Lower George because there was another George further on up. One thing I remember, it didn't smell very good, not like it does these days. As you can see, I like my fish and chips. There's one up there, you go some times when you're just doing some shopping and you think, 'Oh, that smells...' but my memory of both of those wasn't... it didn't smell that wholesome, if you know what I mean. They probably used the fat hundreds of times.

I: Maybe, yes.

R: I don't know. There was Iddel's. That's the wet fish shop. There used to be a pub next to that. You know The Shakespeare pub?

I: The Shamrock now, right?

R: The Shamrock. Oh. One thing that really annoys me, changing names. I won't call them that.

I: It's obviously been through quite a lot of names, that one hasn't it?

R: It's always been The Shakespeare until I suppose the '70s. That was a really notorious pub for fights. As kids we used to go and watch them fight in the yard. They used to play pigeon tossing. There were a lot of Irish there in the late '40s, '50s. Opposite there on the corner there's an advertising hoarding. That was a pub, before my time. It was called The Harp, I think. Iddel's was the fish shop.

I: I've spoken to a few of the other people and one of the people I spoke to his grandmother ran JR Tapps, the confectionary and sweet shop.

R: Oh yes. I think we used to get pop from them. I'm not sure. Sweet stuff.

I: You had everything you needed on the high street, right?

R: Yes. There was Harry Higgins and Shenton's. They were clothing and stuff like that. There was old Charlie (ph 0:16:53) *Fryersford* (unclear 0:16:54), all out in the open.

I: One of the impressions I get is that... actually, the first question I'll ask you is when you were growing up there did people used to refer to the area as Lower Dockem?

R: No. In my opinion, Dockem started at the gas works.

I: After that?

R: Yes.

I: It wasn't the area where you lived?

R: No. It was the lower end, or the west end, if you like. It was the lower end but we used to talk about Lower Dockem. There were sort of divisions between Dixies Corner where the pepper box was, that was an underground toilet

covered with laurel bushes and glass topped where the roundabout was in those days. That was the no-go area for people from the top end of town. Late at night I mean. Late at night it was fairly rough all round really. It wasn't the sort of violence you get now. It was just...

I: The odd punch-up?

R: You had punch-ups. They weren't nasty people they'd just argue and have a fight. It was all over in seconds. There was no nasty stuff like it is now. From there, the pepper box, Dixies Corner, down to the other side of the railway bridge, that was the Lower High Street. Of course then you get to Tewkesbury Road, which is Dockem. That's how I always understood it. Why it was called Dockem, lots of different reasons. Big coal yards there and stuff like that, and they always tidied up with...

I: The bridge is where the old railway was before, right?

R: Yes. I've got maps. Have you seen the maps before the old railway?

I: No. I haven't actually.

R: 1885.

I: That used to connect it to Gloucester, right, that area, didn't it, the rail that passed through there, that's now the Honeybourne Line?

R: That's right. That went from Lansdown through to Honeybourne. I'm mad on maps and I subscribe to them and I can fish them up straight away and you say... because there's a place called Whitesmiths, Whitehart Street. Bear this in mind because I think it's quite interesting. If you go down to the bridge, just before those new flats, that was (ph 0:19:49) *Dough Bells*.

I: Yes. I've seen pictures of the old Dough Bells.

R: Great big underground cellars and stuff there, and two pubs between the bridge and the warehouse. There are pictures on Days Gone By I think. Wendy has got some. She's got quite a few. She's quite a clever lady. I can remember getting into Dough Bells and getting the broken (ph 0:20:15) *Soda* siphons and getting the glass tube out of the siphons for pea shooters. If you go to the railway bridge and look to the right, there's a little street called Whitehart Street. It goes right to a point.

I: That's the one that closes up against the railway line, right?

R: Yes, and then the other end of that, it does the same thing. People have argued, 'The railway isn't always there.' In 1885 the railway wasn't there. The main station was all there but the Honeybourne Line hadn't been built.

I: And they just ploughed right through it, didn't they?

