

INTERVIEW WITH BEV COLEMAN

[BC]

Okay, away you go. Hi there. Hello.

Nice to meet you.

[JL]

So I'm Janice, this is Lynn from Whitney Museum and we're going to do this chat about your life in Whitney and your job here at Henry Box which is full of history and apparently you've got a few funny stories to tell us. So if you could tell us to start with your background in Whitney. I believe you were born here.

Yeah, I was born in Bridge Street in Whitney. My dad was a foreman at Smith and Phillips Blanket Mill and we lived in a maisonette in Bridge Street in opposite, well at the time it was Jack Harrison's Bakery, but then it became a newsagent. I don't think it's actually anything anymore.

[BC]

It's the old Star News. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

[JL]

And obviously my family's from Whitney. My dad was born at Newland and my mum was born at New Younhood. Well, she wasn't actually.

She was born in her grandmother's house in Long's Place. In Long's Place? Long's Place, yeah, because my grandmother, my great-grandmother, they called her Nurse Cooper.

She'd never had any training but she'd had 14 children of her own. So she used to, if anybody was having a baby, because there was no national health in them days, so if somebody was having a baby they'd call on her and she'd go and apparently she used to say, I'll bring them in and take them out because if somebody was having a baby she'd go and deliver it and if somebody died she'd go and do the necessary, as she used to call it. So what time, what year was that or decade was that?

When my grandmother was born, when my mum was born. When she was doing that job? Yeah, it's sort of 1900s to 1930s.

Oh right, okay, yeah, oh interesting. So she did, my mum was born in 1933. So she was at hatch and dispatch?

Yeah, yeah, but she'd never had any training but 14 children is probably training. Because, yeah, when my mum was born they didn't think she'd survive. She was tiny and the sort of family legend is that Granny Cooper rubbed her in brandy, wrapped her in cotton wool and put her in a shoebox next to the, like they had a range.

They didn't have cookers in them days. Yeah, yeah, I remember my grandmother. A blackened range and that's how she survived.

Really? Yeah. What the brandy did?

I don't know, I don't know. You didn't put it too close to the fire? Hopefully no, no, no, but there you go.

Just one of them things. So did you, were you part of a big family yourself? Did you have lots of brothers and sisters?

I had two brothers and a sister, so I was four of us. Okay, okay. So you were brought up in Whitney.

So can I ask how old you are? I'm 62. Okay, so you were brought up in 1950s, 60s Whitney?

Yeah, well 1960s, 70s, yeah. Yeah, yeah, sorry. I'm talking about myself here.

[BC]
And how, what was Whitney like in those days?

[JL]
A lot smaller and a lot quieter. It was, I mean, Bridge Street, the boys used to play football out on the, out in the street. Did they?

You know, they'd kick a ball across the street and that and play. And that's a busy road. It's massively busy now, but in them days it wasn't.

Yeah, yeah. I actually got run over. I was being crossed over the road when I was, I think I was about seven, eight, because I was going to school.

Being crossed over the road by a policeman.

[BC]
Yeah.

[JL]

Because the policemen used to stand on the corner of State Law. And I went to Hayne Road School. Well, the same as my mum.

My mum was in the first, first ever class when they opened it. Being crossed over the road by the policemen and apparently these guys had done an armed robbery and they came bombing along in a transit van and knocked us both over.

[BC]

Van us both over, yeah.

[JL]

It was all, it was all, it got in the papers. I was famous. But there you go.

And how old were you then? I think I was about seven. Oh, bless you.

Yeah. That wasn't nice. Were you badly injured?

Yeah, my, my leg was, yeah, pretty banged up. Yeah. How about the policeman?

I don't, I think he had like severe bruising and that sort of thing.

[BC]

Right.

[JL]

So, yeah. Did they catch the robbers? I don't know.

You didn't slow them down? I can't remember whether, whether they did or not. I don't think they did because they drove off.

So there you go. So you went to Hayne Road, so that was in the early days? Oh no, you said your mum?

No, my mum, my mum was in the, in the first ever, like the, the, the, when they opened it.

[BC]

Yeah.

[JL]

She was in the first, in the first.

[BC]

Oh, okay.

[JL]

And then you went to? Because last year they had their anniversary, didn't they? What was it?

It was the Whitney County Primary. Was it the 80th anniversary or something? Oh, last year.

And then when did you, you went to? Woodgreen. Yeah.

Yeah, obviously. With, with, with, yeah. Yeah.

I'm just trying to think who was there, teachers. Mr. Worrell was my form tutor. I remember Mr. Worrell. Well, he was head of our house.

[BC]

Yeah, yeah.

[JL]

He was my form tutor when I was in lower school. He taught geography. Yeah.

Yeah, he was a nice man. He was very nice. Quite a nice man.

