Mike Fitzgerald and family: Hop Picking.

D: What are your names?

M: Michael and Anne.

D: And you went hop picking as well Anne?

A: Yes.

D: How long did you go hop picking for, Mike?

M: Since I was a child.

D: Did your mum take you?

M: Mum and dad yes.

D: Where did you go to?

M: First of all, went to Headcorn. For about four or five years. Then my mother wanted to go to Tonbridge where her people were, father, brother, sisters, so we decided to go to Tonbridge. And we got this farm at Tonbridge, and slept anywhere; rough stables, in barns. And we went in that barn. Puddles of water outside. Anyway, we carried on there. This farmer had two farms, Bank Farm and Lilly Farm. If you worked on Bank Farm, you had to walk down to Lilly Farm where the hops were, after you picked the hops walk back to Bank Farm. So, we decided to go to Lilly Farm, to get near the hops. Get to Lilly farm and all the sisters and family are on the farm. We all lived there, enjoyed ourselves; grew up as kids, right up until recent years, last picked hops there. Very friendly with the farmer, Bridges, weren't we?

A: Yes.

D: So, you stayed on the same farm all the time?

M: Yes. All one family we were. Had thirty bins; we were all one family. We carried on. As a young man, about 18, I put up a hut for myself, used to be about five or six, it was only a little old shack place.

D: Before that you didn't have a hut?

M: No, I used to live in with mum; about ten of us in there. And when I was 18, got a pole puller. I

got this little old wooden hut thing, and that's where I'd sleep. Then I got married and wife came in there. And weekends we'd have one or two get in there to have a kip. Then on I got a car, used to drive them all about in the car, first car we ever had was my car. And used to go farm to farm and station to station, charge them 6d each.

D: Was that when they came down at the start of the hop season?

M: Yes. From there to Tonbridge used to charge them 6d and bring them back when they'd get their shopping in Tonbridge. But apart from that they had a little shop near a pub called the Carpenter's Arms, and this little shop called Pimbers, they sold oil, paraffin, bootlaces, bread, margarine, post office; one of those little shops, you know. And we done alright there. Kids used to love to get the shopping. they'd take all day; you know what they're like.

D: Just used to skive off.

A: There were a load of kids in the family. We'd all go.

D: You'd all disappear?

A: Dad, tell about when you was little. He's all got connections in Kent, my cousins they bought a bit of land during the war, his son built a bungalow on it. So, we've still got really strong connections.

M: My brother, my eldest brother.

A: But when he took you to hopping when you was little to be his skivvy.

M: My brother and his friend, hopping the two blokes. They took me with them and picked the hops up as they thought. Had my hair cut first thing, took the lot right off. Bald headed I was. And they got an old dog with them called Spot, took him and all. Pushed us through the ticket barriers; no tickets them day, you pushed it through. They don't want to leave him behind. We get on the train. Not the corridor trains, just the one department trains. We was sitting there all sides. Ticket bloke comes along for the tickets. They shoved me under the seat with the dog, and those two sitting there. the dog is quiet enough. He's heard the ticket bloke come along, "Tickets! Tickets!" He goes, "Grrrr." Course that was right against my head, I had my head to him. When they got me out I cried my eyes out.

A: He was only about ten.

D: Because the two lads were working, you had to do...?

A: They took him to do the skivvying. Look after their hut.

M: Anyway, my eldest brother, he bought this small holding down at Five Oak Green, near Paddock Wood. And they built huts, had old wooden hut they put on there. And it stood like that for years

and years, they used to go down week after week, month after month, they loved it, he and his wife. Anyway, he died last year, August before, and his son took over. So, he decided to chuck all the old stuff and build a bungalow. So, he took all the old hut down and knocked it all down. And he built a lovely bungalow.

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

M: Hop picking itself? When the farm shut. 30 years it closed. The lady lives on the farm, she lives in one of the oast houses, made it into a house. She loved hopping. She said she'd love to get a hopping reunion up.

A: Where all the hoppers go and pick for the day. Big charity thing.

D: Two ladies have said to me that they are really sad that the machines came in and that if there was any chance that they could, they would love to go and hand pick again.

M: Last hand picking that I went to was at Hometon. The only farm left to do handpicking. The difference there in the modern day is that they're all sitting in caravans. Lovely.

D: Do you remember the machines coming in?

M: Never had one on our farm.

