

Elaine Jones: Hop Picking

D: When did you first go hop picking?

E: I was about three months when I first ever went hop picking. I can't remember that too well. But I was born in June, and by September I was hop picking, and that was something we did every year. We never did anything else; it was just our life. In fact, I've brought along - my grandmother died - and she must have married down at hop picking because this is her marriage certificate, which she must have - not that I ever knew this - but she obviously never married until she was 49 years of age by which time she had five children. But nobody ever knew that. And this has only been found since my mother's been dead, because they would have found that something that would have been kept quiet. And she married at Tonbridge, and she's put her address as Bank Farm Cottages. Well we were actually in Bank Farmhouse. This is my grandmother's marriage certificate, which we knew nothing about.

D: She's got herself down as a widow; was this her second marriage?

E: I don't know because they're all dead now. But all her children were by the husband that we knew as grandfather. She had five children by him. And she must have had a son when she was 14 by somebody else. We just don't know really.

D: 1941. So, she was down there during the war?

E: Yes. I don't know why because there was a fair bit of bombing there. Because when we used to go hop picking, you could see where the bomb had actually dropped right near the huts and made a crater. And we used to have a fire in that and tell ghost stories round it. And also, there was a prisoner of war camp fairly nearby and she had all things that the prisoners had made from wood bark and handed over, like owls that they'd carved out.

D: Were people on good terms with the prisoners of war then?

E: Yes. I think they must have been. Even though they all had sons fighting in the war. That had gone on.

D: Someone was saying that they were all some mother's sons.

E: That's it; even my dad, when the grandchildren asked him about the war, did he shoot anyone, he always said that what you've got to remember, they didn't want to be, a lot of those wanted to be there as much as I wanted to be there; which wasn't at all. So, I think people did remember that during the war, and probably they were nice to these people. But I can't verify anything like that. But there was loads of wooden stuff, and we asked where it had come from and they say it came from the prisoners of war in Tonbridge.

D: What was the name of the farm that you picked at?

E: That was Bank Farm. But later on, we were at a place called Toodley, and I think that was called Manwarring Farm. He was a Mr Manwarring. Just across from the huts was the actual farm that we used to have to walk through; all the oasts and the cows used to watch. I mean it was so different from the life that we were used to in the East End, all crammed to get in there in little streets. But we went there and saw trees and fields and cows.

D: What area of London were you from?

E: Hoxton. Which was very, very poor.

D: So, it was your first view of fields then really?

E: It was.

D: But the thing was, my father, he came over during the war from Canada, and he met my mother and they married and they went back to Canada, but she couldn't settle - they had a lovely life out there; but she came back and lived in two rooms, and he was used to ranching and things so they used to go hopping. And he loved it. He really got into it.

D: How did your family find out about hopping?

E: I only did for all my life; my mother would have done it for all her life; and it would have been her mother - my grandmother - would have done it all her life. I think she had been going since she was a child. Because it was a way, they could earn money and get out of London. My grandmother's father died, and all her sisters were taken into service, because she was the only one left; so, her and her mother used to go hop picking, just to earn money.

D: Was it mainly the money or was it the break away from London?

E: I think in lots of cases it was the money as well. But it started off as the money, but then it was the love of the life. People went there to earn money but by the time I got older, money was still important, but it wasn't the be all and end all. People just wanted to be there. there's a bit of competitiveness about it, how many bushels the woman in the next bin had picked, you've got to beat her today because she's done, you know, so many.

D: Did you have any leagues?

E: I think everybody knew; it was an unsaid. Oh, but then they'd all be saying, "Oh, our bins are dirty." A dirty bin meant you left leaves in it, because when they called, "Pull no more bines." It meant the measurer was going to come and measure up for you. And you had to clean it. And people went so fast - I mean if you saw my grandmother and mother clean the bin; they used to get all the leaves out quickly. But people used to say that the ones who were getting lots of bushels were leaving their bins dirty. But people actually took a pride in cleaning their bins, getting all the leaves out. But what it actually meant was that you wouldn't earn as much because it was lighter.

D: Did you clean it as you went along?

E: Usually you did clean as you went along, you would scoop them up and clean them every now and again, but then when he said, "Pull no more bines." and he was coming round to measure, you had to stop. I mean there was a great discipline to hop picking; you didn't start until he blew the whistle. And as soon as he blew the whistle, you stopped. You weren't allowed to continue picking. You had to stop and just sit there until he'd gone along and measures everybody's bins, which he did a couple of times a day.