Mr. Holloway. Anyway, so what was it like as a socialite for Whitney? Was there anything to do in your teenage years?

No, not really. Well, I mean, there was brownies and guides and that sort of thing and that sort of thing. We actually had, do you remember, we had a march to get a youth club.

We had a demonstration. Don't you remember? Yeah, we did.

We did. There was a demo. I think if you look in archives, paper archives and that, you'll see it.

To get a youth club because there was nothing, you know. And then they built the youth club, didn't they? Down by the swimming pool.

Yeah. Yeah. It was a really good youth club, actually.

They used to have a really good disco on a Friday night.

[BC]

I think they had a football club on a Friday night.

[JL]

Oh, football club on a Friday night. Yeah, that was legendary, wasn't it?

[BC]
Yeah. Yeah.

[JL]
You don't have to lie about your age, but yeah, I don't think anybody really cared.

[BC]
Were you around in the days of the sidings?

[JL]
Well, sort of because I was alive, but I was living in Northampton. Oh, right. Okay.

Because I lived in Northampton for 10 years. Right, okay, sorry. So, what happened, when did you, how old were you when you left school and where did you?

I was 16. And what did you do? Well, I left school on the Friday and I started work at Compton's Headdress on the Monday because my auntie got me in.

Oh, right. Because in them days, that's how it worked, wasn't it? My auntie Anne worked at Compton's.

Yeah. So, she put a good word in for me and I ended up on the finishing table. The lady in charge was Joni Forster.

Right. Not Foster, it was Forster. Okay.

And what did you do on the finishing table? Well, just finishing the hat, you know, making sure the peaks were shone up and all that sort of thing and then everything was perfect. And did you enjoy it?

Yeah, it was okay, yeah, yeah. And how long did you do that for? A few months because then I went to college in the September.

Which college was that? Aberdeen and Whitley. But I don't think it was called Aberdeen and Whitley then, I think it was Whitley Technical College because I went to do secretarial, obviously.

Yeah. Everybody went to do secretarial. I didn't get on very well with that.

I can't remember what the lady's name was that taught us. Yeah. Because she used to cover the letters up.

Yeah. And she'd go, lift your wrist, lift your wrist, lift your wrist, and she'd walk behind you. You had to strengthen up your little finger to be able to hit the A and the S.

Yeah, I mean it wasn't like electric typewriters or anything, it was proper, you had to bang them and change the ribbons. Good old days. Kids today don't know they're born, do they?

Did you do shorthands as well? Well, I attempted to do it, yeah. I still can't do it.

My mum was a, even though she was born, she was born with one leg shorter than the other and a crippled hand.

[BC]
Oh right.

[JL]
She later had her leg lengthened. Yeah. Because she was, a big Russian doctor came from Russia and did it.

I don't know whether that was, you know, because she wore a calliper. But she was, well I suppose it'd be called a PA, personal assistant, to John Wilson Stammers.

[BC]
Oh right, yeah.

[JL]
So, and she was really, despite, she could use that hand and one finger, but she would like, touch type this, don't hand stuff and, I've only written 20 words a minute or something like that.

[BC]
She was good then, that's fast. I did 100 words a minute, I have to say, it's very charming.

[JL]
There you go. So did you get a secretarial job? No.

No? No. So what happened after that?

Well, I met my husband, because my brothers, my brothers were in the Morris dancers for Bantam, and we went up to a place called Moulton in Northampton, just outside Northampton, to a Morris dancing thing, and I met my husband up there. So then, tuna throwing and that, and I ended up moving up there.

[BC]
Oh right.

[JL]
So yeah, then that went out the window. I did a bit of, sort of designing and that sort of thing. Designing what?

All sorts of things.

[BC]
Oh yeah.

[JL]
And some, like dressmaking, I made ball gowns and bridesmaids, wedding dresses, that sort of thing.

[BC]
Oh, you're a clever girl.

[JL]
Yeah, I can make a hat, and then I worked in a shoe place, because I worked in the, I don't know whether you've seen a film called, Kinky Boots. Yeah. I worked in that factory.

Did you? In Northampton? Yeah.

Because that's what they're famous for, isn't it? Yeah, yeah, making shoes. Yeah, yeah.

And, and I claimed to fame, is I made a pair of shoes for the Queen Mother. Wow. Did you?

Yes. Wow. But anyway.

I'm impressed. That's brilliant. So I can make everything from hats, to shoes, to handbags.

Oh wow. How interesting. There you go.

And then, we had a pub for a little while, up in Northampton. Then I trained as a psychiatric nurse, and did that for a little while, three years.

[BC]
Yeah.

[JL]

Then I had the kids, and then I moved back down because Northampton's not a nice, well in them days, it wasn't a nice, where we were living, it wasn't a nice place to you wouldn't want to bring your kids up there. So I came back here. So you and your husband?