A: You do remember them coming in.

M: I remember. The people work, picking the leaves out.

D: What did people feel about the machines that came in?

M: I don't remember.

A: Everybody was upset, weren't they?

M: Yes.

A: They used to get the letter about August. And it was like winning the pools when that letter came. You got your hut.

M: Used to go round, "Have you got your hopping letter?" "No, you got yours?" "Oh, she's given me the sack this year. I won't be going." But this farm, there was a very nice chap, very friendly. And I went in the army and happened to go down there one weekend. So, he said, "Where are you stationed Mick?" I told him. So, he said, "I'll get you 28 days agricultural leave." So, I said, "That sounds a good idea." Went back, got a letter, "You've got 28 days agricultural leave for Lilly farm, Paddock Wood." "Right." So, I got the leave and went down there, hop picking, plum pulling,

whatever. And after the time was up, 28 days, I should go back to the army. He said, "Don't go back, I've got another extension, another 28 days extension for you." Nice fellow, old Claude. That was wartime.

D: Was it common that people would get agricultural leave?

M: Some of those farmers who had their men working, in the army, they got them leaves to do the harvest, harvesting, whatever, apple picking, apples, plums, hop picking, tractor driving. And I used to do what I liked down with him, old Claude. One year I remember I went back there, and he said, "Oh I don't want you on Lilly Farm this hopping." I said, "Why what's the matter?" "I want you to come over to our other farm, Church Farm." - that's his brother's farm up the road a bit. So, he said, "You like it over there." So, I said, "Well, yes." So, a big blonde lady was over there, she was an instructor from the RAF, she worked as a pole puller. A women Pole Puller. Bur-bur, they called her.

D: That's the first woman pole puller I've heard of?

M: I can't think of anymore.

D: Was it good money, pole pulling?

M: Thirty bob a week.

D: A pole puller got a set rate?

M: Got a regular week's salary. Got thirty bob Saturday, I used to borrow 2s and 6d Monday, 2s and 6d Wednesday, 2s and 6d Thursday, and what was left was my wages!

D: Did you manage to save much?

M: Used to go in the pub, get the half-crown off them, go up the pub, four pints of beer, packet of woodbines, half a crown.

D: What were the weekends like?

M: Packed weekend, wasn't it? We had a hoppers reunion up at Lilly Farm. Couldn't get everyone in. 200 people, we had a bin as well, up this big hall, and we had all the hops on the bin. Lovely it was.

D: Where was this?

A: In the farm. All the people, now they were married and got son-in-law’s and daughter-in-law’s, half the people couldn't go. But they're always ringing to say, "We must get to talk about hop picking."

M: On our particular farm, Lilly Farm, it's all one big family, in about 15 huts, about thirty bins.

A: 20 huts at the most.

M: All aunts and uncles and relations.

A: They weren't blood relations, they were in-laws. All aunts and uncles. M: What about the time she used to go out pinching apples, scrumping, her and her mates. She knew all where the best trees were, right in the middle of the orchard. And take a couple of mates with her, see her climb up the tree and take the apples.

A: He knew, the farmer, he knew.

M: She done it one night, she's up the tree; all of a sudden the farmer's son come along and said, "Right. Caught you. Got you. I'm telling your dad about you."

A: What about when I wasn't well in the huts one week. And Claude came down and brought me some soup and some sweets. He said, "I've saved so many pounds of apples this week!" He was lovely. He was like part of the family as well.

M: We were last down there about a month ago, and saw John, his son.

D: Did any of the people from Bow end up moving down to Kent?

A: Our cousin had this bungalow built. He's there and his brother-in-law's there. And my uncle had that hut built, for years like he'd always had it. So, they're down there now.

D: Why was hop picking so popular?

M: The reason that made it popular, was those who were only the poorer people had no money at all coming in, and we used to go down hop picking, pick as many as they could, and every night they could have a sub, get a couple of bob, half a crown, six bob, and used to spend it.

A: But dad, mum didn't do it for the money did she?

M: No.

A: Mum was a tailoress, and always had work, so we were never really poor. But she used to give her job up to go. It was just the atmosphere that was really lovely.

D: Could she get time off work alright?

A: Yes.

D: Did that happen often?

