

Winslow Oral History Project

Interview Summary

Interviewee	John Grace		Date of interview	25 Oct 2012
Maiden name				
DOB	Oct 1947	Place of birth	Steeple Claydon, Bucks	
Father's name and occupation	Gamekeeper			
Mother's occupation & maiden name				
Keynames	Sir Ralph Verney, Sir Edward Tomkins, Lady Tomkins, Bob Liggett, Harry Dane, Stan Marriott,			
Keywords	Steeple Claydon, Royal Latin School, Buckinghamshire Constabulary, Pond Farm, Claydon Estate, Iver, Thames Valley Police, Wooburn Green, Magistrates' Court, Winslow Town Council, Lowndes Way, Grange Farm, Winslow Hall, Elmfields Estate, Magpie Farm Estate, Old Mill Furlong, Winslow First School, Rushmead, Sealed Knot Society,			
Interviewer	Sue Stainthorpe			
Abstract	John talks about his career in the police force, from his early days in South Bucks to his 17 years in Winslow from 1980 until his retirement in 1997.			
No. of files (tracks)	2	Copyright status	Cleared	
File				
File 001	John was born in Oct 1947 at Steeple Claydon, where he spent his childhood and attended the village school. Later on he went to the Royal Latin School in Buckingham.			
0.30	He decided to join the police force in 1966 (at that time the Buckinghamshire Constabulary) and attended a day at the Headquarters in Aylesbury for interviews. He recalls the medical examination by a very elderly police medical officer			
File 002	John describes his hearing test at the medical, and says that he passed the medical.			
1.05	Asked about his parents, John says that his father was born in Steeple Claydon, and traditionally (going back to the 1700s) his family had been the village blacksmiths in Steeple Claydon, His mother was a farmer's daughter, their farm was called Pond Farm, which was very near to Calvert, but in the parish of Steeple Claydon. They were tenant farmers on the Claydon Estate. On leaving school, at a fairly young age, his father became an apprentice motor mechanic at Phillips's garage in Buckingham. He was paid 5s per week. He played football for Buckingham Town, as well as Steeple Claydon. After this he went to work for Vauxhall Motors at Luton. During the war he started working on the Claydon Estate doing agricultural work. At the end of the war Sir Ralph Verney decided to start the shooting on the Estate and John's father became the gamekeeper. He remained gamekeeper for the next 50 years.			
3.03	When John finished his basic training in the police force he was posted to Iver in South Bucks. He spent a few years there, and when he was due to get married he applied for a house in Iver. However, in the week of the wedding he was posted to Wooburn Green near High Wycombe. This was in the early 1970s,			

	<p>where he remained until 1980. His parents lived in Middle Claydon by then and his wife's parents lived in Gawcott, so John and his wife wanted to move nearer to them. They had 2 children by then. He applied for the post of Resident Officer at Winslow and got the job. He came to Winslow in 1980. At that time the Thames Valley Police (created in April 1968) were in the process of closing a number of small police stations and Winslow was one of these. This included the Magistrates' Court, which was attached to this station. Winslow Town Council objected strongly to losing policing in the town, so TVP reconciled this by having two resident officers living in the town in the police houses in Lowndes Way. John describes how he was able to meet lots of people around Winslow whilst on his beat and says how much he enjoyed this. This lasted for about 18 months to 2 years, and gradually by the time he retired (17 years later) he had Winslow plus 17 villages to look after.</p>
7.56	<p>When they first moved to Winslow John had a red Ford Cortina estate. About six weeks after they moved the car was stolen from outside his house. A neighbour had seen two men pushing the car away. It was found dumped at Grange Farm in Little Horwood Road.</p>
10.50	<p>On the whole John says he found Winslow a very interesting place to work because the town had a cross-section of people, from the very well-off to those who definitely weren't.</p>
11.30	<p>John recalls being on duty at the wedding of one of the daughters of Sir Edward and Lady Tomkins at Winslow Hall and was given a bottle of champagne. On another occasion the Hall was burgled and a very large wooden camel was stolen. John was contacted by a detective constable from the Metropolitan Police who had arrested someone in London who had the camel as well as some other items wrapped in a tea towel with the Winslow Hall laundry mark on them.</p>
14.28	<p>John says that most of the problems were fairly minor. He has noticed many changes during the time he lived there. Elmfields estate was already built when John and his family moved to Winslow and Magpie Farm estate and Old Mill Furlong was being built. Winslow Secondary School was still open, the Headteacher was Harry Dane with Stan Marriott as Deputy Head. John recalls a complaint from a woman who thought that pupils from the secondary school had shot her cat with an air rifle. The Head was concerned and so John and a friend demonstrated to the school, by means of shooting at vegetables, the dangers of air rifles! The grand finale was blowing up a pumpkin with a 12-bore shotgun! John says the children were suitably impressed!</p>
18.00	<p>As John had 3 children, he had a lot to do with the schools over the years. He recalls the old Winslow First School in Sheep Street when Bob Liggett was Headteacher. John was Chairman of the PTA for a number of years and continued when the school moved to the Rushmead site. The old school had a large playing field and John recalls that at one summer fete there were pony rides. Also there was a member of the Sealed Knot Society living in Winslow and they agreed to put on a demonstration at the fete, firing a rampart gun. Unfortunately, this was not compatible with the ponies, so a timetable had to be worked out so that the ponies were at the far end of the playing field when the gun was fired.</p>
21.07	<p>During that time the old first school closed and there was an open day for old school pupils. John remembers talking to an old pupil who remembers getting into trouble when the R100 airship came over and they all rushed to the windows.</p>
23.09	<p>John used to write for the Parish Magazine "John's Jottings" and says he still gets</p>

	reminded of this.
23.26	The house in Lowndes Way did not have a police office, so if anyone called, they had to go in the kitchen which could be difficult with family around. People would often turn up on his doorstep. John tells a story about a man coming round and telling him his suspicions about a possible murder in one of the villages, as the old man hadn't been seen since Boxing Day (and this was about March) and also he thought he had seen a freshly dug grave in their garden. John went to investigate, this turned out to be a potato patch and the "victim" was perfectly well, sitting in bed being waited on by his wife!
30.00	John retired in 1997 in March having done over 30 years. He reflects on the changes in policing since he started in the late 1960s and his views on the new Police Commissioners.