Yeah. And how many kids did you have? I've got one.

That's another story. I've had, I've, I've been pregnant with nine children. I've got, I've got two.

So.

[BC]

Oh really, so you've had.

[JL]

I've had six miscarriages, and then I have my son, Jacob, who lived for two, two hours. And then I've got my son, my daughter. So yeah, there you go.

It's life, isn't it? Was that, I mean, under three years ago, you know, my daughter's just had my baby by the age of fourteen. I suppose it's so much more advanced these days with that sort of thing, isn't it?

You know, if you can't hold on to a baby. Oh yeah, they do all sorts of things now.

[BC]

Yeah. At least you've got your son and your daughter.

[JL]

Yeah.

[BC]

So what are their names?

[JL]

My daughter's called Tiffany. Yeah. And she's a teacher.

All right. Locally? Yeah, she works at Wattfield.

All right. Junior school. So near Swindon.

[BC]

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

[JL]

Where it's attached to the military academy. Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah.

And then my son's called Thomas, and he is, well, he works. Travis Perkins. That's right.

He's a manager for Travis Perkins at the moment. They're the building managers.

[BC]

Yeah. Yeah.

[JL]

Okay. He keeps getting poached. Well, he must be good.

He is very good at his job.

[BC]

Yeah. Yeah. So, so you moved back to Whitney.

[JL]

We went to Whitney. What year was that? 1993.

Right. Okay. Yeah.

So did your children go to schools in?

[BC]

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Yeah. Yeah.

[JL]

They went to St. Mary's. Yeah. And then they went to Batts.

Yeah. And then they came here.

[BC]

Yeah. Yeah.

[JL]

Because obviously giving them the Crofts.

[BC]

Yeah.

[JL]

But with St. Mary's, you had to prove. Yeah. A prior.

You sort of. Yeah. Because my great grandmother and my grandmother and aunties, because they came from the wrong place.

So they all went to St. Mary's so I could prove that I was.

[BC]

Yeah. Yeah. My brother, we moved when I was a child and my brother went to St. Mary's and I went to Batts. So yeah, you could get the kids in there. Yeah.

[JL]

But you had to be confused. Yes. But yeah, we're very strict.

Yeah. It's a very good school. I mean, even now there's only about 60, 70 children.

What else than that?

[BC]

It's hilarious. Yeah. Yeah.

[JL]

It is a no-slip school. Of course that's opposite Henry Bolts. Yeah.

Yeah. Yeah. Right.

So you had children and at what point did you go back to work? Well, my mother and father-in-law came and lived with us for a bit and then my father-in-law, he had cancer and my mother-in-law went back up to Northampton and I looked after him. And then that was 1997 when he died.

I decided to go back to work. So yeah, so then I came, my mum and dad were working here at the time, right? Even though they were both retired, they came back to work here as cleaners.

Didn't they?

[BC]

Yeah.

[JL]

They didn't retire until they were 73. Yeah. So yeah, I came and worked here as a cleaner and that's it.

I was going to be here for a couple of years while the kids were little. Yeah. Because it suited, because my husband was a postman.

Right. So he was at work in the morning.

[BC]
Yeah.

[JL]
And then I went to work after I picked the kids up from school, I went to work. So they had them, you know, while I was at work.

[BC]
So it worked out great.

[JL]
Yeah. But yeah.

[BC]
So how long have you been you're the caretaker? Yeah. How long have you?

[JL]
Well, I was a cleaner and then I upped me hours and upped me hours because people left and whatever. Then I was the cleaner in charge. And then, how many years I've been a caretaker?

It's got to be, I don't know, because I was a cleaner in charge for 15 years.

[BC]
Yeah.

[JL]
I think, I think I've been a caretaker, maybe six years. Right. Okay.

Do they have more than one caretaker? We've got three caretakers. Right.

I've always been the evening caretaker. Right. Okay.

Because obviously I've worked evenings.

[BC]
Yeah.

[JL]
Yeah. I prefer evenings anyway because of the daylight.

[BC]
Yeah.

[JL]
But yeah, so we've got an evening caretaker, a morning caretaker, and then there's another caretaker that sort of bridges both shifts. Do you have to work weekends as well? We, we do weekends, we let buildings out.

Right. So we come in. Yeah.

To unlock and lock up and that sort of thing.

[BC]
Oh right.

[JL]
Do setups and that sort of thing.

[BC]
Yeah.

[JL]
But that's on a regular basis obviously.

[BC]
Yeah.

[JL]
Not every weekend. So is it a good job? Do you enjoy it?

[BC]
I love it. Yeah.

[JL]
Yeah. And do you know all the children? No.

No, there's, I mean there's, there's over a thousand of them. That's a lot. Some of them you get to know.