A: Everybody did it. If the women were working, they used to give their job up. And the last year of hopping, which didn't make it so bad, there were rumours going round about these machines. And I was having my son and mum was having an operation, and we couldn't have gone that year anyway - first year ever we hadn't gone. Then it ended. They wrote to us and told us.

M: He said, after next year it's all finished.

A: But we didn't believe it. But then my mum had that, and we couldn't have gone anyway. So that softened the blow a little bit.

M: And after that there's nothing. We still went down there. Still do go down there don't we.

A: Most of the people went there go down there.

D: Was it very long hours you worked?

A: Seven in the morning, we used to go.

M: About seven, he'd come along, old Claude, with his basket, and he'd get near the huts, the corrugated huts where we were, and picked up a brick, bang! on the side, bang!, old Claude's here, "Come on, all to work!" And he used to go, and the pole pullers used to get up and follow him along. I used to creep up about half hour later!

A: Thing is, when you went up it was always a cold morning; foggy and damp. And yet you pulled that bine...

M: And you pulled them and got drowned in the dew and water.

A: And then in the afternoon it would be boiling hot. And your hands would get dirty and black and smelly.

M: Hop hands.

A: But even to smell them hops now, would be marvellous. And then you didn't have any bath or anything, and you used to all get fill the bowl up and have a wash down. And there'd be about - how many people in the bed?

M: About six or twelve.

A: When you arrived there, the first thing you did, you used to have a tick, you know on the mattress covers, you'd undo that, get the straw and you'd fill that up, all the kids would be filling it up, you'd hold it. And then my mum would sow it up. And you'd start your bed on the floor. Faggots, brushwood bundle. But as the years progressed it got a bit more comfortable, and my mum would say all year round, "Oh that'll do for hopping. Don't throw anything out. Nice table." Then she put all curtains round the bed. The hut was minute. So, you'd have this much room to live. That was the bed there, and at the end of your bed you'd have a little table, table outside.

D: How did you all get on together; didn't you row being that close together?

M: Not family, no.

A: You'd hear them shout at the kids sometimes. But not really, no. Some of them were a bit rough, weren't they? But our old hut we had was corrugated iron, that much away from the ceiling; so, everybody could hear every word you said. You could hear everything. "You alright? What you up to in there?" and all that.

M: There was a hole in one. "Don't you look through this hole," she said, "I'm having a wash." "Put a bit of paper over it then."

A: Mum used to make a hole purposely, to have a little picture.

D: Does that mean the kids must have been peeping all the time as well?

A: Yes. Climbing up, looking, knowing me. But how about your cousin, Missy; she was loud wasn't she? Singing; one of them right types.

M: Used to wear a white apron. Always had a white apron on. Get themself ready Sunday be up the pub, had their white aprons on, and these white shoes, slippers.

D: Did people get really dressed up at the weekend then?

A: Yes.

M: Put their nice gear on weekends. I was always out driving, take the fellows away. Or beginning Saturday morning, start taking them to Tonbridge to get their groceries, and pick them up.

A: You always drove from when I can remember. You always drove; had a car or van.

D: Was that unusual then?

A: Yes.

M: In them days there wasn't a lot of cars about.

D: What was your job the rest of the year then?

M: My job the rest of the year, I used to work on the meat transport, heavy transport goods. Smithfield Market and take it off right over the country. So, a lot of driving.

D: Would you stop just for hop picking?

M: For hop picking I'd probably have a fortnight's holiday.

D: Did you get much of a holiday? It sounds like you were working on the pole pulling.

M: Yes. Used to class it as a holiday.

D: Did you carry on hop picking during the war?

M: Yes, we used to go down there.

A: You all got evacuated from there?

M: Yes. This particular farm we was on, one Sunday morning there was about seven, eight of us, walking back to the farm. As we're walking near the farm, we heard a siren go at Paddock Wood. So, we're walking into the farm. As we get there, we see all the Germans going over, swarms of them, bombers. And all of a sudden one of them must have took fright and said, oh I'm turning back. It's turned back and come towards the farm and dropped this stick of bombs. We heard them screaming down, "Cor, bombs!" So, we dived into the bleedin' hedge, eight bombs went right across the bleedin' farm. And the kids were all in the huts, down the bottom there in the hop fields there they were. Me and my brother-in-law got up, run down to the farm; they were all in the huts, the women and kids, screaming, "Mum! Where's dad?" The first bomb was in the orchard. Blew up apple trees and did a lot of damage. Next one was in hop field, and big hole - unexploded it was, came right through the ground. So, me and my brothers looked at that, "Cor, look how it's gone through that ground. Like knife and butter." Little did we know that any minute, if it had blown up, we would have gone up with it. Then went up a bit further, where the hops, the beans were, about four bits blew up in the air then. Had it been a weekday we would have all been killed. Then another couple of bombs further over at the railway line. Anyway, the police came down. Then the army came down. They said, "Right. You've got to be evacuated. Can't do hops no more on this farm." So, he took us to Church Farm, his brother's farm. When we got there, there's no room to sleep, no place for us. Said, "What are we going to do?" Said, "Well the only place is that barn over there, some get in the barn. Cow shed, there are no cows there, some make room there." And they

