**FLEMING John, Fiona and Heather**

**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 John, Fiona and Heather Fleming describing their memories of the Suffolk Punch heavy horse.

John is a farmer and well-known breeder of Suffolk Punch horses. Fiona is his wife and helper, and Heather is their daughter and also a horsewoman.

The recording was made by Juliet Pennell, a member of the Suffolk Horse Society.

The date of the recording was 7th September 2013 and it was carried out at their farm in Eyke

The duration of the recording is about 27 minutes.

Juliet This is Juliet Pennell interviewing John and Fiona Fleming and their daughter Heather, on the 7th September 2013, for Working Horses, Working Lives; Sharing our Stories of the Suffolk Punch.

John I am John Fleming. I am 61 years old.

Fiona I am Fiona Fleming, I am 55 years old.

Heather I am Heather Glockling and I am 28 years old.

Juliet Thank you. John could you tell us perhaps about your first memories of Suffolks? Or your family’s first involvement with Suffolks here at Ike?

John My first memories of Suffolks is when we still had a few... two yard horses on the farm still working.

Juliet And they were here because your grandfather had Suffolks, I believe.

John My grandfather bought his first Suffolks at the sale of William Woodgate, when he sold up at Sink Farm.

Juliet And that was when?

John In the ‘30s.

Juliet So he worked them on the farm, and your father worked them on the farm as well.

John Yes, they both worked them on the farm.

Juliet I mean when you were young they were working on the farm, was there ever a time when there were no Suffolks at all on the farm? Or has it been a sort of continuous stretch?

John There was a few years where we had no Suffolks. There were no working horses on the farm.

Juliet And then you reinstated the Suffolks, and when was that?

John The first Suffolks we had back on the farm was 1979.

Juliet That’s lovely. Fiona did your family have any Suffolks when you were younger?

Fiona No. Although father was from Halesworth, he’d obviously seen a lot of Suffolks, and mother was from this area. But no the first one that my parents had was in 1973.

Juliet Can you tell us a bit about her?

Fiona Well, mother always had a menagerie of animals, and they had had a little bit of a talk about finding a Suffolk. I had come back from school and I had been told, oh there was another new animal, go and have a look. So I went down to the fields, expecting to see another shaggy pony, and I noticed all the light horses kind of disappearing away from the gate, and along came a large chestnut horse, that erm... plodded up to the gate. And I thought ooh my word, she is big, I had better stay the other side. I then thought well she is very friendly, so I sat on the gate and talked to her, and she turned out to be ‘Rowhedge Pearl’.

Juliet And did your parents... Did you breed from her, or was she more of a pet?

Fiona We did breed from her. We took her down to Sheila Andrews, and she had a colt foal, and then after that... a couple of years later she had a filly foal, and we then sold her again in foal to Wales.

Juliet And did you keep any of her foals? Did you keep a Suffolk, when she went?

Fiona We kept the filly foal. Yes. Until father sold up really.

Juliet And Heather can you tell us some of your... perhaps your earliest memories of Suffolks here at Ike.

Heather My earliest memory is probably riding him out to the fields. I remember doing Young Handlers, getting him in from the field, particularly seeing the foals.

Juliet And you started to show them when you were sort of, what sort of age?

Heather Ooh I am not really sure what sort of age I was when I started showing him. I remember doing my first Young Handlers at Quy Show, I think I must have been about between 7 and 10, something like that. I came 3rd, so I was over the moon and happy.

Juliet That’s wonderful. John could you tell us about the... you know the first mare that you had, when you got back into Suffolks. Who did you have?

John The first mare we had was ‘Old Bells Greta’, she was off the Hutchinsons, who I helped for several years, and learnt a terrific lot off them.

Juliet And they had quite a lot of Suffolks, did they?

John They showed Suffolks for a great number of years. They had actually bred seven generations of one line.

Juliet That’s amazing. How many generations have you had here now, of your own though?

John Four generations.

Juliet And that started with... Not with ‘Old Bells Greta’ but...

John No her granddaughter actually was the start of the line. Then we had her daughter ‘Old Bells Gwen’, she bred ‘Ike Harvest King’. She retained glensin, the afterbirth, or the placenta, whatever you want to call it. Of course she never bred no more.

Juliet And does that... How is... Was ‘Ike Harvest King’ related to ‘Ike Samphire’, who is your wonderful mare you have got at the moment?

John Well that would be great great grandfather.