Yeah. If they're a little bit of a character or whatever.

[BC]
Yeah.

[JL]

I mean in, in the past they don't do it now because things have changed obviously. In the past if they, if they'd done something silly then we had them after school to do a bit of picking, that sort of thing.

[BC]

Yeah.

[JL]

So we got to meet.

[BC]

Yeah.

[JL]

Some of them, they're cheeky little devils some of them.

[BC]

Yeah.

[JL]

But obviously we don't do that anymore because it's. Not PC is it? Not PC, no, no.

Not allowed anymore. But that's the only thing that's changed really. I mean there's, the school's still the same.

It's fallen, it's still falling apart. But yeah. It's a very, very old school isn't it?

Tell us about, a bit about Well we've got, we've got the Mary Box building. That is 1660. Yeah.

Yeah. Then we've got Trelawney House which was the old bishop's residence. Yeah.

It was built for the, the Bishop of Winchester. So that's that. Yeah.

[BC]

I'll show you later. Yeah, yeah.

[JL]

That's 1723. Yeah. And then obviously this is the old police station and the courthouse because this would have been the judges chambers.

Right, so we're talking. This is sort of Victorian.

[BC]

This is the building that's next to, just for the sake of the interview, this is the building that's at the front of Henry Box School to the right hand side. It would be to the left hand side if you were looking at it. But um, it's a really old building.

I used to get a brownness upstairs.

[JL]
Did you? Yeah, years ago. Yeah, yeah.

And that was, the vicar lived in the old building. In the, in Trelawney House.

[BC]
Yeah.

[JL]
Yeah, it was, it was the um, yeah, the vicarage at one point and then we bought it.

[BC]
Yeah.

[JL]
Because there is the, the um.

[BC]
I've gone blank haven't I? Yeah. It'll come back in a minute.

Saller. A cellar.

[JL]
The cellar's been closed off now but there, there is a tunnel that goes from the cellar of Trelawney House into the crypt of the um, under the church. Is there?

[BC]
Yeah. Fascinating. So have you ever been in it?

No. No, it's been sealed off. No, because it's all sealed off.

Is it? Yeah. Is that so we could escape quickly I guess?

I don't know.

[JL]
I don't know. There is a, there is a vicar's ghost up there as well.

[BC]

Oh is there? Yeah, yeah.

[JL]

So tell us, tell us about the stories about the ghosts. Oh there's loads, there's loads of ghosts, yeah.

[BC]

Oh don't tell me.

[JL]

We actually, one of my colleagues, we were looking at the, long story short, we had some lads on site that were running about, getting up to mischief. So we were looking at the cameras to try and ascertain where they were, what they were doing. Yeah.

And out the back of the physics block we could see these two figures.

[BC]

Right.

[JL]

Dancing about. Really? My colleague, she's never seen a ghost.

I see ghosts all the time. I've never seen a ghost. All the ladies in my family can see ghosts.

Okay. And we have dreams about what's going to happen in the future and it happens.

[BC]

Okay.

[JL]

Yeah, we're all weird. Anyway. Yeah, we could see these, these two figures.

They were like dancing. There was a man and a lady and then there was a little girl stood off to the side.

[BC]

This was at night?

[JL]

This was at night, yes. At the back of, behind physics. Anyway, where was I?

What was I talking about? You were talking about those ghosts.

[BC]

The ghosts, yeah, yeah.

[JL]

So that was, that's one.

[BC]

Yeah.

[JL]

Obviously there's the ghost of Mary Brookes. A lot of people have felt her, heard her. I've seen her.

Who was she? A woman. You know, like a Victorian.

Well no, obviously no, she would have been Stuart. So for people listening, who was she? Mary Brookes was, well, the school's called Henry Brookes because Mary and Henry Brookes founded the school.

Henry Brookes died two years after the school was built. So it was Mary, she's a bit of a hero of mine, actually. It was Mary that actually made the school, developed the school.

She even got a law passed through the parliament of the day so that she could actually run the school and have a say in how the school was run.

[BC]

Oh, how interesting.

[JL]

Yeah, she was, she had seven children with Henry. Yeah, she was a real. So was she a nice ghost?

Yeah, well she's to me. The only time she gets annoyed is if things are moved and things that she doesn't like. When we were, down in the cellar of the, where my office is, but down in the cellar under the building, at the back we've got a workshop where there was always a wall, a sort of a wooden wall, where we knocked it out to try and make a bit more space.

And the beam that comes down through the building, hanging on the beam, was a big old key. I presume the original key for the building. And we thought, well, we'll put it in the archive, you know, took it off the hook that it was hanging on.

And the lights, the lights were going on and off, doors were slamming, a filing cabinet just whopped straight over.

[BC]
Really?