D: So, nobody would carry on?

E: Nobody would carry on. People would sit there and watch and then they'd watch him and say, "Oh, you're taking them heavy." It meant he was filling his basket up too much. And I think a lot of people would buy him drinks in the pub and he would take their measure light.

D: A lot of insider dealing?

E: There was; I'd say there was.

D: Susceptible to bribery.

E: Yes. But it was a lovely life. People didn't have nothing really, and I think it was a time when some people might have a handicapped child or somebody with Downes Syndrome, would all be integrated. But then I think that was fairly typical of the East End anyway years ago. Everybody mostly had nothing, so everybody was accepted. Whereas now it's not so much like that. Much more fun, I should imagine, for a Downes Syndrome child in the East End than in a lot of places; they'd be helping out in the market and they'd certainly help out at hop picking.

D: So, people would just take you along as part of the family?

E: I'd say you'd be much more accepted.

D: When was the last time you went hop picking?

E: About '68 when I would have been about twenty.

D: Why did you stop?

E: It all finished. My grandmother was ill. We should have stopped when our farm went completely mechanised. But she had cancer, and she just wanted to go hop picking, so we chased round and found a farm. As long as we could find four pole pullers, because they were short on pole pullers, which were men to help take the bines down and weigh up them and put the hop sacks on the tractors. So, my brother and his friends were recruited just so that she could go hop picking. And that's how much it meant to her. It's amazing, but we were all ready to pull out all the stops to see if she could at least do that for the last time.

D: Was she one of the only pickers then?

E: It was still going on. It was a Whitbread Farm, and they're the ones that have got the museum. And we were on one of them Beltring Farms, but not the big one, one of the small subsidiaries that would have gone. But the girl I phoned to ask her if our uncle could talk, his brother loves hopping, and every year we used to go and visit him, and he ended up living there. He bought this little bit of land for a really cheap price; parked the caravan on it, and he lived out his life there. He fell in love with that part of the country and the hop picking area and that and he lived there, and he only died a little while ago.

D: Do you still go down there?

E: Yes. It's awful now, all new oast houses. It's all converted. It's just not the same. All the hedges are all nicely trimmed where that was all rough blackberry bushes. And we used to have a Red Cross hut just alongside - which was full every night with kids being there with their stings and bites! But it was smashing, and you'd get a dolly bandage - which nobody had ever seen before. You know one of those bandages on your finger, which the Red Cross do it properly, so it's all like a finger stalk. Oh, we were so proud of all that. That was the thing; if you cut your finger! So, it was a lovely life really.

D: You must have been going at a time when you saw the changeover happening? Do you remember the machines coming in?

E: Yes. I do remember them coming in. But at certain farms were mechanised all of a sudden. Or they just closed the farm down completely and went over to something else, like finished with the hops almost. People did go to work on the machines even when I was there, but I don't think people liked it. I've seen the machines at work; they come round and tear all the hops down. I don't know, because you was just all inside. There wasn't that open-air thing about it. And there was the noise. Whereas the hop field was very peaceful, I mean it was so quiet. You'd just hear other people chattering, and then blew a whistle to break. It was lovely.

D: Do you think people resented the machines coming in?

E: Oh yes, I think so.

D: Were there any protests about it?

E: No. The people then, I suppose you accepted what authority put before you. I don't think there was a lot of questioning. Especially because it was women; it wasn't like a trade union; it was mostly women - because the men all came at weekends.

D: The men didn't pick at all down there?

E: Not very often. My grandad seemed to be around most of the time. But he'd leave the bin about half past ten and when we came back at four o'clock, he'd be asleep outside the pub, snoring away. Drunk.

D: He drunk the profits?

E: Oh yes! He'd just look at his clock, half past ten, off he'd go and that would be it.

D: Didn't your gran murder him?

E: Probably! Oh, she did, she used to say, "Go and get him from that pub! His dinner's here." Or take it up there. Take it up to the pub and just give it to him. Over his head I think sometimes. He'd shout, "Go away, woman!" He wasn't interested in eating anyway, he didn't want it, to have a drink. But he loved it down there. He used to come along with his boots hung round his neck.