Juliet That’s amazing. So now carrying on through the lines, you have had some amazing mares over the years. I mean I remember your mare ‘Ike Beauty’, I think with the two foals that she brought up. Can you tell us how that came about? How she came to bring up two foals.

John We had two foal sisters ‘Ike Beauty’ and ‘Ike Orchid’, they erm... ‘Ike Orchid’ had a foal the previous year, and that would have been her second foal. And ‘Beauty’ and ‘Orchid’ they both foaled on the same day, 12 hours apart exactly, and we lost ‘Ike Orchid’ through colic, and ‘Beauty’ just seemed to know that her sister had died, and wanted to accept the foal.

Juliet So she brought them up really as if they were twins and fed them both.

John That was more than that, because she would not let one feed. One had to be either side before she would let them feed, due to the back legs stamp hard on the ground. She was a disciplinarian.

Juliet So she brought them up very well then.

John She did.

Juliet And did she go on to breed again successfully herself?

John Yes because she bred the... the next year she bred ‘Ike Amber’.

Juliet And have you still got ‘Ike Amber’ now?

John We have got her granddaughter now ‘Ike/

Fiona Olympian.

John /Olympian. We lost ‘Amber’ last year.

Juliet And with the foaling, I mean you must have lots of tips and tricks, things that you have learnt over the years from breeding your mares. I mean could you share any examples with us, of little things, you have learnt, that are perhaps to peculiar to Suffolks?

John Well not peculiar, the thing... we use the same routine with every mare we foal, whether it is at home, or at other peoples. We have one camera today which makes life a lot easier. As soon as the mare lay down, and she is down straining, we will creep into the box, and make sure everything is all right. Make sure the two feet are there, the head is there. As soon as the head appear, we clear the afterbirth off the head, so the nostrils can breathe. We then get the carving ropes and put on the feet, and only pull a little bit when the mare strain. I was always told never to exhaust your mare, just help her a little bit. Then our routine is when they are out, we never cut the naval cord, unless we have to, let it break naturally. The longer it is, the more blood going to your foal, and then as soon as it breaks we use the old fashioned iodine on it. You will always know when we have a foal, because our fingers are brown, with iodine. We make sure that they bond, and then we leave them alone.

Juliet And how many foals have you bred over the years, or is it almost too many to remember perhaps.

John About 33 Suffolk foals, and we have foaled a lot for other people too.

Juliet So 33 of your own.

John Yes.

Juliet That’s amazing. And of course you had... I mean you have a stallion of your own now, but you also stood ‘Golden Grandchild’ here at stud. Could you tell us how ‘Grandchild’ came to be here with you?

John Brian Gillings, who I didn’t know over well, but he and I done a lot at [?8.49] horse show together. I was show director and he was the secretary. One day he phoned up, he said ‘I will bring my mare and foal over to show you. I would like you to see my mare and foal’. This was in September. He brought the foal over, showed us the foal, we put it in a box, walked up to the house and had a cup of coffee. As we walked back he said ‘You wouldn’t keep this mare for a fortnight, I am on holiday, and foal’. And ‘Golden Grandchild’ stayed ever since. We kept the foal for about six... the mare for about six months, and we said ‘We will look after the foal for you Brian, but we can’t really keep both’. And so he removed the mare and that went to somewhere else, and there we kept ‘Gold Grandchild’.

Juliet And I think Fiona, I mean you said he was an incredibly memorable horse for you. I mean can you tell us a little bit about, things you remember about him when he was here with you?

Fiona He was just such a kind horse and he had the most incredible eyes. There are eyes that kind of reflected the whole world, and many people who met him just... those eyes just shone, they were just extraordinary. But he was just a kind horse. He lived out in the field behind the house, with the cattle, and he would line himself up with the diary herd when it was milking time, actually in the collecting pen with them. And if you had a cow calving out there, you could leave the gate open, and you could bring the cow and the calf back, and he wouldn’t interfere with anything, and he just seemed to know exactly what was happening around him, at all times.

Juliet And was he an easy stallion to handle or... I mean with his temperament?

Fiona Yes. I mean a stallion is a stallion, and of course when you have mares coming to stud that’s always a bit.. more of an excitement time, but yes I mean he was out in the field all year round. There were many a time that in the winter time, the local gamekeeper would leave a gate open unintentionally, and you would say ‘The field gate is open at the top’ and Tonic would either go out and have a look around the wood, and then come back into his field. Or occasionally we would get a phone call saying ‘He is arrived down and he is looking at our ponies over the fence’, at night. So you would plod off down the road, with a halter... ‘Come along Tonic, it is time to go home’. It might be 3 in the morning, and you would take him on home. But he was never ever any trouble.