all got in wherever they could. We went in the barn, about four other families in this barn. Just an old barn, straw and everything. And we stayed there until the hopping had ended. While we were there, they said that, "Can't go on Lilly Farm no more, it's out of bounds." Said, "Where are we going to pick the hops." They said, "Well we don't know yet. See what they say." Next thing we knew, go back to the farm pick the hops, the unexploded bombs are still there. We finish picking the hops at that farm. And all of a sudden, one day we were out there picking, army lorry came along. "What do they want?" Two soldiers got out. "Got unexploded bombs here." "Yes, one up there, one there and two over there." So, they said, "Get right back in the ditches. We're going to explode them." And they got out fuse's wires or something, "Stand clear." Bang! Up they went. And they said we couldn't go there picking we had to all go to Church Farm, and we was picking there all the time while the bombs were there!

D: That was at the weekend though, so nobody got hurt.

D: Have you any photos?

A: Yes. That's him. My mum's sister. My dad's sister. My nan. That's all his old aunts. That's my nan. My mum's mum. That's my dad's aunt. And they're all his aunts and relations.

D: So, they're quite nice huts, aren't they?

A: that's the best hut. They were only little. There were only four of those. We used to have little tin ones, like that, to begin with. That's going for a day's outing, down to the hopping. That's my dad pole pulling, and relations. That's my nan. my mum's mum and my dad's aunt. That's a party; someone's birthday.

D: Paper chains hanging across the huts.

A: But people didn't have many cameras in those days.

D: The lady that I saw this morning she had a photo of the man that used to come round and do the photos.

M: Yes, there used to be one.

D: Is that a trade that people did a lot?

A: Yes. But you probably couldn't afford it at the time. My aunt has, she had hers done down there.

M: We had a van from Radio Kent take us down to the fields, they're all wheat now, and we were standing outside what was left of the huts, and I was explaining to them about all the kids - there were miles of kids; no-one worried where they were. Be out all day. No fear of being mugged or molested. Miles of kids. At the different farms.

A: You know the paraffin, the lamps, and the shopping. And another aunt would say, "I want

something." In the end you'd have pram loads of kids, about all these big ones, and about six kids each holding on, and then going along and say, "Let's go scrumping." Up the apple tree or plum tree. The farmer would be in the field with the pickers, and his wife, Daisy, she did picking.

M: Oh yes, nice person.

A: So, we'd go scrumping, fill the prams up with the apples, come back about five hours later - the poor kids would be bit by earwigs, and weeing and everything, and the nappies would be ringing wet, the mum's would all be going; "There they are!" We'd all get a wallop, being out all day. We even used to go on the train lines. To get to a farm, to pick, we had to walk over train lines.

D: Was this the kids going off?

A: Yes. To get back. Everybody had to go over the train lines. You did. So, after the day, we'd say, "We'll go back and get the kettle on, and the fire going." for me mum to come home, and we'd take all the kids over the train line. People didn't worry then like they do now.

D: Was it hard work for your mums to sort the food out and clean a few clothes?

A: Used to get up the field, take sandwiches, didn't we?

M: Put the pot on, make a little fire up the field. Put the pot on, boil the pot. Or send them back to the hopping hut, it was only down the road. Put the pot on down there.

A: Ali, my friend, her mum had 16 kids, didn't she? My neighbourhood friend. Poor mother; no father. And they all used to go up the field, the mother'd get a big loaf of bread, be cutting it there as she stood, bit of pilchards on or dripping or whatever. She and her mother never even had time to go the toilet, she used to stand and go at the bin! But your old aunt used to, didn't she?