[JL]
She went absolutely mad. And as soon as we took them, we said, well, the only thing that's changed is the cage, so we put it back on the hook, stopped.

[BC]
What? Oh my goodness. I've never seen anything in my life.

[JL]
She did not like that. She wanted that key back where it was supposed to be. Yeah.

Yeah. But it's in the Mary Box building. Yeah.

When you, if you sit in my office, loads of people have heard it. The building is locked, totally locked in darkness, nobody in it, apart from us down in the cellar.

[BC]
So it's not used for anything?

[JL]
Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. But no, you will hear the door to the head's office open a shut and you'll hear footsteps go across the door, across the floor and there's nobody there. It's not just me, it's a lot of people have heard that.

[BC]
Right.

[JL]
A lot of people. She's, she lets you know that she's about. Yeah.

You know, the other night, a couple of weeks ago, me and one of my colleagues Simon were sat down there and again, it was all locked up, nobody else here. We heard the door because there's a, we go up the servant stairs and come out. We heard the door at the top of the stairs open and shut and then on the door.

I looked at Simon and Simon said, did you hear that? I said, yeah, it's Mary. Well, just as we said that, it did it again.

Bang, bang, bang.

[BC]

Gosh. It doesn't scare you. No.

[JL]

Well, I've been in nearly 29 years. If she was going to do me any damage, she would have done it by now. What does she look like?

Well, it's just a shadow. It's a shadow. Okay, so it's not, it's not clear.

No, it's, it's just a shadow. It's a dark sort of shadow. It's a shadow of a person.

An older woman do you think? Well, no. Well, you can't really tell.

It's just like an outline.

[BC]

Yeah. Yeah. Wow.

And how long have you been seeing her for?

[JL]

Oh, years. Years. Years and years.

Yeah. 20? Yeah.

30? Yeah, since I've been here. Yeah.

Wow. Yeah. And it didn't bother you at the beginning?

No, because I'd see ghosts all the time. So who else have you seen? Oh, there's Mary.

There is a vicar. Several people have seen him on the top stairs going up to the, what would have been the servants quarters in the vicarage, in the Trelawney House. There's a little boy.

We call him the whistler. He's at the back of Robinson. You know he's about because you can hear faint whistling.

There's nothing there. It's the D&T block.

[BC]

Oh, okay.

[JL]

I've seen him clearly though. He's a little boy, maybe about that high. He's got like a striped cap on and a school uniform, short, but he's got a box, a wooden box around his neck, like a gas mask box.

Oh, right. So in the Second World War. He's obviously from the Second World War.

Yeah. And he whistles. He's obviously happy.

[BC]
Yeah.

[JL]
Yeah. Have you, anybody ever researched who it might be? No.

No. No. No.

And I mean, there's another ghost in the cells, the old cells. I'll show you them in a minute. Cells?

Where used to be a police station. Oh, here.

[BC]
Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

[JL]
So the, um, what used to be the music rooms, it's business now, but they use the storage cupboards, but, um, they're the old cells from the Victoria prison. There is a ghost in there. One of the other cleaners, she's quite sensitive to ghosts as well.

She was cleaning in there one day and a cupboard opened and all of the contents.

[BC]
Oh my gosh.

[JL]
We think it's the guy, I don't know whether you've heard the story about the axe murderer.

[BC]
No.

[JL]
In Whitney. Tell us. No?

Oh, anyway. Anyway, this guy, sort of Victorian era, he was lodging in a house down Marlborough Lane.

[BC]
Right.

[JL]
And he fancied the girl that was the servant there. She was like the, you know, general purpose cleaner. And she kept saying, no, no, no.

Anyway, one day he'd have a few drinks and he sort of tried it on with her, whatever. And she rebuffed him, apparently. He picked up a small hatchet that they'd been using to cut firewood, because she was doing something by the fire.

Oh, nasty. Stove dredging with the axe, apparently. And he, apparently, he walked up the church green, came into the police station, put the axe on the counter and said, I've killed her.

So they took him in, put him in the cells, came into the courthouse in there, which is the reception now. Came into the courthouse the next day and the judge put the old black cap on and said, take him to Oxford. So we think that's who it is, the horn in the cells.

[BC]
Oh my gosh.

[JL]
There you go. And it doesn't? No, no, no.

No, I suppose the ghost wouldn't have a hatchet, would it?

[BC]
Oh God, no. No, no.

[JL]
The worst it can do is throw things about, you know what I mean? Yeah, yeah. Who else is there?

Oh, well, I mean, there was, weird. There was one guy, we were in the science block doing some cleaning, me and Simon again, my colleague Simon, and one of the teachers upstairs had said, oh, did you see that? There was a bloke walking about.

Who was it? I don't know, I don't think it was anybody, you know, whoever it was, we'd had a look, couldn't find anybody. I felt all cold.

