

## TRANSCRIPTION FROM DENBY COURT VIDEO

### WATCHING THE HOP FARM VISIT TAPE

Lee: ...What's a bushel? One of those big baskets? And how much did you get for them?

A: Sometimes you'd get five bushels for a shilling and when they thought the hops were big, they used to take more 6 bushels a shilling. We used to pick more than 6 bushels a day. More than that. My sister and I went until we were about sixty, when they started the machines. My sister and I used to have one book with it all on and keep it right to the end, take the money at the end and buy something that we wanted.

Lee: What did you do for food?

A: When we used to pick in the fields, one of us used to go up to the shops they had up there. One place we went, they had a hut thing: it was like a shop and you could go and buy all sorts of things. On Saturday, you used to go to the proper little village or up town and get more for the week. In the daytime, one used to stay on the bin and the other used to go up shopping and get things for your dinner and put your dinner on and make a pot of tea.

We slept on faggots with straw on it. We used to take a big pallet thing and fill it up with straw and make it like a mattress. The faggots were bunches, like a witch's broom. They laid them down and laid the straw on top. We used to have them tied ...bundles of twigs. We had to get up early. They'd knock at the hut door and wake you up. It was like a holiday to us because we never had enough money to go on holiday.

Lee: When was the first year you went?

A: I was about ten, I suppose when I first went. I'm 85 now. The boys used to make fires with wood. That's what we used to cook on outside. When we had our tea, we had a kettle and we used to put it on an oil stove. It used to keep the hut warm and everything.

B: And we had candles

A: I didn't have candles, I had a Tilly Lamp, a proper Tilly lamp, an oil stove to put the kettle on and a taper for lighting the fire.

Lee: We've cooked the food and eaten it. Before we go to bed, we had to 'go somewhere'. Where did you go?

A: When I first went, we used to have to go in the hedges. Afterwards, they made toilets what you take out and empty them. You couldn't flush it. You had to make a hole in the hedge and put that in.

Lee: Did one of you stand on guard while the other went in the hedge

A: We used to find a place where there wasn't anyone: walk away from all the others. When you was in the hop fields, you would walk away and go where there wasn't anybody.

Lee: Did you sing songs?

A: Oh yes, you sang all day:

When we go down hopping  
To earn a quid or two  
With a tee-eye-oh, tee-eye-oh, tee-eye-tee-eye-oh!

When it was all over, when we was going home, we'd sing:

"Hopping is all over  
Money is all spent  
How I wish I'd never  
Went hopping down in Kent  
With a tee-eye-oh, tee-eye-oh, tee-eye-tee-eye-oh!

At night-time, if it wasn't too...we'd make a big fire and sing songs. All the family went.

B: We used to go up to London Bridge to get the hopping train. It was about 3 shillings return. A lot of people didn't have the fare for all the kids. My mum used to kick me underneath the seat when the man came round for the tickets. It was all honest in a way, because we never robbed anybody like ourselves, if you know what I mean.

Lee: Did you have a big party at the end?

C: No, we just went on our way

A: Some people went up the pub and had a sing song. Not all the people that were there didn't sort of mix

Lee: You didn't go on the stilts we saw?

A: No. They put strings up for the hops to grow on. They pull them down when you pick them. They had a man called a "pole puller" and he used to do it.

B: Sometimes when he wasn't there, we'd pull them down ourselves.

A: I went on the machines when they first had the machines. It was too much like being in a factory. You had to go out at 8 o'clock in the morning and stay in this shed thing. They used to catch

the hops in a trolley and put them up on hooks and then pull them down. They used to come in a trough and my sister and me were there pulling out the big leaves. I think it spoilt the hops.

C: My dad couldn't go 'cos he worked, but he used to go up at weekends. We loved hop picking.

B: In August, one kid would say to another "Has your Mum got her letter yet?" You thought it was ever so good when you got the letter. Irrespective of what we said, that it was hard and everything, we couldn't wait for the end of August, September to come and to go down there.

A: Sometimes, people used to go down beforehand and take some of the stuff down. They locked the shed up. People used to do them up with wallpaper and all and curtains...You used to have your bed at the back and a big space left to do your cooking or whatever. You had your curtains down in front of the bed.

There's nobody picking hops now. They do it by machines mostly. They don't want us Londoners now. They wrote one year and told my sister that they don't want Londoners because they've got the home-dwellers: women, people who lived in the cottages and gypsies to do it. They can do it in the sheds and they only want 8 or 9 people in there now where they used to have 20 or 30. Us children thought it was a holiday. After you finished picking, sometimes if you'd picked a lot of hops, they had to dry them, so they used to

let you off early and the kids used to roam round the country. It was good. Didn't do us any harm!

I used to hear them having a bit of the other in the next hut! If you tell them you slept on faggots, they think you mean faggots you eat! They are twigs, like witches' brooms but wide (*she indicates 2 - 3 ft*) each one. The straw on top made it softer, like a mattress. You had fresh straw every year. They used to come round every morning and drop about 3 faggots outside the huts. If you ran short, there was a big stack of them. You could go get some if you wanted more.

A: We didn't have any rent to pay anyway. And no poll tax!