

**[TRACK 1]**

TONY WRIGHT:

*It's the twelfth of March 2010 and it's Tony Wright, and I'm taking with Ralph Thornber. Can you tell me your full name and where and when you were born?*

RALPH THORNBUR:

My name's Ralph Thornber, I was born in Mytholmroyd, February 1948.

TW:

*Can you tell me something about your family? Did you have siblings and your parents, what did they do?*

RT:

Well my mother's still living, she's ninety in September/October, my father died when he was sixty-nine and I've got two girls and four grandkids, all girls.

TW:

*Do they work in the business as well?*

RT:

One daughter has got an interior design shop in Hebden Bridge, and the other one has The Ark Nursery.

TW:

*I see. And what did your parents do as jobs?*

RT:

Well we had a company called Thornber Holdings which was a large chicken business. We used to export chickens all over the world, and we started in 1907 and we sold it up in 1970...1982...1972 sorry, and then he started again, carried on breeding chickens, which he'd done all his life

TW:

*Was this your father?*

RT:

Yeah.

TW:

*Did he start the business?*

RT:

No, his father and his father's brother started it.

TW:

*So your grandfather and great uncle?*

RT:

Yeah, which I never met.

TW:  
*Oh right.*

RT:  
They started it.

TW:  
*In Mytholmroyd?*

RT:  
In Mytholmroyd.

TW:  
*Whereabouts?*

RT:  
They started at Hebden Bridge, at...opposite the station – what's it called? Anyway, they started there, and then as the business got bigger they moved to what's now called Mytholmroyd Hatchery which is a company called Sweet and Maxwell in there now as offices, but that was a chicken hatchery, they built it, early fifties probably. It expanded and expanded.

TW:  
*Right. So has it always been a family business – you didn't have outside investors?*

RT:  
No, well it was a public company and then as I say we sold it up, but it was a public company, I can't remember at what point it was floated, it would be the early sixties.

TW:  
*In the early days, do you know anything about, apart from where they started up, what kind of chickens they raised, and, how many eggs they produced?*

RT:  
No. I can tell you – I do know quite a bit about it, but I can tell you that my father bred on chicken and they didn't call them names, they called them numbers and we started 101 and went right up to 909, and just the 404 – that was the best chicken in the world, it laid more eggs and ate, and lived longer than anything else. He sold two hundred and seventy five million [275,000,000] of those and then I can't tell you the figures on the others, but that was the best one, and

TW:  
*So you must have had a lot of land to have that many chickens.*

RT:  
Well since my father died we've bought everything back that we sold, but a lot of it's got houses on it, like Elphaborough and the Community Centre. That was going back when I remember as a duck hatchery, and this side of Elphaborough, that had a load of breeding stock on it.

TW:

*How many sites did you actually have?*

RT:

I can't really tell you...we'd two in Ireland, one in Scotland, Occuld in Peterborough, Reading in Berkshire, one in Germany, one in India. They were all chicken hatcheries or sort of satellite chicken hatcheries. This was the main one. When it was built, this hatchery was the biggest in the world, but we used to do a lot of other things as well. We produced chickens. We produced the buildings that we put them in, the cages that we put them in, and all the technology that goes with them.

TW:

*So you had workshops for all sorts of things then?*

RT:

We'd laboratories; I think we'd more people with PhDs than a lot of people have.

TW:

*Was this for breeding?*

RT:

Yeah.

TW:

*Right. So when you got to 404 and you say you went up to 909*

RT:

Yes, different breeds all the way up, yeah.

TW:

*So like, was one a particular kind of breed and was two a different breed?*

RT:

Well no, you always try to get better, and they lay bigger eggs, more of them, and eat less. That was always the target and as it got further on, it was the browner the egg the better. My father brought brown eggs to England.

.

TW:

*Really?*

RT:

They were all white before he brought some from the States, and he got very pally with a chap called Henry Wallace; his grandfather was nearly president, but they bred corn, that's what they do now; Highline breed corners in the States and Henry started to do the same with corners, with chickens, and my father and him, I think it was in the forties, I think he went over there and did a deal on some breeding stock and brought it back, that's how it came about.

TW:

*Did brown eggs come about then by the food that the chickens ate?*

RT:

No, if you go to some states in America they'll still have white eggs, they won't have brown. It's just that people like looking at brown eggs more than white.

TW:

*How do you get a brown egg then?*

RT

I haven't got a clue, [laughter] I haven't a clue. Some chickens lay them, some don't, but as they get older they're not as brown and they end up cream, but that's how that happened. My grandfather started... I can remember we used to do a lot of ducks, and we were the biggest – we had the duck market for the whole of the UK, but they made the decision that chickens was the way they wanted to go, and that is what they did and then we started in sheep and pigs, but as I say it was all sold in 1972.

TW:

*So you had chickens and ducks and sheep and pigs.*

RT:

Yeah but the sheep and pigs were later on, you know, they'd be in the... well sheep, they'd be in the seventies. The main thing was chickens started in 1907.