Anyway, I was cleaning and this guy who was stood behind me, reddy faced, sort of, white hair, and he was like, oh. So I turned round and said, what do you want? It was a dead person, obviously, it's one life.

Yeah, yeah. And he said, my name's Bert. And I said, okay Bert, but I'm really, I'm busy at the minute, and can we just, you know.

Anyway, he disappeared. He appeared again in the foyer, a forgery foyer, I was cleaning in there. My name's Bert.

And I said, well, okay, well, what do you want? Tell our Julie to tell our David to get the doctor and get it sorted out. I thought, well, the only Julie I know is one of the cleaners.

Why? Do I, could I say her name or not? So I went up to Julie and I said, Julie, I said, you ain't going to believe this, but this bloke has just appeared to me.

Do you know anybody called Bert? And she said, well, I had an uncle Bert, but he's dead. I said, well, thank God for that, because he's just appeared to me.

At least you know he is. I said, give me a message to tell you, tell our Julie to tell our David, whoever David is, to get the doctors and get it sorted out. Well, Julie said, well, that's my oldest brother's called David.

I said, okay, fair enough. I said, well, tell him to get to the doctors and get it sorted out, whatever it is. Well, it turned out that a couple of months beforehand, Julie's brother, who was a drayman, had fell off the lorry and he'd bashed his shoulder.

And he hadn't gone to the doctors and it had been getting painful. So we went to the doctors and the doctors said, well, yeah, if you hadn't have come, you would have ended up doing more damage than we could correct. You know, you'd have to have physio and all that sort of thing.

[BC]
So there you go.

[JL]
Good old Bert. Yeah. Because he knew Julie was stuck.

Presumably. Yeah. And he knew that there was somebody that would, who would be able to give the message to her.

[BC]
Yeah. Can I ask, do any of the children ever say, the kids here, the pupils, do they ever see Is it just you guys? Cause you're here constantly all the time.

[JL]

Cause we're at night. Yeah. Yeah.

[BC]

Too busy in the daytime. So they don't come out, I guess.

[JL]

I wouldn't imagine. No.

[BC]

I mean, before it gets dark, then I'm out of here. It's half past three on the 10th of December and I'm gone by 4.30. Are you ever on your own here? Yeah.

Yeah. Yeah.

[JL]

I've been on my own about one, two o'clock in the morning. Yeah. It's people that are alive that I'm worried about.

So you've never taken the psychic thing in any other direction, you know, as a medium? No, it's just purely what you see here. Spirits appear to me.

Yeah. Sometimes they'll appear to me. I could be stood in a queue and they would appear to me and they'll be like, no, no, no, no.

I don't want to be, you know, I don't want people thinking I'm a loony, you know, tapping somebody on the shoulder and saying, oh, by the way, your gran's stood there. Yeah.

[BC]

They do say some people can receive this. Obviously one of these that can receive.

[JL]

They trust you. Maybe they just trust you and know that you're not frightened and you're receptive to it. Yeah.

Maybe. I don't know. Yeah.

I don't know. I've always been the same. We had a ghost in the, where I was born in Bridgestreet.

We had a ghost. We used to call him Fred and he was a Cavalier.

[BC]

Was he?

[JL]

Yeah. And he'd wake up and he'd be stood at the end of your bed or he'd look through the window at you because we had like three bedrooms and then there was a big front room and there was like a window. Yeah.

That looked into the bedroom, into the hallway between the bedrooms, if you know what I mean, because it was a masonette. Yeah. And you'd look up and he'd be stood there looking through the window at you or you'd be having a wash, look up in the mirror and he'd be stood behind you.

Yeah. In the, you could see him in the reflection in the mirror. Really?

Yeah. Oh Ben. Yeah.

Oh. How interesting.

[BC]

Yeah.

[JL]

That's fascinating. Maddening. Yeah.

[BC]

So Hemibots, it's obviously a place that is full of sort of history a lot of people don't see or know about. So it's been really interesting to hear.

[JL]

It's an old, it's an old site and there's lots of, there's some old buildings. Not all ghosts are old. Some of them are modern.

[BC]

Can somebody say something about, maybe I've got this wrong, maybe in the museum I've heard, is there not a square somewhere that's got people buried in a square just on the...

[JL]

No, that's the plague pit.

[BC]

The plague pit.

[JL]

In the, in the plague wood.

[BC]

So there is a plague pit.

[JL]

Yes. Yes. It's not plague.

It's, they were, it's a mass grave, I believe, from the cholera.

[BC]

Okay.

[JL]

Because plague wood is actually owned by the church. It was part of the churchyard.
Okay.

Because there's a gate goes, you know, the path that goes through the churchyard.

[BC]

Yeah.

