**ADAMS Bernard**

**Introduction for the recording and the transcript.**

This recording is part of the oral history project carried out by the Suffolk Horse Society in 2013 with advice from Cambridge Community Heritage, and a generous grant from the Heritage Lotteries Fund.

In the recording you will hear the voice of Mr Bernard Adams describing his memories of the Suffolk Punch heavy horse.

Bernard is a retired farmer and breeder.

The recording was made by Hilary Cadman who is a member of the Suffolk Horse Society

The date of the first recording was 21st August 2013, and it was carried out athis home in Felixstowe

The duration of the recording is about 19 minutes.

Hilary This is Hilary Cadman with Bernard Adams of Felixstowe on the 21st August 2013 for the Suffolk Horse Society Oral History project. Good afternoon Bernard.

Bernard Good afternoon.

Hilary Now Bernard tell me where were you born and when?

Bernard I was born in this house, Laurel View, Felixstowe in 1935. And my grandfather, and father came here in 1920. He started farming at Red House Farm, Forkenham in 1914. Before that he lived in London and he was in the fish and chip business. Father and uncle wanted to go into farming, and so they moved to Felixstowe because grandfather had had a heart attack, and so they hired the farm at Red House Farm, Forkenham, to see how they got on. And then this farm Laurel farm became available and grandfather purchased this from the [Quilters?] over at Bawdsey, and that’s where it started from. My father was the one that liked the horses and he started showing horses, some time in the ‘20s, and erm... certainly in the ‘30s he was very successful, and he won, I think more or less the last five Royals before the war.

Hilary Really!

Bernard Yeah.

Hilary Was that showing in hand. All in hand, no harness, we have never been into harness. My first recollections of working horses, because it would have been during the war, and we still... we had tractors at that time, and the heavy work was done with tractors, from what I can remember. But the drilling and the harrowing and all that sort of work horse hoeing and all was done with horses, and I used to follow with father, walk up and down with him, with the horses drilling, and then when they got tired, I would go and sit in the hedge, while he carried on. [laughs] But I was only, well less than ten years old then. And we did carry on after the war using them for some jobs, on the farm working. But less and less because combines became available, and tractors, so we really didn’t use them for very long after the war. And the time came, and then that period of time I can’t remember exactly when it was, but it would have been in the late ‘40s, because everyone was selling Suffolk horses. I can remember going to Spurling Hempson’s sale yard with father. But you know, horses were sold for very little money and all went to the butcher. But I do remember as you will see from some of the photographs there, the stallion parade after the war, they erm... The amount of stallions that were there on show, and it was on Ipswich town football ground, it was just unbelievable what we have got today, one or two stallions, hardly any. But erm... my first recollection of a show was Woodbridge Show, sometime during the war, I am sure... I am sure Woodbridge was held during the war and I can recollect, but I can’t tell you where, or what it was, but there is... there again a photograph there that looks as though it was in war time, that Woodbridge was held. But I remember the shows from... The Suffolk Show in 1946 at Christchurch Park, which we did show horses and cattle at that time, and we did.... well for many years afterwards. So that’s my recollection and I have been to every Suffolk show since 1946.

Hilary Gosh!

Bernard I’ve only missed one, and that, we went to a wedding in Scotland, and unfortunately they didn’t last, only for about 12 months. But erm... And I’ve been to most of the Royal shows, since 1947, I think it was, the second Royal Show after the war. Father wouldn’t let me go to Lincoln, which was the first one, but he let me go to York, and I went to York with him.

Hilary And how would you have travelled to York in those days, with the horse.

Bernard In the lorry.

Hilary You went by lorry.

Bernard Oh yeah, we had lorries. We used to take three lorries.

Hilary Did you... so a number of horses.

Bernard Well not a number of... not all that horse, but we had cattle as well, we always used to show cattle. And when I started of course, we did sheep as well. So we used to take three vehicles. But erm... But of course we had a groom, Harry Howe, who had been with us since, I can’t tell exact when he started, but it was in the ‘30s. He looked after the horses and showed the horses, and we also had somebody showing the cattle. So I went into showing the Suffolk Sheep, and that’s how I got into the Suffolk sheep, and did that for quite a few years. My first time of judging horses was on Ipswich Town football ground, with Bill Mackie, at the Ipswich sale, but I can’t tell you what year it was. I haven’t got a catalogue and can’t remember it, but it would have been interesting to know, because in those days all the sales, Spurling & Hempsons, and then we used to do the showing on Ipswich Town football ground.

Hilary Could you tell me the points of the horse for judging?

Bernard Well yeah to an extent, I can’t remember the exact points. No I can’t. I am sure people judging, they make a lot of the points, but I don’t think there’s... you go for the type of horse you like, how it moves and everything else, its feet and its legs. I don’t think the points are the be all and the end all myself, and I think it is very complicated for young judges, when they put these points out, to go by, they can be a bit misleading. But there we are, that’s something else.

Hilary Do you think judging priorities have changed in the years, that you have been judging?

Bernard No I don’t think... No I don’t think the judging priorities, I think perhaps some of the judges have... they have got different priorities to what we had, or what there was in the early days. I think the quality of Suffolk horses, is not as good as it was in those days, undoubtedly because there was more choice. And certainly our problem today is the quality of the stallions.

Hilary And what is missing?