R: Whitehart Street came right from the high street through to Swindon Road. (Ph 0:20:57) *There was a drive right through it*. I've probably got some copies of it somewhere. So that's always a talking point. It was always a funny little place to look. The old Spike. That was always featured. We were always

threatened with the Spike, the workhouse. 'If you don't get on in life, you'll end up in the Spike.'

I: So you lived in fear of it?

R: That was one of those things. I suppose, after the war it became less and less a form of lower life because when you see pictures of the old orphanage, because my mother was put in an orphanage when she was four, but it's gone now. When her father died of his injuries after the war, that's my mother's side her mother put all the children in the orphanages. My mum and her sister went to the ladies one in Winchcombe Street and my uncle went to the one which is (ph 0:22:18) *Doughty House* now.

I: Opposite the brewery?

R: Yes. He had a good time. He lived until he was 96. He only went last year. He always said it was great there. They used to take him on holiday. Mum used to say it was horrible for the girls. She stayed there from four until she was 16, 17. Then she got lodgings in King Street. So she went to King Street after that. My uncle, he said it was a great time for the boys. So all those things stick in your memory.

I: So the people that lived in your part of town, in that area, obviously you didn't mix much with people from other parts of the town, from Cheltenham?

R: I don't think we did really. There were relations, obviously. I had relations (unclear 0:23:15). I remember my uncle was a copper in (ph 0:23:19) *Shalford* so we used to go and see relations but I don't think there was any friendship.

I: You didn't spend much time on the promenade?

R: Not when I was young. No. I remember going to the prom once with my father, and I can't remember how old I was. Dancing about and doing silly things in the windows. My father said to my mother, 'Stop him from doing that.' He criticised me for dancing in the prom. It must have been '49 or something like '50, and my father said, 'Stop him from doing that,' and pulling silly faces in the Cavendish House, you know. My gran always used to say, god bless her, she was lovely, she said, 'You didn't go in the prom unless you were fairly dressed up.' If you could dress up, I don't think it mattered where you...

I: You had to look the part?

R: You had to look fairly... you couldn't go in, in boots.

I: You didn't get many people from those parts coming to..?

R: No. I can't remember seeing any smartly dressed people down that end. The only one that used to come down there was Colonel Smith, who owned the tractor Caterpillar repair shop. He used to come in his Rolls Royce and the Rolls Royce used to come up Nailsworth Terrace. That was a big thing for us. Then one day we went to Brean to a (unclear 0:24:56) site there and he said, 'It's alright. The chauffeur will take you down.' We went, all of us, my gran, my dad, my mum. My sister wasn't born then I don't think. There were about five

of us in this big old Rolls convertible. I remember my gran looking round and saying, 'There's a Rolls Royce in the street.'

I: Was there a huge class divide, do you think?

R: I'm pretty sure there was, yes. There was a lot of chat about the posh folks, like derogatory things. I expect they did the same about us.

I: One of the impressions I get is that people from outside the area, I mean you could say a lot of people think similar things now about different areas, but they must have thought that where you lived and grew up was dangerous, it was rough, and you wouldn't want to go there, but in reality, it wasn't as dangerous.

R: No. You can't say it was... I remember some of the fights when I was younger. I didn't start doing them until I got a bit older in my teens. I was involved quite a bit, even later on in my teens. Not when I was small. I can remember fights in the street. There was a chap called Charlie Welsh. I think he was Irish but I think his name was Welsh. He reminded us of John Wayne. I remember him being knocked down outside The Shakespeare and his head hitting the kerb. I always remember that crunch. 'Charlie Welsh is on the floor!' Later on in the Saturday afternoon, if you wanted to see an organised one you'd go into The Shakespeare yard.

I: They'd always be doing them there?

R: Pigeon toss. I don't know how it works. Throw up two pennies and then start it. A lot of people got drunk then. A lot of people get drunk now, probably more so, booze is cheaper now so I suppose... drink always figured in our house. My grandfather was a heavy drinker and he died quite young, I think because of it. My granny, she used to drink draft beer and she used to send me, when I was quite young, with no notes, up to The Caledonian, which has been empty for yonks. They had a little room on the side, a bottle of jug, I think it was called, which became off licences in the end. I used to go with one of those jugs that you have in the old-fashioned wash rooms, and I used to carry that down with a packet of crisps, I'd think, 'I'll have that.' I couldn't have been more than eight or ten at the most.