[JL]

There is a gate on the actual wall to go into plague wood. Plague wood.

[BC]

So where are we talking about?

[JL]

It's called plague wood, yeah.

[BC]

Just down there on the...

[JL]

Well, I'll show you in a minute. So in St. Mary's? No, it's actually in the school grounds.

[BC]

It's in the school grounds, yeah, I'm not sure what's happening.

[JL]

Yeah.

[BC]

Because wasn't it something to do with, there's a building over here that was a hotel that were bringing people out of Oxford that were ill and put them in there and the ones that died came into...

[JL]

Yeah, probably. Plague wood. Yeah.

Yeah.

[BC]

I can't remember the name of it. Anyway.

[JL]

Was that where Boots was?

[BC]

No.

[JL]

Because that was a hotel, wasn't it? That was a destitute? No, not a destitute.

No, the workhouse was at Tyrehill.

[BC]

Yeah, yeah. Right, we've gone off tangent.

[JL]

Yes, you have, Liz. I'm doing this interview, aren't you? I shut up now.

[BC]

So you, let's, are you going to keep doing this job then for the foreseeable?

[JL]

You're going to... I've got four years. Yeah.

Before I can retire. Yeah, yeah. So hopefully.

Yeah, you're going to do that one. Hopefully, yeah. As long as I'm, as long as I stay healthy.

Yeah. You know, able to do it. Yeah, absolutely.

We have the invitation to believe you. I've paid me pension for a long time now. Yeah, absolutely you have.

Going back to Whitney, can I just ask you a few things? Like, how do you think the community has changed over the years? That's a hard one.

[BC]

Do you think it's got bigger for sure?

[JL]

It's got bigger and it's not the community that used to... When I was a kid, everybody in Bridgetree was aunt or uncle. Because in them days, you didn't address an adult.

You either addressed them as Mr. or Mrs. whatever, or they were auntie. Yeah. Or uncle.

Yeah. Because it was a respect thing. Respectful.

[BC]

Yeah.

[JL]

And there was, it was like village parenting. Yeah. If we were all playing out.

Yeah. If one of us fell over in ourselves or whatever, the nearest mother would take him in and, you know, without thinking.

[BC]

Yeah.

[JL]

Without thinking about safeguarding or, you know.

[BC]

Yeah.

[JL]

Because everybody parented everybody. Yeah. It was a community.

You knew all your neighbours in those days. Of course you did. Yeah.

We lived next door to them for years, didn't you? It's very different these days. Yeah.

I mean, we used to go out and our mum had like some holidays. Our mum would give us a jam sandwich and a bottle of squash. Yeah.

If you was lucky.

[BC]
Yeah.

[JL]
And she'd say, off you go then. Be back before the lights come on.

[BC]
Yeah. I remember that. There was no mobile phones.

[JL]
Yeah.

[BC]
Yeah. Yeah.

[JL]
That's right, down the bathing house. Down the bathing house. Well, you could swim in the river then because it was clean, wasn't it?

I learned to swim in the bathing house. So we're talking about the Windrush, which runs through Witney. Yeah.

And used to go down there.

[BC]
So the old bathing place, which was just part of the river, wasn't it?

[JL]
No, there was huts down there, wasn't there? There was. There was changing huts and that.

And there was a diving board. And there was a guy that used to.

[BC]
There was a guy used to.

[JL]
There was a lifeguard down there, wasn't there, when we were kids.

[BC]
Was there? Yeah. It was really clean and beautiful.

[JL]
Yeah, it was a proper bathing place.

[BC]
Yeah.

[JL]
Yeah. Was the cinemaster here when you were a kid? So at the palace?

Oh yeah, Stumpy. Yeah. What was his name?

David. Huddleston. Huddleston.

[BC]
Yes.

[JL]
But we used to call him Stumpy. Yeah. We used to shout up the stairs.

Wait till he got up to the top of the stairs and we'd shout, oh, it's that bit. And then leg it and hide. Get up onto the balcony thingy.

No, across the road. But across. Get up onto the.

Yes. So he couldn't see us. And he used to shout, I know who you are, you fiddler.

I'll bloody tell your dad when I see him. He used to shake his fist. Oh God.

He used to go in the cinema in the afternoons, in the afternoons, turn the lights on. Queenie. Shut up you lot.

Get out. And there was Queenie. Yeah.

Who used to sell the ice creams. Oh yeah. With her trolley, with her little tray and that.

[BC]
That's such a good memory. I don't remember her. And he used to say, put that bloody fag out.

Good old days. Yeah.

[JL]
Rocky Stannard, the copper. Yeah. Remember him?

[BC]
Yeah, I do. He used to write a column for the Whitney cassette.

[JL]

What are you doing at school? Oh, I've got an appointment. Oh, right.