M: Yes.

A: And she used to stand and do it as she spoke to you, didn't she? I don't know how! Makes you wonder.

D: I suppose if you're going to go out in the country anyway, there's nowhere to go.

A: There used to be a toilet. And there'd be about six seats cut out, and everybody'd sit on there together!

M: That was just ladies. The men was up by the field. Galvanised hut, like a sentry box. Men used to go in there. And there used to be about six or seven all sitting together; tell tales!

Kerry: She went. She's a year younger than me, but she went until she was about 8.

D: Where did you go?

Hilary: Wateringbury. Until 1969. On the farm where we were, they were just bringing the machines in.

D: Did any romances used to go on between the Londoners and the country people?

M: No. Used to get on alright. Romances? I don't know. I already had my romance.
A: you met mummy at fruit picking.

M; I had a romance at fruit picking. She lost the meat and I found it. One day they went to have their dinner, have a break while they were picking gooseberries. They sat over the hedge and I sat there. All of a sudden, such a commotion; what's that? "Someone's got my meat!" I said, "Is this yours?" "Yes, that's mine, greedy sod!"

A: And that was their first meeting.

D: People used to go do the fruit picking and then the hop picking?

M: Yes. Used to do the fruit picking and then straight to the hop picking.

D: You must have been down there a long time then?

M: A long time, yes. There was no work about them days, 1930's. '32, '33.

D: Were you still working on the transport?

M: There was no work about. I had a little job here and there.

Kerry: Something that always fascinated me, was that you'd go down there on a Sunday, and wait for mum and dad to come down, people in their early 20's and they'd all come down, doled up and suited up. Seen the photos of them. My dad going down in a suit! Can you imagine these days going down in a suit on a boiling hot Sunday.

A: Lovely it was. And everybody who went says the same thing. You can't explain the feeling. When we meet with Billy and everybody, he cries not coming. And he cries that they'll never get times like that again. No matter what you done or where you went.

D: Was it the companionship?

A: It was just like a wonderland. It's like that feeling when you're a little kid Christmas eve; that lovely wonderful... That's what hopping was like. It was just fantastic.

Kerry: Well I suppose it was an opportunity to meet all the family. To all be together at the same time.

M: Yes. Probably saw them once a year, twice a year.

A: It was magical really. You'd light a fire, in the evening, and tell ghost stories.

M: Sing all songs round the fire. We had a cookhouse place. Bits of woods - you call them seats – round, sit there talking and jawing, telling tales.

Hilary: Always ghost stories. My nan swears she saw a grey lady.

M: What about when the lolly man used to come round. Remember the lolly man.

D: What kind?

M: A bloke used to come on a bike with a basket on, and sweets and bits and pieces whatever he had. And they'd see him coming along the road, "Lolly man!" all the kids yelled out. "Quick mum, there's the lolly man." "You don't pick no bleedin' hops, you'll get no money from me!" Some mothers say, kid'd come over, "Can you lend mummy tuppence for the lolly man?" "Give tuppence for the lollyman, we'll give it to you tonight." Probably my kids said that, "Lolly man, can I have some money?" I said, "Oh, how many hops you pick?" "Three." "Should pick ten, then you'd get. you pick the ten, you get the thruppence."

A: And the milk man. Used to come round with churns. The proper old churns. He'd put a dip in it.
M: Scoop in.

A: You'd take your jug. Even that tasted different.

M: And the baker, baker bloke used to come.

A: The bread. Bread man. And the meat man, towards the end.

M: Kippers, he'd sell kippers.

Kerry: Where did you have to live to go hopping?

A: Anywhere.

M: Shepherds Bush, Southwark, they all went hopping. The poorer families.

D: I know what you mean, you don't hear so much about it North London.

M: No. Hoxton. I say I had this lorry I was driving. When hopping came, I used to take the whole lot down in one go, all their luggage, 5-ton Bedford. Used to Deptford Green, Hoxted, St Lukes, Stepney, Wapping, all that. Pick them all up. It's about 11 o'clock.

A: How much did you used to charge each family?

M: 1 bob. Leave at 11 o'clock. By the time I got down Tonbridge where they were, all the huts, all the kit in the huts, on the straw, I get down there about 1 o'clock.

A: When you was a kid, you used to go by train, walk to London Bridge?