Juliet Did you ever ride him?

Fiona Well Heather rode him.

Juliet Just on the farm... Where did you ride him?

Heather I just rode him out in the field. I started... I worked at Valley Farm for a while, so I picked up vaulting... So I thought I will have a nice little go on him. So I used to practice on Tonic out in the field, I just used to put a bridle on him and I would leave the rope dangling down and I just used to... clamber on and/

Fiona Somersaults.

Heather /practice all my vaulting on him.

Juliet A nice broad back.

Heather Without the vaulting handles, because we didn’t have those. But... No he used to just happily stand there, he would just... he would love it, if you were giving him the attention, the cuddles. You know, he just loved being with people, so I didn’t have a problem that nobody was holding him, because he would just stay with you anyway. It is like every time we went to play in the river, he would come up and he would be down with us, the whole time, he would never interfere, or try to over impose himself on you. He would be there. You could run up and have a cuddle with him, run back and jump in the river. Run back have a cuddle with him. He wasn’t like a lot of the light horse stallions that you can meet nowadays, that are quite ferocious, at all. He was, you know, it didn’t matter what age you are, you could go up and cuddle him.

Juliet And you had two stallions here, didn’t you, when you had ‘Grandchild’ you had another stallion, you had ‘Millennium’ as well. I mean they... Was there only... any other problems between them? [laughter] Can you tell us any stories about that John?

John On two occasions they did get together. The first occasion ‘Millennium’ come over the river, and they got together, and that was dark, or dusk. And they take... two stallions fighting take a little bit of separating. You have just to wait your chance, and put one way, and one the other, and catch one as soon as you can and get a bridle on it, and hope the other one keeps away. On the second occasion he got out from this meadow, where a gate was left open and come down... around the road and went through this gate here, and then got with ‘Millennium’. And it took us about an hour before we had the opportunity to where we could actually split them safely.

Juliet Were they injured either of them?

John No only bite marks. They never kick, they would only ever bite.

Juliet But yes two Suffolk Punch stallions, you would have to pick your moment wouldn’t you to get between them.

John Well that’s the only way, to pick your moment. You couldn’t part them without that.

Juliet And Heather now I believe you have got a part bred Suffolk stallion, you have bred a lovely part bred mare, and you have got her foal. Can you tell us a bit about how... what you are going to do with them?

Heather Well my part bred mare is by ‘Golden Grandchild’, by a thoroughbred mare, and then I crossed her with a show jumper, another thoroughbred, and got her son, who is now staying a stallion. Sheeba who is my first cross, she works well for Hunters, and she can do her Hunter classes, and we are getting into Working Hunters. I mean we have just done a Gymkhana Spectacular, and she was fantastic. We won that. I was quite surprised. Whereas her son is more a sports horse type, he is more streamlined, although he has got some of the bone of the Suffolk. He has produced quite a good strong horse, and even though his mother was only 16 hands, and his father was about 16.1, he is a year old and he is almost 16 hands already, so I think he throws back to the Suffolk for the height, somewhere back in the line of the Suffolk for the height. But he will go on and stay a stallion and be graded with the sports horses.

Juliet And do you see... I mean a little bit of what he looks like is Suffolk, but do you see Suffolk temperament in him as well?

Heather You can see a bit of both in him, it depends in the situation you are in. He does seem to have ‘Tonic’s ears’, he has taken Tonic’s ears, which I can remember when we were sitting with ‘Tonic’ thinking about his ears. Yes his son is very much... your grandson is very much like him. Yeah. He’s actually very good in the field, but he does get the nibbly side from the thoroughbred, where he is just constantly having a little go, but other than that he is pretty good.

Juliet And how old is he now?

Heather He is a year and three months now.

Juliet And will you ride him as well, or do you think you will mainly just keep him as a stallion?

Heather No he will be ridden. He will do his Sports Horse classes, he will be ridden and graded as a stallion, and then we will find a discipline, like show jumping, or eventing, whichever he takes to the best. But I do like an all rounder, a bit of everything, hunting you know.