TW:

*Right. For such a big concern, I mean, how did you get your eggs to where they should be?*

RT:

Trains.

TW:

*It was all done by trains?*

RT:

The eggs came - we used to have a vehicle, two hundred vehicles, and all the chickens were delivered by the reps who all had a van, but when I used to come home from school, we used to have two shire horses and they, at one o'clock, we started bringing chickens from the hatchery down to the station and I remember that because that's what I did, I enjoyed it – two shire horses and, you know, it was better than being at school.

TW:

*So you sold, not just eggs, but little chicks as well?*

RT:

Yeah, that was the main thing, we sold chickens. We didn't sell eggs till later on and that wasn't the thing that we should have done, but there you go, but chickens went all over the world and we used to fill – I can't just remember the figures, but we used to start loading chickens from one o'clock till five o'clock four days a week and they

just went everywhere, and I don't mean one...train loads, not a van load.

TW:

*A lot of chickens. Were they all different kinds of breeds as well or did you concentrate*

RT:

They were all brown or white – 404, 606, the white one was called the 606

TW:

*What kind of chickens were they? What breeds were they?*

RT:

Well they were Rhode Island Reds, some of the...the amount of stock that my dad had for breeding off was unbelievable, unbelievable but we had some good ducks but they just took the route to go for eggs rather than meat as it was.

TW:

*Right. So when did your father actually start working for the business then?*

RT:

I don't know actually when he started, but his dad died when my dad was twenty-six, so he just got from working in the business to running it, because he died of a heart attack, that was it, and he was straight in at the deep end as it were.

TW:

*Right. And you started when you were fourteen say?*

RT:

I left school on the day that it was legal [laughing]

TW:

*Have you ever regretted staying in the business?*

RT:

I don't think so, I don't think I'd have it any other way than it was.

TW:

*What made you sell up then in the early seventies?*

RT:

Times went like that. We had the wrong chicken, poultry industry was in a mess and we should have got out a lot earlier, but hindsight's a wonderful thing.

TW:

*So when the chickens went, what did you do then?*

RT:

Well my dad carried on breeding chickens. When we sold out, he kept all the chicken side of the business. We'd a farm in Scotland and he carried on breeding chickens

till, basically till the day he died and I think it was probably about four or five months after he died that we sold the poultry stock to my sister and another company down south for them to carry on, and we rented the buildings for five or ten years, I can't remember what, and they decided that they couldn't carry on and we converted everything that we've got to let. They're offices. The big chicken hatchery, that's thirty thousand square foot [30,000 square foot] that's rented to a couple called – well you'll know Reuters, Reuters –well Reuters, Thompson they're called now, there's two hundred and fifty people there and then this farm that we're on now, there's a company called Aspire Technology, they've seventy-odd people work there and then my daughter's got the nursery, there's another forty people there. Yesterday funnily enough we had Calderdale here, and there's five hundred and eighty people work in the units that we have, in Mytholmroyd, nowhere else [laughing] and if you add the kids, go to the nursery, there's three hundred and fifty kids registered in that nursery now. They're not there all the time.

TW:

*That's a lot of kids.*

RT:

A lot of kids, yeah.

TW:

*Does that nursery service just Mytholmroyd then?*

RT:

They come from, from what I can gather, Todmorden, Rochdale. A lot of the people that work in the units drop their kids off, go to work and pick them up on their way out.

TW:

*Oh I see. That's very handy. So what actually happened to the chicken business. Did it just disappear then?*

RT:

Yes.

TW:

*And somebody else [phone ringing.....so other people, other businesses took up your slack as it were?*

RT:

Yeah, I mean, when we started there was two hundred and twenty chicken breeders in the Calder Valley.

TW:

*Was there really that many?*

RT:

In the Calder Valley. Now...now I would be amazed if you could count the chicken breeders ....well in England there'll be three and they're nearly all owned by the same

people. There's Highline which we started with and then there's Babcock and Warren [sp], they bought each other out, so it is in very, very small hands now.

TW:

*Right. That's just the breeding side?*

RT:

Yeah that's the breeding side to sell the chickens for eggs, I mean people put...in buildings now they put a million in one shed, you know, we used to sell hundreds to the big lad, in the back yard or whatever was....

TW:

*Because there are a lot of people who had their own chickens around here.*

RT:

Yes, a lot of people. It's climbing back up. Not many, but there are people that have chickens of their own.

TW:

*Did you have massive sheds then?*

RT:

Yeah, all these that's full of people.

TW:

*Right. And that was just for breeding*

RT:

Yeah that was for breeding, and that farm down there was for...we used to rear them from day old to eighteen weeks and go out to farms...all they did was just want the eggs off them, they didn't want those eighteen weeks doing nothing.

TW:

*Right, I see. So when you actually finished with the chicken business, what did you do then?*

RT:

Well...in '72 when we sold out, as I told you, we kept some of the properties. One of them's down on Burnley Road, there's Moody Mares in it now. Well that was our laboratories, well we converted that into offices and that's where we stayed, and then we'd some spare offices; it's like the usual tale – it grew and then there was such a demand we moved out of those offices, we moved in to that building across here, then I just carried on getting more and more tenants and that's all we do now.