M: Yes, my father used to carry his bundle, and us used to carry these bags, hopping pots and what we had. Walked from Spitalfields to London Bridge. And get to London Bridge, big open space where the railway place is. And it was all stacked against the wall, bundles and kids akin, donkey carts, hand barrows, prams. We used to get up there about quarter to twelve.

A: Was it a cheap train at night, hoppers train?

M: 2 bob hoppers' train.

D: Did you have to prove you were going to be hopping?

M: You just went, hoppers, they knew who they were. You had two coppers on the gate, and two porters. Tickets as you go through the gate, "Right, away you go, 'way you go."

A: But they were the real poor times, weren't they? My mum said that when she went, she was a young girl, she was very particular, she still is. And it was murder down there, she was too particular, all his family started on her. The whole lot. "You're too fussy."

M: But she soon got used to it.

A: Oh yes. She loved it.

D: What happened after you got to the train at London Bridge?

M: Went to Tonbridge about 4 o'clock in the morning, get outside, on a side street it was - didn't go the main front way - side door. Pitch black, all cold and misty, dewy. And we had to wait there until the wagon came to pick you up.

D: That from the farmer?

M: Farmer, yes. Some farmers used to come there about 9 o'clock, 10 o'clock. Most of them come in the afternoon pick them up. We'd left home, Spitalfields, 11 o'clock the previous night. On the train all night, got off four o'clock, sat outside. Some of the men and women, fitter ones, they used to leave us with the luggage, they'd walk down the farm about six or seven mile and get the best hut they could have. The farmer used to chuck two bales of straw in, about four faggots. Used to make the bed.

Kerry: In the later days, you know when you had to do the cooking, did you cook for everyone?

A: No. Only your own family.

M: Had an iron thing there, with hooks on, had your own hook, for the pot, and you put your faggots under, build it up, boil it.

A: What did your grandad used to do; go round to the pub conning them didn't he?

M: Oh, my grandad, he used to take the whole lot, the whole farm, all his daughters and that, he used to go down and be well known. Bank Farm, so he went to Bank Farm to see the governor, Mr Thomas, "Good morning, John," he said, "I've got all the hoppers here together." "Good morning Michael." he said, "Everything alright?" "Yes." "That's that, that's that, that's that." He said, "By the way sir," he said, "Can I have a sub?" He said, "You don't have subs. You're not picking the hops." "This is a special case." he said. "They've come all the way from London, they've not got a bit of bread or nothing to eat. They're all starving." So, he said, "Well, I'll go in the house and see what's in there." So, he goes in and comes back with about thirty bob. "That's how much; thirty shillings." "Thank you very much sir, thank you." So, he goes to the woman and give them about half a crown each. The rest of it, him and about ten of the blokes up the pub, they'd go up to the pub. The man who used to have it was a city gent, I used to call him, Harry Weller. Mr. Weller. They'd walk in the pub, the blokes, about six blokes. "Good morning Harry." "Oh, good morning, Alright?" "Yes." "What would you like?" "Six nice pots of bitter." "That'll be 1." "You'll have to put that to my account." he said. "Your account? You never paid me the last time you were here!" He said, "What about that?" "I know, I know, quite right." he said, "But think of the double payment you get this time."

A: One of the best characters you could ever meet. Successful man in that he done everything he wanted to do in life. Done exactly what he wanted to do. Completely selfish. Bought that bit of land, he'd go down there and sleep and drink, and do exactly what he wanted. But funny, wasn't he?

M: Lived there most of the time.

A: Like a recluse.

M: Him and his wife, she was as bad. Rough it.

A: Yes. Lovely woman, his wife, very nice woman. But characters, weren't they?

D: So, he had a caravan down in Kent?

Hilary: On his bit of land down there. It was worth a lot of money; it had building permission. He used to go down there and buy land. To look at him you'd think he was an old tramp. He'd buy the land; he'd go to all the auctions. Very shrewd man.

M: He had an old bike; you'd see him riding round and round. Stopped at a pub one day at Matfield, have a pint, sitting there and a bloke come up to him and says, "Hello Harry, come up to buy the wood?" He said, "What wood's that?" "Over there." he said, "It's for sale." "When's it going to be sold?" "In the back of the bar here." "Oh yes? I'll have a look in that." he said. He goes in there,

about a dozen people in there to buy the bit of wood. They're all bidding up, but they haven't even seen the wood yet, and don't know where it was even. They've bid up, bid up. "Right, what's your name?" "Mr Fisher." he said. His name's Fitzgerald. "Right, that'll be so and so and so and so." "I ain't got no money on me sir." "What do you mean, got no money; just bought a bit of land, got no money?" "I'll get it tomorrow, my wives got it." So, they let him have the land, sold to him. Went down the next day with her. They paid for it. A forest it was.