I: She'd send you to get a drink for her?

R: Yes, go and get two quarts of... I remember it was quite heavy carrying it back. Then my grandfather, he was always there since I was born, and he was a great big old bricklayer, and his leg was smashed during the First World War. So he just used to sit in front of the fire, he couldn't walk properly, and there was a fire in the middle and an oven either side. Granny used to cook on that. She had a gas cooker but she always cooked on that. I remember when the first plastic bowls came out she put it on the gas ring. That's how innocent they were. My gran was very innocent.

I: How are you supposed to know if you've never seen or held one before?

R: They used to send me down to the tobacconist on the corner of Burton Street. I can't remember the name of that. That is one thing; I can see the shops and smell the shops but some of their names. The butcher's, Mudway's, that was at the bottom of the alley. She always figured a lot in my life because my

cousin threw a bayonet out of the window once, a World War Two bayonet that my uncle had brought home, and it landed in my head. The lady from the butcher's came and stitched it up. I remember that, having my head...

I: My god (Laughter). There can't be too many people who can say that, you've been bayoneted and you've survived.

R: Yes. You can see it now. It's there on my head. The second time she did it for us, she was a nurse but she was a butcher's wife as well. A family of butcher's. Selby was one. He jumped off the wall once and jumped under a six-inch nail sticking out of a plank. I remember him taking to his mother down the butcher's shop and she was looking at his foot, and it came right through his shoe. Then the second time she looked after me was when we used to fight with the Grove Street because that was a bad place.

I: I heard that as well today.

R: (Ph 0:30:42*) Greton House* and all that.

I: So that's the street at the back of The Shakespeare?

R: If you lived on Grove Street, you were... what was the phrase? You were brought up on (ph 0:30:51) *the hens of the bread*, the crusts. That's what they used to say.

I: That was really poor down there?

R: Yes. They all went as I got to about 10 or 12. Those cottages on the left, they were real hovels, like. Don't forget, the first slum clearance had been over by then, the '30s I think it was. In the '30s they were changed when the lower end was changed, when the real slums, you've seen pictures, I expect, of them. Some of the slums down (unclear 0:31:25) Street and all the way down there. The second time Mrs. Mudway stitched me up was when we were fighting with the Grove Street lot and somebody threw a treacle tin full of concrete over the wall and that hit me on the head and I had to have another lot of stitches from the butcher's wife. So that's the sort of thing that sticks in your mind, but generally, nobody got killed.

I: Do you think the area was as dangerous or more dangerous than any other parts of the town really?

R: I don't think so. From Dixies Corner down to (ph 0:32:16) *Kingditch* Lane now, was all on a par I think from the same sort of level. I don't know what it was like. I expect Whaddon was built then. That was fairly rough.

I: People moved out from your end of town to Whaddon, didn't they?

R: When we were kids, we used to say, 'Can you talk Whaddon?' or, 'Do you speak Manser Street?' You know, by the swimming pool. That was rough. Whaddon was rough. Then the Moors was rough. We still talk about it now, the people that are still alive. Their accents were different. You've got Birmingham people that moved in into the Manser Street area by the Swindon Road area. Call it the swimming pool area. They had a different accent... well, not a different accent, they had different sayings to the people in Whaddon,

and that's why we used to say, 'Do you speak Whaddon?' and the Moors were different. Some of the language in the Moors...

I: When you say the Moors, where do you mean? Where is that?

R: The Moors Estate. There used to be a massive big house down the Tewkesbury Road. Just before the Kingsditch roundabout on the left-hand side there was a massive house called The Moors. That was knocked down and then they built those houses I think in the late '20s, early '30s, something like that. So you go down over the second railway bridge, which is by the Range. You go over that, as you go down there's a turning in left, that's the Moors.

I: So near Princess Elizabeth Way?