TW:

*So you're just a property developer?*

RT:

Yes, that's what we are now.

TW:

*Oh right. Because you see trucks about with Thornbers on it.*

RT:

Well that was a business that I started. I've Townson Thornber fuels. ...I don't know how long ago we started it, it was about '89 and then I sold it to Shell and I carried on working for fourteen years which....I thought it would last fourteen minutes, but, and then I decided I'd had enough and since then they've sold it to someone else, but it's still about and it's basically the same people as we had.

TW:

*Yeah well you still see the lorries all over.*

RT:

And then we started, when I'd sold that business and stopped working for them, I put full time in renting the rest of the properties that we had, and touch wood, we're quite full, there's not much space left, which in the recession is you know, quite unbelievable.

TW:

*Just out of curiosity, how many properties do you have? I don't want you to let out any secrets.*

RT:

We have five or six sites. We've somewhere in the region of about four hundred thousand square feet but a lot of them are chicken huts, or if they weren't chicken huts....I think most of them are what my father bought in his lifetime around here. We've bought....what have we bought back...I've bought back six of them and

TW:

*How do you convert a chicken hut then?*

RT:

Dead easy.

TW:

*Go on.*

RT:

Put windows in it, insulate the floor, I mean basically you're putting a new building in an old one,....but I mean they're fully air conditioned, they've views to die for, you park outside it, you're not blocking the streets of everywhere up Hopefully I've been trying for the last twenty years to get people around here to work round here instead of choking the road up to Halifax, and it's worked very well, I mean everybody's got lawns. We've probably got about six gardeners in the spring and summer to keep all the lawns and everything tidy, and we do our snow ploughing, we do our own gritting and every site – not every site but the big sites like here that's got a lot of people, they've all generators so if there's a power cut there's no down time.

TW:

*It sounds very good that.*

RT:

It works well, it works well.

TW:

*Are you interested in sort of environmental issues then, because you sort of have*

RT:

Yes. We've just started converting the vehicles we have to gas. I've one to pick up on Wednesday – the chap that runs everything for us, he's got a gas van. The thing that we need to get to grips with is electric but.....

TW:

*Do you think that will come?*

RT:

We need....the cars, I don't know. I'm talking about or electric bill is horrendous. We need to sort something out with that, and....all the windmills that I've seen seem to be a lot of trouble and don't produce a lot.

TW:

*What about water power?*

RT:

Yes, well turbines. There used to be some up...further up Hinchliffe way, but we haven't got the fall in anything we've got, that's the problem, I mean wind would be the way forward or the sun; on a day like today you do get some heat out of it, but it's on the agenda. We're starting with the easy bits.

TW:

*Right. So do you think....speculatively in say twenty years time, do you think you'll have solar power and wind power and electric cars and that sort of thing?*

RT:

I don't know about electric cars, but they'll certainly be gas unless they start to cause a lot of problems, but I'd like to see as....the buildings get tired we don't put electric in, or we'll put electric in but we'll put something in to provide it rather than plugging in to the national grid.

TW:

*So basically you want to generate your own electricity?*

RT:

Yes, we've enough land to do it. The farm next door, he's put a windmill up, but it ain't doing that much, it isn't doing very well at the minute [laughing], but I think we need to wait another couple of years to let somebody else be the guinea pig.

TW:

*Right. Very interesting. I'd like to go back a bit to the....when you had the chicken*

*business, you said you had these hundreds of vehicles, I mean, where did you keep them and how did you maintain them and everything?*

RT:

Well.....you won't remember this bit, but do you know Redacre?

TW:

*Yes.*

RT:

Well there's a green patch there. That used to be our garage headquarters.

TW:

*Oh did it?*

RT:

It got burned down. We'd eight mechanics. It's the bit I actually ran was that, with the fella next door, Edward, who's died unfortunately, but we'd a fleet of...two or three hundred vehicles. Everybody knew what a red van looked like; it was either on a pub car park or somewhere on a farm, but...no, we'd all the trucks for delivering the building, the trucks for the chickens, it was all in-house, we didn't do anything...in those days you did it yourself, you didn't hire people in to do it.

TW:

*I'm curious about the progression of it. So, it started in 1907. It must have been fairly small then; how did it get so big in such a relatively short time?*

RT:

Well it just flew, it was unbelievable, I mean I can't remember everything because I started.....when I was fourteen, but I started messing about on the farm when I was about eight, but it just went enormous, I mean we built a farm in Romania

TW:

*Why did you have these places all over the world then?*

RT:

To produce chickens again.