A: Lot of land, didn't he; had land near the Medway.

M: He sold it, he sold that. They've still got another bit up there.

Kerry: He had a forest once, didn't he?

M: Then he bought a bit by the river Medway. Big stretch, right along.

Side Two:

M: The bloke who had the farm next door used to let his sheep come through and eat all the grass. He said he can't get out that entrance, he can't get out nowhere. So, he said what's he brought it for, he paid good money for that? Eventually he got fed up with it and he sold it for about five times what he paid for it.

D: You know you've got a picture of this party at the huts?

A: That was a birthday party.

M: Someone's birthday.

A: I'm at one end of the table and Billy's at the other.

M: Was it the battle of Britain?

A: Something like that. Or the war over.

D: Did you have a party on the last day of hopping?

M: Never had a party as such, but the last time you used to go to the local pub, and all go up and have a sing song and all get merry and come back to the huts.

A: Used to throw everybody in the bin and do all silly things.

M: The last day of picking yes. Right laugh that day, yes. Kerry: How about the last ever day?

A: I've got a picture of the last ever day. But only tiny.

D: That was the year before you heard because you said your mum was ill?

A: Yes. The field nearly empty, and climbing up the pole, I think. But then that was probably about 1960. That was different then wasn't it.

D: What do you mean climbing up the pole?

A: You know the pole in the field, that used to support? Few of us climbing up there. Throw one another in the bin. How about the party we had all them drawings Johnny done? They would have been smashing for a book. He's really good at art. Great big ones, all around the hall. That was at the reunion. Everybody went mad and they took them. But they were really - he'd copied them from photographs like that. And I painted them. They were really good.

Hilary: I've got some photos of my gran and they're all round the bin. I've got one of my nan and my aunt.

D: What do you think would be a good thing to tell the children? You've all been hopping.

A: Hard work. But the rewards were much greater than the work.

M: "Pull no more bines." - that was the end of the day. Stop picking. They was away then the kids. Oh, away they went!

A: They're always talking about having a reunion, but they're such a big family. And there's so many and you have children and their wives, and their children; there's so many they can't all get in. So, my cousin Billy said they're all going to come over and have a chat one night. And we're all going down there because our farm used to have a white gate, and we used to sit on that, and you could walk that way to The Cow, and that way to the other pub. But we didn't used to drink. But the pub was a meeting place. We used to get dressed up and we'd walk from our white gate to The Cow, couple of miles wasn't it? And we want to do that, all of us my age group. Our ambition is to all be together and walk from the white gate to The Cow and back. Just to recapture that feeling.

M: I used to all the outings and beanos and that, all of us get together. Done the lot of them.

Hilary: They do that at the tenant’s club in Wapping, once a year they have a beano and take them down to the hop fields, then they go on to the seaside.

Kerry: And more or less everybody who lived in Wapping went hopping, that was right in the heart.

A: Wapping years ago was a real, like Shadwell, was a real poor people years ago.

M: That's where the poor went. The poorest of the poor went hopping. The only relief they got.

A: In my time it was because they loved it so much. Wouldn't think of the money part. People used to go to school with no shoes on.

Kerry: Lady's shoes.

D: Was that the only shoes you could get; didn't they hurt your feet?

M: She said, "I've bought you a pair of shoes." They were lady's shoes with buttons across. Go to school in that.

A: His mum was a flower seller.

M: Chas and Dave sing the hopping song.

A: "When you go down hopping, hopping down in Kent." and the other one, "Our lovely hops." I've got a tape of it if you want.

D: May I have your address?

A: Yes.

Hilary: My aunt nearly had all her teeth blown out, when the bombs was going off going hopping. She'd just got off the van, just arrived there, and everyone run with the bombs being dropped, and she didn't run in time and she got caught by the blast and it knocked all her teeth out. And lost her sense of smell, and she's never got it back.

A: Her aunt was a character. My surname is Irving. 34 Barnes Street, Stepney, E14.