

## INTERVIEW WITH ALISON MARSH

[SM]

Hello, good afternoon. My name is Sami Masani and I'm with My Vision Oxfordshire, here to help Hannah Kishon and the Whitney Industry Museum collect oral histories for their oral history project. And the date today is the 21st of January 2026.

And I am sitting with Alison Harris. Alison, would you please say, sorry, Alison Marsh, would you please say your full name for the record?

[AM]

Alison Marsh.

[SM]

And is that what you'd like to be called?

[AM]

Yes.

[SM]

Alison Marsh?

[AM]

Yes.

[SM]

Okay, Alison, thank you. Now, Alison, can you tell us a little bit about your family and your earliest memories of Whitney?

[AM]

My dad worked for Earliest Blanket Factory on the top of Mill Street. He was a carpenter there. And my earliest memories is of the sweet shop that was just along the road from us that my dad would always take me to.

Yes, we used to go shopping on a Friday night to, where the co-op was now, it was called International. And we would go round. And by the time we got to the till, I'd always stuck about three or four bags of chocolate in, which was too late then for my dad not to let me have it because he was in the process of paying.

[SM]

That sounds so funny. Okay, so you said you were born in Whitney, so it was your dad who moved to Whitney then?

[AM]

Yes, my dad originally came from Fairford, which is about half an hour away. And then he moved to Whitney after the war and when he met my mum.

[SM]

So what would you say primarily brought your father to Whitney?

[AM]

I think it was because he met my mum.

[SM]

How long have you lived in Whitney now?

[AM]

I lived in Whitney altogether probably for about 35 years.

[SM]

From when to?

[AM]

From when I was born until my daughter, who's now 31, until she was nine.

[SM]

And you've basically stayed local to Whitney, in and around, haven't you?

[AM]

Yes, I have. I stayed local to Whitney because that's where my dad was. So when I moved out, I didn't want to move away from my dad so that I could still look after him.

[SM]

How has Whitney or your local community changed in the time that you've been on it, or has it not changed?

[AM]

It's changed loads. It's so much bigger now. When I was younger, on a Tuesday, it used to be half-day closing, so all the shops would close on a Tuesday afternoon.

There were no big estates or anything. It was really small and lovely, kind of one-off shops, which they're not anymore because they've all had to close down for the bigger shops. So, yeah, it's changed a lot.

[SM]

And how do you find that change?

[AM]

I don't like it, which is awful because I know I should, but it just feels as though the essence of where I grew up isn't there anymore. You don't know anyone now, whereas a few years ago I'd walk down the street and meet loads of people that I was at school with, and now you very rarely see anyone that you know.

[SM]

What's your favourite place to meet people in Whitney when you lived there?

[AM]

And that's where we used to go, really. And then when I was a bit older, we'd go to the football club and the sidings, which was where Whitney Railway Station was, which was closed down a long time ago, but two of the carriages were kept there to turn into a nightclub.

[SM]

Carriages?

[AM]

Yeah, that's why it's called the sidings.

[SM]

Sorry?

[AM]

That's why it's called the sidings, because it was train carriages.

[SM]

Oh, that's so interesting. And what about now? In the current time, what is your favourite place to go to in Whitney?

[AM]

I don't think I have a favourite place anymore. No, because I don't live in Whitney. I live about ten miles away now, so I only go to Whitney for work.

I guess the main places I like to go in Whitney is just to go and see my friends at their houses, which is on Burwell. Yeah, that's the main place. There's nowhere else that I meet people or whatever.

[SM]

So, would you say that not just the landscape, but the community itself hasn't changed any since you lived there?

[AM]

Yes, the population has increased hugely, as has the residential houses. It's so vast now that it's completely different to how I remember when I was growing up.

[SM]

And the people there, they've changed as well?

[AM]

Yeah, yeah.

[SM]

Do you want to comment on what kind of changes?

[AM]

You just don't know anyone anymore. It's just so many people that I don't have a clue now.

[SM]

Right. So, maybe a memorable day that you had in Whitney? What is one of the more memorable days that you can think of?

[AM]

I think when I was younger, the most memorable day was May dancing when we were at primary school and we would all go up to Church Green and there was a Maypole. And so we would go Maypole dancing and dancing with partners, little partners from school, whether you liked them or not. And my dad always made me up some flowers to take because we used to take it for the May Queen.

And my dad would sneak out of work and all his friends would cover for him so he could come up and see me and May dancing.

[SM]

When you think of Whitney, can you think of a memorable object that reminds you of Whitney?

[AM]

Early's blanket, the chimney stack at the top of the road. Yeah, that always reminds me of Whitney.

[SM]

Yeah, that was quite an iconic experience. What are your hopes for the camp's future?

[AM]

I hope in some ways it can stop growing at quite the rate it does to turn it more back into a market town. But I guess people are saying that about everywhere that they lived and where they grew up. It's just changed beyond all recognition because there are so many more people and not enough facilities to have.

To interest everyone.

[SM]

Do you then hope that perhaps Whitney would become more accommodating for different interests?

[AM]

Yeah, I think because the main thing in Whitney, especially when I was growing up, is it was known as a place that had so many pubs. There were like ten pubs just along Corn Street itself, so that's what Whitney was known for, how many pubs it had in such a small area. And that's all there are now, it's just pubs and coffee shops and state agents.

So yeah, some of the heart has gone, maybe, but because I don't live there I guess I don't know what goes on in the evenings really.

[SM]

If you had to leave a little note to Whitney, like a love note or just something to commemorate the town in some way, what would it say do you think?

[AM]

It would say that it was a really lovely safe place to grow up. I have good memories of it, living there with my dad. And I guess some bad memories of when I didn't live there with my dad and I had to go with my mum, which I really didn't want to do.

So when I was able to move back when my dad got custody of me, I think that was the best thing.

[SM]

Alison, thank you very, very much for today and we really appreciate your time. Absolutely, this is interview ending at 3.44pm and thank you very much.

[AM]

You're welcome.