TW:

*Was it sort of cheaper to produce them over there then?*

RT:

Well in some countries you couldn't import things, they had to be hatched on site. Scotland at one stage, you couldn't take anything in to Scotland, but then the **[clock chiming]**, it all changed, but we'd fifteen hundred people working for us, which in the sixties was quite a number of people. They weren't all from Hebden Bridge, Mytholmroyd, but you know, there were people where all the hatcheries were, but we'd two hundred reps, all with cars and vans

TW:

*Yeah....it sounds so massive. How do you actually keep your finger on the pulse of something that big?*

RT:

I wasn't old enough. We had, you know, there were directors of each division; chickens...my Uncle Terry always looked after the building side and the cage equipment side, we'd another director, Ted, who used to look after sales of everything, it was just split up into different divisions. My brother-in-law now, Stuart, he used to run all the pigs, but there was a lot of people employed from round here. I still know a hell of a lot of people round here by their first names

TW:

*I mean fifteen hundred is all of them everywhere, but you must have had quite a few just local.*

RT:

Oh yeah, three or four, five hundred, six hundred

TW:

*Which is....you must have been one of, it not the biggest, employer in the area.*

RT:

I don't really know, in those days there was....Moderna, that was a big concern, and....there was sectional buildings in Hebden Bridge, yeah, we would be fairly well up there as one of the biggest employers.

TW:

*Do you feel some sort of pride in the fact that you employed such a lot of people for that many – for so long?*

RT:

Yeah, I wish it was still going on, but things change don't they?

TW:

*Yes they do.*

RT:

In some respects I think it was the worst day of my dad's life when he sold up, but there you go.

TW:

*I mean that's around the same sort of time when a lot of the textile industry went – it was the last, sort of, the textiles really.*

RT:

Yes, textiles and chickens up this valley, and blankets.

TW:

*Was it – was that because there was like a world recession, or was there any other reason for it?*

RT:

All I can say, is the reason we started up in it was me grandfather and uncle worked in the weaving sheds and they went on strike, and this strike lasted two years, and

TW:

*Was that at Nutclough? Or was that Eaves?*

RT:

It was Hebden Bridge, I'm not sure, that's where we started – Mayroyd. We started in his house in his back yard, with six or eight orange boxes, that's how it started, but then he, as far as I know, he was making more money out of selling half a dozen chickens here and there than he'd do working, so he never went back to work, and that's how it started.

TW:

*Was he ever part of that self-help co-operative, because there was a strike in '07-'08 wasn't there?*

RT:

No, he was....I really don't understand the weaving thing, but up Calder Valley and the Colne Valley, they must have had their own unions, it was nothing to do with the strike in Manchester and anywhere, it was just up these two valleys. It...just went on for two years, but from our point of view, that's how it started.

TW:

*That's how it began, right. Cos when I moved to Hebden in '87, Mayroyd there was still a place that had chickens and eggs in.*

RT:

Yeah that's a friend of mine, that's Lee Farm Eggs. They sold Shaver chickens which was our opposition, but as I say....Wallcroft, Cheapchin, I can reel them all off from Todmorden to Sowerby Bridge.

TW:

*Why do you think there were so many...is this a particularly good place*

RT:

I really don't know, I don't know why there were so many

TW:

*Right. Maybe it's just....if you knew somebody that was doing alright, you'd think you'd have a go yourself, particularly if you were making more money out of it than in a weaving shed or a sewing shop.*

RT:

Yeah.

TW:

*Right, okay. I'd like to go back a little bit really then, to when you were young, like*

*before you started working and ask a little bit about....your family life and your school days really. where did you go to school?*

RT:

Halifax to start with, then Huddersfield, then I got sent to Rossall in Blackpool, or Fleetwood, and then I got absolutely up to here with that, and then I went to one down in Hampshire, but that was an agricultural college which was, for me, fantastic, you know, we weren't locked up in a classroom all day, I think there were three thousand acres you could...at potato picking time, that's what we did. It wasn't school, wasn't that.

TW:

*So how old were you then?*

RT:

Twelve. When I left there I came straight to work.

TW:

*So you knew you were going to go in to the family business and that sort of thing from quite an early age really.*

RT:

Yeah.

TW:

*Was that just because when you were, say, six, seven or eight, or something like that, you just liked that kind of life?*

RT:

Yeah.

TTW:

*So you just*

RT:

I mean, you say is there anything you'd do different. Yeah, I probably would have just done a bit better at school than I did. I've no A Levels....anything, and neither did my dad have, he had none either, and quite a lot of...the people we knew...we had a lot of people who had PhDs and what have you, but I have nothing.

TW:

*Well it doesn't seem to have made a big difference really.*

RT:

No it hasn't but I would have liked, if you were looking back, I would have liked to have done a bit more on the mathematical side than I did [laughing]

TW:

*Is that a subject that interests you then?*

RT:

No, no, no, it's just that it would make life a lot easier. When I started that oil business that made your figures start...you know, you learn a lot more in something like that because everything's to do with figures.

TW:

*I suppose you learn on the job as well don't you?*

RT:

Yeah. There's nothing better than practical.