D: Why did he have his boots tied round his neck?

E: I don't know. He'd wear shoes. But he'd always have to have his boots with him. And they'd be tied round his neck, his laces tied up, tied round his neck. In case he needed his boots.

D: His work boots?

E: Yes. It was a lovely life, because you'd get up in the morning, there'd be a mist everywhere and you'd have to have a cold wash outside the hut, then you'd have to carry the chairs and the sandwiches and invariably we used to plead that my mum made the sandwiches and not my nan, because if my nan did them, they tasted of paraffin, because it was all paraffin oil lamps - before that was candles but then they had paraffin oil lamps - and she always managed to get paraffin over all the sandwiches, everything. We used to get down there and think, "Eugh!" because they all tasted of paraffin.

D: Paraffin is very good for your bowls isn't it?

E: Yes. I think it must have been, because we had two toilets down there on this quite a big farm, and they were like square boxes with a round hole came up at the side. But I don't think anybody used them. They put lime down them every week. But people you used to just see them walking off the farm and they'd be going to find a field somewhere.

D: So, you had to be careful where you walked yourself?

E: I don't remember that happening. People used to hide. When you look back, how primitive it all was. But it was lovely. We cooked on the open fires outside and we'd have lovely things, like blackberry and apple puddings - because you could pick the blackberries. Apples were everywhere. I mean obviously a lot of scrumping went on. But it was just smashing.

D: How would you do a pudding? Would that be a steam pudding?

E: Steam pudding in a pot. Yes. Even then you had these little ovens that went on a paraffin burner, but we never made a pie; it was always steam pudding.

D: Did you finish at the fields about five?

E: Yes. You'd start really early. You'd get down to the bins and pull the bines, and they'd all be covered in dew, so you'd get soaked. You had to go out in the morning, because September's getting quite cold, really wrapped up, and by about ten o'clock everybody's shedding clothes. You had to carry all that, and sometimes quite a long walk, because you weren't always near the hop fields, and you were carrying chairs and boxes to sit on and chairs to sit on and coats and the food and flasks.

D: I suppose the bigger your party picking, the better because they could all carry it down there?

E: Yes. That's right. And everybody trudged along. And it was a lovely sound, everybody was really scruffy, it really was a really scruffy time, you could hear all the boots would be flipping along the road. The toil. It was; like people had really toiled almost. But happily, so. 'Cause you all had to come off at the same time, you couldn't stay, so when he blew the whistle to go, you all went. So, everybody was coming down the road and getting to their huts at the same time. So, it was lovely.

D: What did you wear when you were picking?

E: Old wellingtons; anything we could find. Old coats, old trousers. We used to have where I lived in Hoxton, there was a mission. It was for the very poor years ago, the Hoxted Mission, run by Mr German who we all loved, and he'd have a mission day when he'd be selling all these clothes that he'd get from grander people that he knew - because he was quite well to do, but a very charitable man. During the war years, because before the war he was there mainly to provide the food and shoes for the little kids with no shoes or anything. And the people that went hopping would be going there and buying up all this stuff; men's trousers, old jumpers. But then as the day wore on, you'd look quite nice because you had something underneath; but in the morning when it was wet, you pulled the bines and you'd get soaked.

D: Did you wrap your hair up?

E: Yes. Most women wore turbans, but I was too young for that. I've got photos here. That's later on in the day when it would get warm. But before that you would really be pretty scruffy and if it was cold and rainy.

D: When was this?

E: I must have been about three or something there.

D: Is that you there? You've got your hair bound up in a braid.

E: I always had to have my hair like my grandmothers and her hair was plaited on the top, so I had mine done like that.

D: Is that 1950?

E: Yes. About that. 1950. This one is later still.

D: I can remember having a swimsuit like that.

E: Yellow, I think.

D: Now, who is this?

E: That was my mother

D: She's wearing dungarees?

E: Wearing dungarees, yes.

D: That's later?

E: Yes. They would have worn them down there; or men's trousers sometimes. But that was just a pair of dungarees. That's another one where turbans and dungarees

D: This looks earlier?

E: No, that's me. So, it's probably about the same time.

D: But you're all much more wrapped up there?

E: Must have been a colder day. Although we all looked smart; probably knew when the photographer was coming. That was actually on the huts, where we lived. That was the fire. And this is where we'd all cook round that, and then we'd eat further back.