I'll ask your dad about that later on. And he would, you know. Everybody knew your dad.

Oh, everybody knew my dad. My dad was very famous in Witney. What was his name?

Don Fiddler his name was. Don Fiddler. Yeah.

He was a fireman. Yeah. So was my brother.

[BC]

Yeah.

[JL]

Most of the kids, when I was at senior school at Wood Green, there was a gang of us. There was Kay Godfrey and Donna Heartless.

[BC]

Sean Heartless.

[JL]

Yeah. Sean Heartless. Yeah.

Yeah. That was Donna's older brother.

[BC]

Kim. Yeah.

[JL]

And Kim. Yeah. That was Donna's older sister.

But their dads were firemen with my dad. Oh, right. And then there was Paul and Patrick Haley.

We were all the same age and we all hung about in a gang because all our dads were in the fire service. Oh, right. So, like Friday and Saturday nights.

Yeah. In them days, they had the fire service club. Yeah.

Which is still there, but I don't think they open it now because my dad was the steward as well. Oh, right. We used to have discos and things.

Yeah. Mrs. Haley used to organise us. So, it was a real part of the community.

[BC]
Oh, yeah. Yeah.

[JL]
They were both St. John's Ambulance people, mum and dad. Yeah. And mum was, because she went to Haley Road Junior and then she went to the Wesleyan.

[BC]
Oh, where was that?

[JL]
I don't think it's there anymore. No. It was at the Methodist Church.

You know, there's buildings, what's it called now? Oh, right. At the back.

[BC]
Is it Hackett's? No, it was Hackett's. It's now number 14, is it?

That one, do you mean?

[JL]
Yeah. You go out of the back of the Methodist Church and then there's another building there.

[BC]
Oh, I know what you mean. It used to be the girls' brigade.

[JL]
That used to be the Wesleyan school.

[BC]
Oh, was that it? Yeah. Yeah.

[JL]
They only went until they were 14, though, because dad went to, because by then mum and dad had moved to Ducklington. So, dad went to Ducklington Junior School and then he came to the Bats as a senior school. Oh, right.

Because it was a senior school then. Oh, was it? Yeah.

That's interesting.

[BC]
Yeah.

[JL]
But they, obviously, they left school at 14. Yeah. In them days.

But, yeah. So, it's a very different town. Oh, gosh, yeah.

And what, that was quite a good question, this. What do you think future generations should know about this place or time? What do you think?

I think that they should be, sort of, taught about the history of the place, of the school and of the town and everything.

[BC]
Yeah.

[JL]
Because I think it's important that people know where they've come from.

[BC]
Yeah.

[JL]
Yeah. Which is, so that they can know where they're going. If you know what, do you know what I mean?

Yes. Do you understand what I mean? Yeah, that's true.

Do you agree?

[BC]
I mean, I love history.

[JL]
I've always loved history.

[BC]
Have you?

[JL]
Yeah. Oh, you're in the perfect place then.

[BC]
Yeah.

[JL]

I'm trying to sort it out. Because we used to have heritage open days. I'm trying to, sort of, sort out so that we can start having a heritage open days again.

[BC]

Oh, that would be great.

[JL]

And, in fact, maybe the museum could, could get involved with that.

[BC]

Yeah, maybe. You know.

[JL]

We've got a beautiful ancient book, like, I'll show you in a minute, book later. Yeah.

[BC]

Are the kids here actually told the history of this place ever?

[JL]

I think so, probably.

[BC]

I don't know. Probably on that side, but I just wondered if they're actually told the rest of it. I don't know.

It's fascinating though, isn't it? You know, I mean, my kids came here. I didn't know any of that.

[JL]

Yeah. I mean, they're 40 and 43 now, so it was a long time ago, but is there any other particular story or memory you'd want to share that you haven't told us about? Any juicy bits?

[BC]

I don't know. Goings-on?

[JL]

Oh, yeah, yeah, no, there's been goings-on here, but I can't mention the goings-on because the people that have the goings-on may or may not be still alive.

[BC]

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. Yeah, yeah, yeah. No, we'll forget that.

Yeah, yeah.

[JL]

Okay, well, I think that's probably more than my job's worth. Yeah, yeah, absolutely, but it's been absolutely fascinating to tell you all about the history here, and it's a pity we haven't got a video as well.

[BC]

It is.

[JL]

If you're going to take us around, maybe we'll have to, you know, in the future, maybe we could expand on that and do a video recording with you as you take us around.

[BC]

That would be a really good one. We'll ask about that.

[JL]

You can perhaps take some pictures of those.

[BC]

Yeah, oh, can we take, yeah, so while we're going around, we'll just make some photos of the places. Yeah. Okay, well, thank you.

Yeah, thank you very much.

[JL]

It's been lovely to meet you, and yeah, fascinating.