TW:

*So I mean, when you were very young, like a toddler and just over that, what was the house like that you lived in?*

RT:

It was a big house. It's still there; it's up Nest Lane, up towards Nest Estate. I think my grandfather gave four hundred pound [£400] for the piece of land which was a lot of money in those days, and he did the garden before he built the house. He was an absolute nutter on plants, and the fact that...it's just been disbanded, but there's Mytholmroyd Chrysanthemum Society; well he founded that, and he was...you know, everywhere he had greenhouses. If you went to any of our farms in the fifties and sixties, they were fantastic and I'm not saying that because they were ours. Elphaborough, where.....tulips down all the roads. He had about twelve gardeners, it was unbelievable, absolutely perfection. Lawns....it really was a smart outfit. People, well they came from Japan, we'd a lot of people came from Japan. It was a showpiece, all of it.

TW:

*And that was down to your grandfather?*

RT:

No, that was down to my dad and my grandfather, and as I say, I never met my granddad, but my dad was nuts on everything being straight, and the bungalow you went to, that was his, and that was just woodland when we bought that, and he designed and built all the garden. My sister's doing it now, but my father was nuts on gardening.

TW:

*Do you have an interest in it?*

RT:

I like to see it looking alright, but I'm not all that bothered about – I'm no good at designing it, but I do like things looking very straight. To me it sells it if...you know, people come to look at our units – it is spotless. This winter's given it a bit of a hammer, but....

TW:

*It's time isn't it? Time does that to everything.*

RT:  
Yeah.

TW:  
*Anywhere where was this house? You didn't actually*

RT:  
Well if you turn left at Pot Luck, you go round the corner, it's the first house on the left, it's called Rose Mount, and it's called Rose Mount cos he liked roses, and then he had the house built, and then I think my granddad died when he was fifty-six of fifty-four, then my dad moved in to it, and he altered it quite a lot when he moved in to it, cos they didn't have many cars in those days

TW:  
*Did you have brothers and sisters then?*

RT:  
Yeah I've got three sisters – one older and two younger. None of them worked in the business at all until....maybe just before my dad died, my younger sister helped at the farm down here, and the other ones didn't work in it at all.

TW:  
*What did they do?*

RT:  
Heather married Stuart who looked after the pigs. Val – we've several marriages in this – married....actually Graham Smith-Moorhouse who is the doctor, married his brother and then she married again, and Dina married a local farmer, Pete Borne and then Pete came working for my dad and

TW:  
*So even though they weren't working for the business, they were still associated with it.*

RT:  
Oh yes, it's still like that now.

TW:  
*Are your children and grandchildren looking to be part of the business as well?*

RT:  
I really don't know. As families get bigger, they fall out. We haven't done, but you know....big families in businesses, in some cases, don't match. Ours do at the moment; there's only four of us. Next time round there's gonna be eight or nine, so you knows? Who knows?

TW:  
*The reason I ask is....it seems to me as if through the sixties and seventies, an awful lot of local people, particularly younger ones, left the area, presumably looking for work or trying to expand their horizons in some way, going to college or something,*

*and the never came back, and I just....that gap as it were was filled by off-comers coming in, in a way, and I'm thinking about today really, about people who sort of came in sort of eighties nineties and up till now, they all have children here who are all growing up and....I'm just wondering whether they're gonna stay because it's such a nice place to live, and although there's a lot of work, not like there used to be, I'm just....because it seems to me that if people from cities move here, and I get a feeling that they want to stay. I just wonder how you feel about that side of it.*

RT:

Well I was amazed that I ended up with two kids still staying here. I used to see these perfume bottles with Rome, Paris and New York on, I thought 'yeah, they'll be there somewhere' but they both live here, which to me is amazing.

TW:

*Have they given any sort of reason?*

RT:

No, not really. Zoe's my younger one, like me, she's likes where she is. Heidi I'm not sure, but she's staying here – she's had three kids and it's a bit late now with all that lot and the Aspire Technology which is a company above – that's her husband; there's seventy in there and the main office is in London. Who knows, but I wouldn't blame them if they wanted to go somewhere else

TW:

*Why?*

RT:

Well we're in a bloody mess aren't we

TW:

*You mean another country?*

RT:

Yeah.

TW:

*But isn't it world wide?*

RT:

It doesn't seem to be as bad in Australia, but there's always....you pay something for that you know, it never rains and it catches fire, you get stung and you get bitten, all you do is get wet here [laughing]

TW:

*Very true, very true. I wanted to talk to you about change really. I mean we have discussed how things have changed, you know, in a round about sort of way, but what have been the biggest changes that you've seen in you lifetime in the Upper Valley then?*

RT:

.....Well the weather. I mean in the sixties, seventies.....everybody's saying we've had a bad winter. Have we hell. We used to bury three pipes – with all the chickens out in the fields, we used to bury pipes foot deep and they still froze.

TW:

*Really that deep and they froze?*

RT:

And we haven't had nothing – alright we've had minus fifteen or whatever was the worst, but we were in minus twenties and then there was cold winds and you didn't have the gear that we have now for getting rid of the snow. I suppose technology's gonna be the next isn't it, with computers? We put a computer in in 1960 that cost sixty thousand quid [**£60,000**] which took half a building up. Now, my own iphone's got as much power nearly. My father was the first one to put a computer in to anything to do with chicken breeding. Funnily enough they've still got the computer in....we got a phone call from....there's a computer archive somewhere down in Oxford and the computer that they have on show is ours which is amazing when it went in in the sixties.