D: So, where are your huts then?

E: Just behind it; here.

D: So, you'd all cook outdoors? What happened in the rain?

E: We did have little stoves but most of it was done - oh you had cook houses too. Like massive big sheds. With about five fires in, brick-built fires with hooks hanging from them, which people hung their pots from. Lit a fire and all cooked in there. And they had a bench behind it, and you sat there and watched it cook. And in the evening, if it was cold or that, people would actually sit in there, because the fires were still going.

D: So, they would all gather round; was it a good place to visit?

E: Yes. To go and sit and chat. See that was the original photo and I had it blown up.

D: Is this all your family then?

E: Yes.

D: That's your gran?

E: Yes, that's my gran. That's me, my brother, cousin, uncle dad ^a he's the Canadian one. And my mother. There was more of us than that, but we were all down there the same time.

D: So, your dad took to hop picking then?

E: He did, yes. A bit shocked, as a Canadian, culture shock - the whole of the East End life was a culture shock. And that, cleaning the bin, that was much later, that would be my mother cleaning the bin. That's, the chap's going to come and measure, but he's just stopped so that she can clean it out. And that one you've just seen. That's my nan, I think the last year when she was ill. When we had to chase hops around the country.

D: Where was the farm that you found in the end?

E: Whitbread Farm. Beltring.

D: They do seem to look after their workers there?

E: They did. They had dancing and all sorts of things there. Yard of ale contest.

D: What at the weekend?

E: Yes. And singing and competitions, and people from all sorts of farms went there. We all went there, because it wasn't very far from our farm anyway.

D: Would the local people go there?

E: Just hop pickers. People were very suspicious of hop pickers.

D: Do you think that the prejudice against East Enders came because of the evacuees?

E: Yes. There was a difference between people who lived in East London and the people who lived in the suburbs, and I should imagine living conditions were that much better. My grandmother when she was that much older, she lived in the house that she always lived in. She had six kids in there - there were only three rooms. One on top of each other; outside loo. Cold water.

D: What about this photo, this is an older one?

E: That's a very much older one, and that's my grandmother again. That's my mother looking dreadful. Aunt. My grandmother's eldest - she must have had it about 14. And my other uncle's wife, my uncle, my aunt Edie - and I don't know that lady.

D: It looks like 1940's fashions?

E: It probably is.

D: Oh, it's a post card?

E: Is it. I think they did used to do that with photos. And that's probably when I was very young down in the hop fields.

D: Is this the old wellies?

E: Yes. We used to go in a big pram and push everything.

D: Is that a tin bath?

E: Yes. That used to go as well. Now that's much later. Because I must be about 12. That's my mother. That little girl was a backward little girl who used to live in the huts next door. And that's her sister, and her brother, and her dad. And her brother and my cousin. Across these huts - they were brick built up to there, they were quite good huts, but we was all had to talk to each other across the top because you could actually stand on the table and look over and see them all in bed. So, privacy wasn't even in it.

D: So, you used to spy on each other a lot?

E: When the parents were out, I think the kids used to lark about and throw things over and talk. And that's a much later one, that's just on the field. That's the huts there. We used to get faggots delivered every day to burn. Each day the tractors used to come and deliver six faggots per family or maybe three.

D: That was from the farmer?

E: Yes. And you'd burn those to cook your food.

D: Is that the old pot that's still boiling there?

E: Probably. Yes.

D: Look at the shoes, the lads - they're not quite wincklepickers?

E: No. But going that way. All showing off. That's what that's all about. But it was lovely. And it was very communal. Life was very communal. That was on the hop picking farm, the old accordion there.

D: Is this what used to come out at night then?

E: Yes. And round the pub. Weekend that looks like, everybody's dressed up. All singing.

D: Look very smart; did people do that at the weekend?

E: Oh, at weekend, yes; everybody had a strip wash in their hut with a bit of hot water if they're lucky, and everybody would come out really looking nice. But on the pubs, the pub doors, it always said - people did congregate - "No hop pickers or gypsies in this bar." So, you always had to go round.

D: Didn't that upset people?

E: No. I don't think it ever did. It was accepted.

D: So that meant that the local people all used to drink in one bar and the hop pickers used to drink in another.