R: Brook Street. Brook Street is the last street on the Moors. Then it comes to Lizzy Way, which was just a lane in those days, and a lane to the right as well. There was a roundabout in my time. The first roundabout was built there because it was just a crossroads at one time. There was a garage called the Pikehouse Garage. All those things stick in my mind about the people that lived in St. Paul's and the Whaddon and the Moors had different sort of sayings.

I: That shows that everyone lived in their own little communities that were kind of quite separate.

R: Because they came from the cities, there would be overspills from Coventry and Birmingham and London. Some parts of... I've lost my thread now. You wait until you get this old. Of Whaddon were almost Londoners in ways of thinking. St. Paul's were a lot of travelling types. My granny was from travelling stock, but that was the Stephens. When you look at some of the Kears here, they're a bit dark. My uncle's curly. His brother was curly. His son was called Curly and had darkish hair. My mother came from the Cotswolds, and she used to hate it. She tried to make me talk in a different way. My dad always talked like my granny. You could hardly understand my granny.

I: One of the things that I've heard from a few other people is that they were always unsure whether to tell people that they lived in the Lower High Street.

R: I'm pretty sure, yes.

I: Was that the same for you?

R: Not for me because I didn't care. I love accents. I always have. The BBC have got a lot to answer for, for changing people's accents.

I: Trying to make it all the same.

R: You could not work for the BBC if you had a Yorkshire accent. That was a load of old balls as far as I'm concerned. My wife comes from farming stock, so she finds it a bit strange because when I get with my old mates now, we lapse into vernacular, is that the word?

I: Yes.

R: She doesn't go mad but she just says, ‘Oh, you don't talk like that.’ I’m talking now as a lower ender. I would think however that comes out I don't know. I don't like my voice but a lot of people don't, do they?

I: Nobody likes hearing themselves.

R: No but I wouldn’t change it.

I: That’s who you are.

R: I used to do a lot of shooting on the big estates and stuff and used to dress up a little bit to go on there and I probably, when I was lucky enough to get on these... because it was unheard of in those days to go on a big estate, but I’m lucky as I went through life I got a little bit higher and occasionally I used to get invited. I would try and change my accent a bit then to fall... that’s a bit snobby, isn’t it?

I: You didn't want to be looked down on?

R: Because you were, I think.

I: That’s why. You wouldn't do it...

R: I remember dressing up to go to a shoot in Charlton Abbotts with these millionaires and they worked on the estate and I got invited to a big day. You were expected to dress up a little bit and I remember I put a yellow tie on that... where it came from I don't know. It had pheasants on. I thought, ‘I better put on that.’ I got the piss taken out of me by the locals (Laughter) for wearing this tie. I don't think you should change your accents. You’re local, aren’t you?

I: No. I’m not. I’m originally from Northampton.

R: You bloody got me there.

I: (Laughter).

R: You’ve picked up a little bit.

I: Have I?

R: How long have you been here?

I: Nearly eight years.

R: Christ.

I: I’ve travelled around a lot. Maybe it’s talking to people like you that I’m absorbing it.

R: You’ll bloody catch it in the end. So the stores, I can tell you about them. You know as you go in the front entrance of the college? Caledonians opposite. They always said the Cally could have been kept going. The students would have kept that... that could have been turned into a smashing... not smashing

but a facility for students. Have you seen the pictures of the bomb that dropped right outside the gates there?

I: Yes.

R: Massive crater there. That always sticks in my mind. I can remember that. That must have happened when I lived in... When the bomb dropped, because it was all... they used to discharge the things after trying to bomb (ph 0:39:49) *Martin's* I suppose, it was like that.

I: So when was it that you left the area then for good?

R: My dad bought some old stables up in London Road on the rear of those big houses on the London Road. He bought 100 foot of them, including the coach house and stables. We moved in there about '58, I suppose, something like that.

I: After you left, how often did you go back to the Lower High Street? Was it something that happened now and again or quite a lot?