TW:

*I mean forward thinking.*

RT:

Oh yes, I mean we...I don't know enough about it, but my dad invented blood typing for chickens, like your blood type for....you go to the doctor now and have your blood tested, well he did that with chickens, and that's a long, long time ago, to see if there were anything wrong with them when they were born and all through their lives, and you get rid of those that have got certain diseases and what have you, but he did blood typing; nobody else did that, but what else has changed? The roads. They're horrendous laughing]. You don't travel between seven in a morning and ten, and from three till five it's horrendous, but it's the same all over, but from my point of view the scenery and everything else makes up for any of that, and if you've lived here long enough, you know all the back roads to avoid all the traffic.

TW:

*Do you think there's been any good change?*

RT:

.....Yeah, there's bound to have been some good change, I'm just trying to think what it is. I don't drink – there's a lot less pubs, it doesn't really bother me.....there's got to be some changes.....you can't say the schools are better because I don't think they are, they're just bigger because obviously there's a lot more people live round here now.

TW:

*Do you think there are more people now than there were, say, fifty years ago or a hundred years ago?*

RT:

Well there's more houses but I'm not saying there's more people. Some of the....well

two or three of the sites we had, they've all been knocked down and turned in to flats, or houses, and to me that's the end of them when you've done that, you know, it's all very well, you sell somewhere, you might get a big cheque, but that's the end of it producing any wealth, and it does is find somebody a house.

TW:

*I mean there is a kind of.....not a movement, of trying to save old buildings, people trying to save old buildings and use them again*

RT:

I've been doing that for the last twenty years!

TW:

*Which is a good thing.*

RT:

You can build new cheaper, but you haven't got any character with it. When the hatchery was built in the 1950's, as I say that's now an office block and it's quite a good office block – it's not quite the big glass things you can have now, but....our old offices at Orchard, they're still there and they're offices, and I've knocked very little down and what we've had, we've always tried to convert them.

TW:

*That's good I think.*

RT:

Stoney Springs Mill was one of mine opposite The Grove pub. That had passed its life as far as I was concerned for letting because it was tired. It wanted a new roof, new windows, and the only way that made sense was to convert it to apartments and you can't tell it's been done, because it's been done very...

TE:

*Because I remember when I moved here, the sold pine*

RT:

Classic Pine.

TW:]

*When I first moved here it looked as if it were on the way out, so to speak.*

RT:

Yeah.

TW:

*And all of a sudden it looked new again, and it looks like it will last for another two and three hundred years.*

RT:

They've done a good job. It's one of the best jobs I've....I didn't do it, I sold it but they did a very good job of converting that, but there are some that haven't been as good.

Oats Royd Mill isn't just as nice as it should be yet; I think it might get there, but... Moderna's... alright it had the big fire, but Moderna's quite a decent looking spot, and so is what used to be Caldene Clothing, they've built a brand new industrial estate there – that's quite smart.

TW:

*Just hold on one second – I'll see where we are.*

RT:

I hoped you switched it on.

TW:

*Well we've got more than fifteen minutes yet.*

RT:

Fifteen?

TW:

*Yeah.*

RT:

Right, fine.

TW:

*One of the things I'd like to talk about really is characters, you know, different people, different sorts of characters. Can you remember what people used to call....oh he's a character? You don't seem to find many these days.*

RT:

There's still a few about, but.....Charlie Greenwood up Cragg – you don't know Charlie

TW:

*I don't think I do.*

RT:

He's a character. He's eighty, he collects all the scrap. He's eighty and he's still working; he's a character.

TW:

*In what way? How*

RT:

He's just that sort of a chap

TW:

*Is it the way he talks or the way he acts*

RT:

Yeah. There used to be a farmer called...well he lived at Wicken Hill, Jimmy Wick, he was a character.

TW:

*Do you know any stories about them?*

RT:

.....no not really, cos I knew them well, but not that well. There was a chap called David Fairbanks, he was a character and a half with his shire horses. There's Brian Sutcliffe who you'll have seen in the paper – okay, the poor sod's in jail, but a character, a character and a half, you know, he is.....there isn't as many as there were

TW:

*Why do you think that is then?*

RT:

Don't know really...but the textile trade's gone and that had quite a few characters in. Maybe drugs have got rid of a few characters, I don't know; it's fairly prevalent in Hebden Bridge apparently, or so I believe. To go back to another character – he's not a character, but someone who has done a lot for the area is Derek Parker from Hebden Bridge, I mean, I know Derek quite well and I don't know all his background, but he started making trousers then he started importing them, and then he owns a lot of Hebden Bridge and.....doesn't employ a lot of people; he's very similar to what we do, he finds places for people to work

TW:

*Was he local then?*

RT:

Hebden Bridge, yeah. I've probably known him for twenty odd years, but not before. He used to have a sewing shop in Hebden Bridge, but he has put some money in to the area.