E: Yes. Although some local people used to like to mix with the hop pickers because it was a bit more fun; there'd be lots of singing and dancing. During the year I don't suppose there was about ten people in the pub. All of a sudden during the hop picking season, the man must have made a fortune. Especially at weekends with all these men coming down from London and just singing and dancing and goodness knows what in the pub.

D: What sort of hours did they do; or did the pub open late?

E: No. Proper hours because there'd always be the local bobby, then you'd all have to see your way home with the torch. Because the lanes were so dark - I can't imagine anything being as dark as it used to be. So, you'd have to have a torch and you'd go along and find out where you had to be.

D: Did anyone get lost in the dark?

E: A few people fell over I should think, especially if they were drunk!

D: What else have you got there?

E: Well that's only an old school picture that I've found - but that's going back some years. That must be about 70 years. That's a Hoxton picture, and that was my mother. And all these are the little local kids. That's the teacher.

D: When did you move out of Hoxton?

E: When I got married. I was about 23.

D: So, you moved down here?

E: Lived at Peckham Rye and then to Lewisham. Then to Bromley. And now Hoxton and the East End has changed, because things have evolved, different people are there. So, it's not the same now. They've built flats everywhere, whereas it was always little houses and you all sat on the steps. And people always leant on their windowsill just watch. But if you did that nowadays you'd be called a nosey parker. But that was part of the tradition, people were always leaning on their windowsill, just chatting to anybody that went by.

D: Seems that the East End particularly because we got bombed out during the war - I was brought up in London at the end of the Northern Line and loads of people in Burnt Oak that had come from the East End, whole street loads of people.

D: How did you travel down to the hop field?

E: On the back of a lorry, through the Blackwall Tunnel, and the lorry used to come, and it had picked up more people before and you'd booked your place on the lorry.

D: Was it one you'd hired?

E: Yes. And he'd be somebody local and he was taking a few people, you'd get a lorry load, and all go down. Sometimes it'd be open back, which was lovely. And that was it, off you went, with all your stuff on the back of a lorry.

D: What would you take down there?

E: Was a case, the old chest for the hop picking was being packed all year practically, from the jumble sales and what have you, "Oh I've got this for hopping." In it went.

D: What was the chest?

E: Big wooden chest. We used to pack everything in it. In fact, the huts used to look really homely in the end. Because you got to the stage where you had the same huts every year - we used to go down at bank holidays and we used to call it white wash day, go down and white wash all the huts, ready for when we went in September.

D: So, August Bank Holiday you went down?

E: Yes. Went down in August Bank Holiday and whitewash the walls. you only had one big bed in there. Sometimes there'd be - we had two huts, but there could be as many as six or seven in each hut. I'd have to sleep with my nan and my mum and my cousins who might come. And there might be three people in a single bed; there might be four or five of us women in a big bed, which was all lumpy. We had our bedstead and we used to fill that up with straw. But the farmer used to provide at the start - put it into what we used to call a palliate. And all slept on that together. And the men came - I don't know what they did. All got in another bed together. So that was it.

D: Did the farmer give you extra space?

E: No. Because they were all allocated these huts. My mum had a hut and my nan had a hut. But we only had two huts. And when we had all these extra people like cousins, which invariably did happen, they all came and friends, you just had to make do.

D: Was it a popular place to go down and visit people?

E: Oh yes. Weekends. And in the week. Everybody would be coming down.

D: They didn't necessarily work then?

E: Oh, they didn't work, they came down for the enjoyment, to lark about; all high jinks. Water fights and parties and drinking, and just generally having fun.

D: Great.

E: It was. I loved it.

D: How long did you go down for?

E: Well I was about 21 when I stopped going. 20. And I started about three months old. So, I had a long go at it.

D: What did you do about school when you were a kid?

E: You wasn't supposed to say, but the teacher would say, "Have you been hop picking - because you couldn't start the beginning of term. "No Miss." I think the colour of you give the game away.

D: Oh, because you'd be sunburnt?

E: Yes. That's right. Loads of people were missing at the start of term, you'd know that they were hop picking.

D: The schools must have seemed empty at start of term?

E: They were. Primary school would definitely be. And when we got to secondary school - I actually went to a grammar school so I had to come home during the week and then you'd go back on Friday night until Sunday. I'd be able to miss a few days, but I don't think that lasted too long then I used to take all the hop picking time.

D: Did you get into trouble?