R: Quite a lot because my granny was still alive. My granny died in '61, so after then it was probably... then my auntie moved away, so she sold those houses that she owned there, probably not after about 1960. Still involved with friends from that area, but they tend to... I've still got some friends now who were born down there. There's a lad on Facebook, (ph 0:41:03) *Blackton*. His name was Black at one time. For some reason it got changed to Blackton because there was some stigma about being called Black. He's a great old historian. He lives in Gloucester now, but he remembers... he's the next generation from me. What's a generation, ten years?

I: Yes, more or less.

R: He's the next generation. He's 66 I think. He remembers a lot of old stuff from there. We chat on Facebook and he'll say, 'Remember old Laura Hooper who owned the second-hand shop?' Second-hand clothes. That was down on the left just before the bridge.

I: After you left, around '58, around '60, did you notice the area began to change a bit?

R: Yes, it did. I still went down there because in 1956 I started to work in a little factory in St. George's Place. Then later on I transferred to the MEB who had their yard, you know where that Florentine palace is, the sub-station there?

I: Yes, the palace.

R: Just up towards the high street a massive big garden. That was the MEB Cheltenham depot. So I still had to go down there right up until '61 when I left home and went away to work. So I was still around that area up until about '61 I suppose. We did have a ride round. We took the neighbour's Jag and we had a ride round. He's from the posh end. He's from Charlton Kings. There was a girl I wanted to try and get to come today. She's brilliant. She won't have anything to do with Facebook. Whenever we get together, two from next-door, two from (ph 0:43:09) *Atherley*, another two from what were the lower-enders, and it starts straight away. 'Got one for you.' And they'd ask a

question. 'Where was the Wembley Cafe?' 'By the King Street.' You say Tony's Cafe on Facebook now... there is a photograph on... and you can just see on the right-hand side 'Tony's'. He was Italian. He looked like Gilbert Roland. I don't know if you know who Gilbert Roland is.

I: No. Oh right, a little moustache.

R: He was always wearing leather and he went in the (ph 0:43:52) *Tartagles*, the ice cream, the Italians, (ph 0:43:55) *Savatellas*, they were Italians. I went to school with both of those. They had a little ice cream shop. What is it now? It's on the corner of Park Street. That was a pub. Opposite there, my relations used to have the Wheatsheaf. If you say The Wheatsheaf, Cheltenham, there's only one.

I: Now that's in (ph 0:44:20) *Neckhampton*, isn't it?

R: That's in Neckhampton, but there was a Wheatsheaf in the Lower High Street opposite Park Street, in 1880, and they were ran by Annie and Mary Kear.

I: So relations.

R: Just down past there, it used to go, if you look on the old maps, 1885 maps, you see the big courts, there were lots of courts, you know like alleyways going up and up to a group of houses. I forget his name. Have you heard about the boxer from lower end?

I: No. I haven't actually.

R: One of his bouts or matches or whatever you call them lasted 2 hours and 58 minutes I think, and that was bare knuckle. He lived in a pub in Cheltenham somewhere.

I: What was his name? Do you remember?

R: Oh god, I shall have to look it up. Pugilist. Wendy Clancy would know. She's from Whaddon. She lives in Canada now. If you want to know anything, she's a mine of information. She's got all the street directories going back 50 years. Her house must be filled with street directories, so she can find out businesses and stuff like that. He used to use the Wheatsheaf where my ancestors... and Wendy came across with his funeral. In attendance, it was so-and-so from a pub, so-and-so from the Bulford Arms, so-and-so from the (ph 0:46:01) *Ryemouth*, all pubs, they all gathered down the lower end by the bridge and followed and two of the attendees were the people my relations from the Wheatsheaf. I can't remember them obviously because in 1880 the pub was knocked down I think. So there are a lot of Kears around there, but a very funny family, very close-knit.

You can't find anything much past my great-grandfather. My mum's you can go on the Cotswolds and find their graves all over the bloody place.

I: So when you left the area and you noticed it began to change a bit?

R: Oh crikey.

I: How did it change? I've heard a lot of the family-owned businesses on the street started to close, people started to move to these new areas, Benhall even, or Whaddon or Hester's Way.