TW:

*Is he a nice chap to speak to as well really?*

RT:

Derek? Yeah, he would be a nice chap to speak to.

TW:

*Do you have any sort of, any like sayings, or things that are particularly local or Yorkshire dialect, because that's all dieing out as well isn't it?*

RT:

No, it's not my scene isn't that. I speak Yorkshire and that's it. [laughing] I mean, even when I was at school, they couldn't change it. That's what I've always been like and when we sold out to Shell, board meetings – they didn't understand you if you weren't careful, and when we sold out to Shell, the deal was that we hadn't to go to London for board meetings. If they wanted to see us, they came up here because we were taking the mick really, but they agreed to it, and they asked us once and they won't ask us again because they put us up at the best places, they took us to the best shows and it cost them a fortune, so they won't be asking us to go again....I'm just trying to think of other characters.....there's a chap up the road. Do you know Alan Greenwood

TW:

*I don't know if I do.*

RT:

Well Alan used to run Pecket Well Mill, Brisbane Moss and if you want to know about old stuff, he does the photography. He would be a good man to see

TW:

*Oh well I've have to get an introduction from you.*

RT:

No problem, ring him up. He's retired – he's bugger all to do now. Tell him I've sent you, because Alan will be fine, he's really got....pictures of old mills, old mills in the district and he used to run the one....you know where the fire station is in Mytholmroyd? Behind that was Westfield Mill. His grandfather I think, he ran that as well; his life is in fustian, or corduroy.

TW:

*Now that would be interesting. Right.....when you were saying you went to all these different schools in Halifax and around and down south then, why was that?*

*I really don't know. I went where I was told to go really. They were public schools, I mean Rossall was one of the top public schools in the country at that time, it probably still is Half the lads I went to school with, I still keep in touch with. Two of them are teachers, and it was a bit like Colditz; you got locked in for three months and you couldn't get out. Now they've learnt how to make money; they get rid of you on a Friday night, you're only there between Monday and Friday if you want to be, but as far as I'm concerned, that was my....sort of.....because if you had to be away from here, because I would have much preferred to have been at home, that were fine; they were all farmers' sons, well most of them*

TW:

*Well you were saying earlier that you didn't think that the schools were much better than they were when you were young.*

RT:

Well I never went to school round here, but what I'm saying is....Calder High School, I'm not trying to be unfair to the new Headmaster because I don't know him, but the one that left, really pulled that school round, and Cragg School's a good school. I think they're all good schools and I think they always have been really. Calder High got a bit dodgy but I don't think it is now, but there's a lot of kids in there, about sixteen hundred kids – takes some looking after.

TW:

*Yeah I went to a school like that, high school....it's not a place where you can really develop your mind, it's more about negotiating survival I think.*

RT:

Yeah, very probably, I mean Rossall, the one at Fleetwood, that was a hard school was

that. You see these pictures about Oxford and Cambridge – it was a similar sort of start, but the one down south, that was different. It was different, it was just farming, they're different people.

TW:

*Right.....did you used to play out in the sheds and in the woodland round here when you were little then?*

RT:

I used to play in the sheds cos I went working. If there was anything to do with driving, I could drive any of the vehicles on the farms, collect the eggs with the tractors, that's where I was, and as I got maybe twelve, thirteen, fourteen, I used to help hay-making next door, Hollin Hey Farm, but they rented some of our land so it was the same thing really, but all the chickens were outside, a lot of them were outside so you had to feed them every day, and that's outside – I don't want to be inside.

TW:

*So none of your chickens were sort of shut up*

RT:

Some of them were, but they weren't...the caged bit came later. Our breeding stock didn't do very well in cages, so they were in like rooms this size and sheds, you know, big sheds three hundred foot long

TW:

*So it wasn't a factory system as such even though you produced*

RT:

It started to be, it started to be. Depending what you call factory, the farm at Turkey Lodge, that was a factory farm because that produced eggs. Our produced eggs for breeding again, not for eating, well that produced eggs for eating.

TW:

*So for breeding, the breeding side of it, it was much better for the chickens and the eggs that sort of came from them, it was sort of better for them to be free range so to speak, or out in fields anyway?*

RT:

To me, it's very difficult. If you wear your commercial head factory farming produces eggs cheaper for everybody to buy. If you start putting on your environmental head and your other head, maybe they're better outside. I've seen a lot of chickens frozen up – their wings frozen – and I've seen the fox in. They don't look pretty in a factory farm, there's no doubt about that, but if they're looked after they're still alright. You get people who don't look after things, like most things, don't look after dogs, cats or whatever, but chickens looked after in sheds are fine, as long as they're looked after properly.

TW:

*I think we're probably near the time now so I'll just check this again*

RT:

See whether it's working.

TW:

*Oh it's working fine. There are a few minutes yet, well five or six....*

RT:

What's made you stay anyway?