Bernard Well there’s so many things missing, strength, width in a lot of them. Movement. I don’t think the stallions we have got today, most of them would stand up to the standings we had in the... Well ‘40s, ‘50s, ‘60s, until everything went downhill in the 1960’s, but there were still good stallions about. There was quite a few [9.02] there’s George Coulson, you see he had some good horses, and he had a very good mare ‘Rowhedge Mertle’. Sir Robert Gooch, Jack Bullen, to name but a few, and us. I am just trying to think who else was in the showing business then, there was only a few of us left, I must admit. But erm... he kept the... and Phil Overton [? worse], they had Burt Detford, another one. And Charlie Saunders, they were all showing. Charlie had the team. Harry Hall had a team, they were all showing, but there was some good horses, and some good teams, big strong horses.

Hilary Do you think the quality has dropped because of lack of breeding ability? Do you think it is that stallions are not worked anymore?

Bernard I don’t think that’s the effect, it is just erm... numbers, quality from the numbers, you know, there is very few stallions kept, and the choice is getting less and less. Some of the er... we need every stallion, because we need all the lines, but some of the quality of them – if you look back at some of the stallions, you know, look at that... that’s ‘Commander’, ‘Springfield Commander’. If you look at him, well we haven’t got a stallion to touch him today, nowhere. They are not in the same street. So you know, we’re... It is one of them problems that has happened, but you know, you can’t alter facts can you. And I think another thing that... I don’t want to decry anybody but in those days, going back they were professional horsemen. Today, a big percentage of our people with horses, are really a hobby people, and that does... that has made a difference as well, I am sure.

Hilary Going back to the farm again, can you tell me what size Laurel Farm is? Has it always been the same size and/

Bernard No. No no. No it erm... I can’t tell you what it was, when grandfather first bought it, but it would probably have been about 200 acres, but now we are up to... we are farming 1250 acres of land and quite a bit of marsh land, which was flooded in 1953. And of course we still run a dairy herd, we are still milking cows, which we haven’t got many in this part of the world. [laughs]

Hilary And do you know how many Suffolks your grandfather and father had on the farm when they moved here?

Bernard Well when they moved here I’ve no idea, but in the ‘30s, we would have had probably 30-40, because father was... He used to sell a lot of horses around... well even around the world, he sold a lot abroad and locally. He even used to buy in horses for people.

Hilary So was he breeding horses then?

Bernard Breeding horses. Yes. And we used to hire out stallions to different areas. We used to do, you know, [?12.53 Tendring] area I think, probably Framlingham area, and the horse used to go out for the week.

Hilary Would Harry Howe be the man that took out the stallions?

Bernard I don’t think he did that and travel for the week, but he used to travel with the lorry with the stallion and go to different places like, and you know, but this would have been after the war, I can remember of course, not before. We used to go to [?Hosley] Bay and different farms that had got horses, George Anderson and that. Travel around here with the stallion, but father had quite a few stallions, I think in the ‘30s, and probably even during the war, because undoubtedly they were breeding during the war, because they needed them for work. He would have somebody look after the stallion in an area, and work that area during the week, and then they would come home at weekends, this sort of thing.

Hilary You mentioned at the beginning that your grandfather had a fish and chip shop in London, and made, what seems like a huge step to buy a farm in Suffolk. Did he have knowledge of farming?

Bernard To the best of my knowledge, no knowledge of farming at all. My grandfather was... well quite a sharp man, and he had not one fish and chip shop. If I just go back, perhaps a bit further, he went to Australia in the gold rush, my grandfather did, and he came back... He met my grandmother on the boat coming back, and they got married, and then he went into fish... wet fish and fish and chips, and he would buy up anybody that went... got into financial difficulties, and get the shop going and sell it again. He brought a lot of houses. He had houses in London, and in Felixstowe, that’s where he started from and that’s... He came to Felixstowe after his heart attack and he still had the places in London, and then he used to commute from [Forkenham?] and they used to take him with the horse and trap to Trimley station, in the morning, and then pick him up at night. And he would go to London and deal with the shops and the managers up there and come back. That’s how he did it. Then of course, he bought this farm here, Laurel Farm, and he lived in the house over the road, and that’s where he lived until he died in 1945, I think.

Hilary So do you think your father and uncle taught themselves horse care, and horse management and breeding.

Bernard Well father did, my uncle didn’t have anything to do with horses, he dealt with the dairy cows. But father did the farm and the horses, and well they learnt from other people I expect, other grooms. That is how they learnt and erm... that’s how they managed to do it. But you know, he was lucky, he bought the right horses, and bred some good ones, and had... well an excellent time showing, really we did right until the end.

Hilary Were the [?Quilters] here breeding horses at that time as well?

Bernard Not here.

Hilary No. At the/

Bernard At the other side of the river.

Hilary Yes.

Bernard They used to bring the horses, so father said, because they... In the early days they went to the Royal Show by train, and they used to bring the horses over on the chain ferry, from Bawdsey, over the river and then they went together/

Hilary From Felixstowe.

Bernard /to the train. They took the train, and that took them to wherever the Royal show was around the country. And of course in those days the Royal Show was very interesting, because it was in a completely different place, and it was –well up until 1960 – and all the road ways were one in sleepers, and the main roads were two double row of sleepers and the others were single sleepers, and the boxes we had for the horses were brilliant, with boards about two inches thick, and well made with a veranda, so you could sit underneath if it rained and didn’t get wet. And of course we went for a week.

Hilary How many horses would travel in one rail box?

Bernard I’ve no idea. But er I would imagine quite a few, but I have no idea how many. I never... This would have been in the ‘20s, that’s going back a long way. Long before my days. You wished you had asked father more questions about these sort of things, it is not until you get older do you regret. You can remember him, and talking about it, but you don’t really ask the questions to get all the answers, but erm...

Hilary Do you know how many men were employed on the farm in the earlier days, and obviously that would have gone down gradually.

Bernard [recording stops abruptly here]