R: I suppose because I was about on the MEB from '62 onwards, I was on the MEB so I travelled around all those streets continuously doing different connections because I was a cable jointer in the old days. That was my first trade. Not an electrician, a plumber, but an electrical plumber, which is completely different. They used to call me an electrician. I don't know anything about wiring. If you want a sub-station built and a cable that size put in, but you travelled round and all the cable laying... when the lower end was refurbished, we put all the new cables in there, so we remember all that change going on. So we did notice a change. Anywhere in town I suppose.

I: Did that area start to get poorer, do you think?

R: I don't think it did really. I thought it improved quite a bit. You still had the old folks who stayed static and stayed in the same class as you put it that way, but I'm pretty sure people's lives improved. It's still quite a rough town now.

I: That's what I was going to ask you. When you go down that area or you see it now how do you feel about it now? What do you think about it now?

R: I feel about the same as I used to when I was a kid. Things have altered, haven't they? It was drinking and smoking in those days but you've got all sorts coming in now, drugs and things have changed from that point of view I think, but you still have that feeling... I got the feeling when I went past the bridge, you get to (unclear 0:48:55) Street, which is quite a nice couple of pubs in there and the Adam and Eve and the thing there. That was quite a nice street. Then Baker Street. There was a youth club there, which was very popular with the youngsters in those days. I used to go there until I was probably 13 or 14. Then I just moved up a grade to drinking and going to pubs. The first pub I went into I was 14. I got drunk and the older lads from the street just threw me in the porch, banged on the door and ran and left me because they knew if my father came out he'd probably...

I: Give them a clip round the ear.

R: That pub's gone now. That's opposite the brewery where the hotel is. Premier Inn. That was the Old Stone House, the first pub I ever got drunk in. The Moors is still... I have the same feeling when I go down the Moors. I don't go down there but if you lived in the Moors, you were fairly lower working class. My uncle Fred was a bricklayer. He had five in the family, so it was a little bit more than normal run-of-the-mill close knit family had, two kids, some only had one. I only had a sister. If I drove down there now I'd feel the same as I did 50 years ago and the same with some parts of St. Paul's, and even Whaddon. Should my outlook change because it's Whaddon? I don't think so really.

I: I just wondered because there are a lot of people that have moved into that area that are unaware of the stories or the people that lived there before.

R: In that way it's changed. The most area that has changed, in my opinion, and that was my late school time, was Fairview. That has gone up in prices.

I: I live not far from there. I live on Prestbury Road.

R: It's a nice area now, where they've changed Sherborne Street. That's where we had our shop. I remember it being a very small electrical business. It wasn't television then. My dad built our first television. It never had a case on it. It never had a cabinet. We were not to go and touch the chassis. When I drive round there now, I think, 'This has improved,' but as I go to the lower end...

I: Is it still the poorer end of town?

R: I think so, yes. I still have that feeling that it's, if you say from Dixies Corner down, taking Hester's Way as well, because a lot of people moved from there to Hester's Way, who went into the houses, like Crampton Place. That's gone now. Manser Street and Folly Lane. It was dog rough in those days. I still go down there, although they've blocked the streets off now so they can't rip round them like they used to. I still have the same feeling now. I don't know whether that's wrong really. People have moved there, they've gone up a bit I suppose, they think, 'It's not a bad area really.' Where did they come from? Have they stepped up or gone sideways? I don't know.

I: It's just interesting we talked about when you were growing up and you were a kid in that area, there was this, 'We're from the lower end and there are other parts of town,' you don't really mix. People looked down at people from your area. Is that still?

R: Yes. It's like it now, and in the mid '70s, next-door, Naunton Park and Charlton Kings. Lad over the road who did very well for himself. He was born down the lower end. He owns Fiddlers Green Farm now. A massive big place. He had his own business. Quite a few of my mates did fairly well. I think if my granny was to see where I lived now, and what we've had, a Mercedes and the four-wheel drives and stuff, she would be astounded, but I suppose that's just progress. I don't know really.

I: Okay. I think we'll stop it there.

R: Okay. You've probably had enough (Laughter).

(End of recording)