E: Yes, probably.

D: Who did you stay with?

E: My dad stayed at home with me, he had to work. And he'd go back on the Friday. And that's how it all worked really. But I hated it when I had to stay at home. Everybody was having a good time, hop picking.

D: Did people bring babies along?

E: Yes. I was a babe in arms.

D: So, what did they do with you when they were picking?

E: They'd stick me in a pram or a box sometimes, an upturned apple box at the bottom of the bin. Some of them were tied up with - the hops are strung up, so as they're pulled, you get lots of string from hops, they'd put something round the baby's waist so it couldn't wander too far. Tied to the end of the bin they were, lots of them, so they had quite a long run, but their parents could keep an eye on them.

D: Did everyone look after each other's kids?

E: Yes, they'd all do that.

D: Did the kids get into lots of trouble?

E: Yes, they did. That's why. They'd go in the orchard. By today's standards, what they did wasn't very much. You never got huts broken into, but there must have been things in there that would have been of value to someone. But the trouble was, children going into the orchard, getting the apples and all that; scrumping. You'd get the farmer come round and find out who it was. But parents were pretty strict on their kids, because they were so frightened that their children were going to get them into trouble, and they wouldn't be able to come hopping any more. So, the children would get really probably a wallop if it was found that they were scrumping.

D: The kids knew that as well?

E: Yes. But then on the other hand I can always remember eating lots of apples I'm sure we didn't pay for them!

D: What did you do in the bad weather?

E: We still had to pick. If it got really bad you had to go home, and just sat in the hut chatting, talking, laughing. It was never boring. Lots to do. You couldn't stop for the rain; you didn't get paid. But if it really got bad, and there must have been times when it was really bad. But hopping would be extended if there was a lot of bad weather anyway. You might go home in September, you might get another week out of it, with the hop work.

D: You had another week off school?

E: Yes, another week off school! Terrible really.

D: What was the last day of hopping like?

E: Lovely. You all had to go and line up with your book - you had the tally book - and all chattering and everybody working out what they've got. Oh, a lot of fun. And they'd be paying their children out the money for the work they'd done - because you get paid at the end of the hop picking. Although people were allowed to sub if they were really hard up. Just a great feeling of friendliness and happiness. It was lovely. And even the farmer and all the farmhands were jovial and everything. The farmer would thank you, Mr Manwarring was terribly middle class, you know, a posh farmer, he was not your oo-arr farmer, and he'd come and thank the people. Yes, it was lovely.

D: Did you have much to do with the farmer the rest of the time?

E: He was always around. Yes. Stalk along and speak, walk along the farm with his stick, come along and see what was going on, how the other half lived. In fact, one girl that we used to go hopping with, she was a real laugh; but she ended up marrying the farmer. She was a real card. And about 18, she married a wealthy farmer; he was about 40. She used to pick, and she ended up in the gracious living.

D: Was there many romances between the local lads and the girls?

E: No. Not really, I wouldn't say there was. A lot of romance going on between hop pickers, because they all met at the pub and different places. But I wouldn't say with the locals, no. And of course, there was gypsies there too, we used to call them didicots then, because there was a lot of gypsies around. They'd be friendly, but there was a bit of hostility there too, between the gypsies and the pickers.

D: Why was that?

E: I don't know. The old distrust that people have of anybody different I think, that's all there was. But that abated I'd say as the years went on. I don't remember a lot of hostilities, but I heard there was. They didn't mix; they didn't want to mix, the gypsies and didicots, they seemed to wanted to be separate. Although later on the younger didicots and gypsies did, because I remember one that was always round our hut, chatting and talking.

D: Did they pick as well?

E: Yes. They used to be hop picking right the way through, with the hop stringing; they used to do the lot, putting the poles, up the lot. They'd be there all the time, then they'd go and do the apples, and what have you. I would say it was the priest that actually got the farmers organised into providing the huts. But I can't remember any more about it. I think it was a priest from Limehouse who went down there, wondering where all his parishioners had gone during this point in time between late August and September. And he went down there, because they used to say, "Oh it's lovely." And then he found they were just sleeping rough in a field, with no covering or anything. And he was the one evidently that organised farmers in providing huts for them. So that's how it all started.

D: So, he persuaded the farmers to give them better conditions?