TW:

*Oh a number of things. I trained as a landscape painter, as an artist, and I just loved it, and that's what I did for most of my life really, until I started doing this about seven or eight years ago, so it was fantastic for that. I love the country, I love nature, I love walking out in it. My son was born, here, he loves it, and we just like being here really, and I've just made a lot of friends and met a lot of people, and it's just a fascinating place to live.*

RT:

We get people up from London – Sweet and Maxwell, more really Aspire Technology and wonder why they live in London when they've been up here on a good day. The views, non pollution, and they're amazed at what it's like. You get some people who wouldn't live here for a pension, and I wouldn't live in London for a pension.

TW:

*Yeah I must admit I'm of the same mind really cos I like to be able to enjoy the place I live, I mean I did live in London, I was at art school there and it's great because there's art galleries and you can go to the theatre and see music, and all that kind of stuff, but when you start actually counting it up on your fingers it's not that much*

RT:

A friend of mine's kids, he'd lived in London and it looks to me like you're fine doing London between twenty and thirty, and then you want to be out of there. I mean it is very nic....the boss of Aspire, the first thing she said was 'where's the nearest Starbucks?' No! A long way away. But for some people are townies and some people are countries. I wouldn't want to live in a town for anything – I don't like going to visit them.

TW:

*I don't any more. Going to Halifax is a big deal for me these days, but I mean a lot of people who move here though are from towns. They've moved up to work in Manchester or Leeds, or from London even and they move in to this area and I get the feeling that they're the kind of people who are gonna stay*

RT:

Well we've got some – going back to Reuter's – the people up the chain in Reuter's they stay, they don't want to go back, they're very happy where they are, I mean in some cases they probably have to go back because if they don't they lose their job., I don't know, but Sweet and Maxwell have really put their feet down in the area. They help Calder High School, they help everywhere they can and it's great.

TW:

*Well it's nice to have that commitment to a community isn't it?*

RT:

The biggest thing that's happened, or is happening this year, in the Calder Valley as far as I'm concerned, the double eight telephone numbers, is the new fast lane infinity telephone system, I mean that's faster than London. It's only the Calder Valley, double eight telephone numbers.

TW:

*This is Mytholmroyd isn't it?*

RT:

That's it. Not in Hebden Bridge, not in Sowerby Bridge, but Luddendenfoot, Mytholmroyd or whatever, one of the fastest broadband in the country.

TW:

*Is that right?*

RT:

Yeah.

TW:

And so you sort of...who's responsible for that?

RT:

Well as far as I can gather, Sweet and Maxwell spent a lot of money in the telephone exchange to upgrade it, because they need fast broadband, and twenty-three telephone exchanges in the country have been chosen to be upgraded and Mytholmroyd's one of them because I think Sweet and Maxwell spent half their money for them, but I had a tenant look yesterday and I told him about it, and he immediately said 'right I'll have the unit. If I can have broadband that fast it'll be amazing' so that is something that's happening just in Mytholmroyd. The trains - they've chopped them off, stopping twice a day to once I think which is bloody annoying, and....one hand's trying to make the job better and the other one seems to make it worse, but...

TW:

*I mean the trains were a big part of your business at one time weren't they?*

RT:

Yeah, we used to put a lot of stuff on the trains. I think...Anne's got the figures - something like thirty ton of chicken appliances a day, and two or three train loads of chickens a day

TW:

*When you say train loads, how many?*

RT:

Oh I don't know how many thousands of chickens went on it, but....I used to fill t'carriages until...,it was forever, and then Moderna used to put blankets on the trains

TW:  
*Did you have special trains just for chickens?*

RT:  
Yeah

TW:  
*Did you have to sort of book those?*

RT:  
Oh yeah, they were booked all the time, but you won't know unless you've lived here a long time. If you go on to Mytholmroyd Station, look towards Halifax, on the right it's full of little trees that big. That used to be the sidings

TW:  
*Yeah I know that*

RT:  
And that is - big place is that, big area, and that's where they all used to be pulled, I mean you don't get it nowadays, but to get across to them they just put sleepers in the things, and you used to go straight across. You wouldn't get away with that now, and we used to take a lot of chickens down there. It was four days a week for many a year, I mean, the old shire horses were a bit tired after they'd done a day's work.

TW:  
*Right.....well I think that's about it really, unless there's anything you would like to say.*

RT:  
No, I think I've said everything really. I can't, you know, fill you in with exact things because I wasn't about at the time. As I say, I was born in '48 so maybe '58 I started to take a bit of notice.

TW:  
*Do you think what we're actually doing now, having this sort of conversation and creating this archive, do you think it's a good thing for future generations?*

RT:  
Well I've got an office full of archive there that I'm keeping. None of my sisters – I'm not saying they're not interested, but I've taken all this because it would be a crying shame if it got lost. We've cups for all the stuff my dad won, I've pictures – you wouldn't believe how many pictures – we've boxes and boxes of pictures, for stuff we built all over the world and I've kept it and we've kept it dry, we're trying to get everything archived properly. Ann Kilby's started but we're nowhere near finished.

TW:  
*It's a massive job I should think.*

RT:  
It is. And the problem is, once you start looking at it you don't get on because you say 'I remember that'

**[END OF TRACK 1]**