E: Better conditions, yes. And I think that's - and then you started getting all the missionaries - because there was always missionaries down round your bin, when you were there.

D: Why?

E: Oh, they were lovely. They just used to come and visit the hop pickers, I don't know why, whether it was conversion, or just to feed the poor. But they were always there, you always had missionaries. And they were most welcome. They picked with you and chatted, and I suppose we all just thought it was just general chat, but there was probably a little bit of propoganda in it about god and what have you. And sometimes they would come and give a service on the field and preach. Very respectful people were then, you know. Now you'd get laughing and giggling and all sorts. But it was a very disciplined life.

D: Someone mentioned the Sally's Army?

E: I do remember the Salvation Army. They would have been anti-drink. They used to be in the pubs, like they do still. In the East End when I grew up, they were always in the pub,

coming round with Watchtower and the collecting box, and they'd always do well in East End pubs, everybody puts in, they do a lot of good work. Their presence was down at hop picking. You'd get the photographers come round and take a picture. As life went on, they'd take a picture and bring them back and charge you. That was how probably all the pictures come about. Because people wouldn't have had a camera. I don't remember anyone having a camera.

D: Souvenir photos?

E: Souvenir photos, yes. But lots of people couldn't afford to buy them anyway.

D: Sounds like a lot of people managed to make a living out of hop picking who weren't hop picking?

E: Yes. He made a fortune. They'd open up a big barn which was the shop - it was the only shop, I mean talk about monopoly, because otherwise you had to go right into Tonbridge on a bus. Because people didn't have cars. - And that'd be opened up for the season, and that was like a big, it was really only a barn, and they'd have it all stocked up with food and that. And the queues, you'd have to queue for ages. And then the milk used to come when I was young from the urns, and you'd put your jug out, and you'd say, "Two pints." and he poured it in, and it was straight from the cows, across the field. That Friday night you'd get a fish and chip man come; it really was good business for people.

D: The locals must have liked that as well, because they could sell their stuff?

E: Yes, it was a chance to sell their stuff definitely. Then you'd get chicken people come round selling chickens, and things like that, I don't know where they got them, but nobody asked! There was a lot of poaching. I do remember, this chap he had a greengrocer's in London, and he used to come down and load his lorry up with apples! On the quiet. And where we lived in Hoxton it was quite notorious really. Next door to us was a chap who'd always been in prison, but he was always escaping. And whenever he did he used to come down hopping, it was all hush hush, but that's where he was.

D: He used to escape out of prison to go hop picking?

E: He'd escape, and when he's on the run, he'd come hop picking. But the police used to know, so they'd be down there and asking in the huts if they'd seen him.

D: Did people try and hide him?

E: Yes. "Oh no, no, we haven't seen him. He hasn't been down here."

D: What was he in prison for?

E: He had a reputation for being an escape artist, so he was always escaping from prisons, even from the cells. But he really wasn't a terribly bad criminal. My nan always says they just picked on him when he was young, so it started with him being put away early, and because he was such a wiry, canny little fellow, he'd get out. So, he ended up with this

reputation as Angel Face the Escape Artist. Mind you he did end up getting in serious trouble because he shot a policeman. In fact, who played him in one of the films? The film McVicar, I think Roger Daltrey played him in a small part in this thing. He's an old man now probably dead. But he used to live next door to my gran. And several occasions my nan's house was searched, and he was there. Hiding in the basement or somewhere. In a part they couldn't see because they had a cellar, but it was blocked over by one of those big old-fashioned cupboards. He'd been in Dartmoor and got out of there. He got out of everywhere really. He got a Sociologist Degree in the end.

D: Why did he shoot the policeman?

E: He was being chased, being chased and panicked. Which was the most awful thing he did, because he got locked up for a very long time. But in actual fact he'd never really done much, except pilfered from the corner shop.

D: These are wonderful photos.

E: That's my grandmother and her dog, stuck on the hop field. I don't know how old.

D: She looks about 40.

E: Yes, probably.

D: How old was she when she died?

E: She was about 73 when she died in about 1968. Mrs Kate Withers.

D: And dog.

D: Is this outside the hut?

E: Yes. That's on a farm that was quite modern. That was one that we must have been chasing round after. And that's my gran. 1966.

D: This is Mrs Withers again?

E: Yes. The dates on that one too; 1965.

D: That would be?

E: They're on the hop field.