Juliet And you have been very successful showing your Suffolks over the years, could you tell us a bit about perhaps, highlights of showing particular examples... I mean this year must have been a very special year with ‘Samfire’.

John Or more than special year, she has had a tremendous year, she has been Champion most times we have took her out. But the highlight was to beat the All in hand horses at the Suffolk Show. That will be a memorable day for us as long as we live. But ‘Ike Sampfire’ is really a special horse, she was willing champion mares at 2 year old, 3 year old and right through. I think we knew on that cold January afternoon, when she was born, that we had got something special there.

Juliet Golly a January foal. I mean do you have to give special care to a January foal? Have you ever had to put a rug on a Suffolk foal?

John No we have got a foal rug in case.

Juliet But you’ve never needed to use it.

John We never needed it. Once a foal is up and suckling, and have a little warm milk every two hours, or every hour and a half they will never take no harm. Our boxes are double-lined too.

Juliet They are in the warm. You said... I think you do about 12 shows a year, and could you tell us a little bit about some of the shows that you have been to over the years, any other highlights. I mean a very special year with ‘Sampfire’, but any other memorable occasions?

John I suppose really the first memorable occasion when we won the Royal Show with her grandmother ‘Orchid’ in 1998. Our first Royal show... no our second Royal Show, the first Royal Show we done was with ‘Old Bells Gwen’ and ‘Ike Harvest King’. ‘Ike Harvest King’ was the father of ‘Golden Grandchild’, we took her to the Royal Show and we took five mares and foals, and we had two first prizes.

Juliet Five mares and foals.

John What we were showing at the Royal Show that year, and Ernie Smith, an old standing leader was showing the mare I showed the foal. When it came to the Championship, Mr McGregor said to Ernie ‘Youth has got to win’. Ernie Smith replied ‘The best horse should win Mr McGregor’.

Juliet And he showed ‘Grandchild’ didn’t he, Ernie Smith.

John Ernie Smith was the only person to ever really show ‘Golden Grandchild’, all his big wins was with Ernie.

Juliet And what did ‘Grandchild’ win? I mean did he win everywhere over the course of his life time?

John Yes he won. There’s only really been four major shows you can show stallions at. It is Woodbridge, the Suffolk, Norfolk and the Royal that used to be.

Juliet So now with the Royal gone, we are down to three really.

John Yes.

Juliet Did ‘Grandchild’... Did he ever win all three in the same year, or was that unheard of?

John Well no he must have done... if you check it up, because he was a prolific winner.

Juliet Yes. And with all your foals, I mean little cures and remedies... What would you recommend, or would you say call the vet... Or do you have cures and remedies of your own?

John I don’t like vets because they send bills. [laughter]

Juliet That’s a fair point. And if I said to you, if you had five horses of all the horses you have had... I mean would it be too difficult to say perhaps the five most memorable. I mean would everyone... would all of you have five most memorable, and would they be the same as each other from over the years. What do you think? John could you name five, or would that be...

John Well yes. I suppose really, we shall never forget any of our horses, but ‘Beauty’ taking the two foals, was a great memory, and of course ‘Ike Orchid’ winning the first Royal Show for us, we shall never forget the... To win Supreme Champion at the Royal Show the first time.

Juliet Amazing.

John It is amazing. And we always produce ‘Golden Grandchild’, then of course we got ‘Ike Samphire’. I suppose the one that will always stay in our memory... in my memory a bit is ‘Ike Lady Samphire’ a daughter of ‘Samphire’, but the one we lost with grass sickness, because she was going to be another little cracker.

Juliet And has ‘Samphire’, she had another filly foal since then?

John Yes ‘Ike Genesis’, who is going to be equally as tall, if not taller, and deeper.

Juliet And who is she by John?

John Euston’s ‘Bobby Dazzler’.

Juliet And Fiona, would your five be the same, or would you make any changes there?

Fiona Mostly I think they would be the same. Yes, ‘Beauty’ or Bo Bo as we used to call her, I mean that was Claire’s favourite. And I know Claire was absolutely heart broken when we lost her. But ‘Orchid’, I used to handle, and yes that was the most nerve wracking time at the Royal Show winning that. I had a great rapport with Millennium, because I used to show him, and therefore he is different... I did a lot with him. I also think ‘Golden Charm’, which was a two year old that we first bred, the first filly we bred, and again we lost her with grass sickness at two years old. But she was rather special, and I think that’s really hit us hard when we lost her, because at that point we had only one foal coming up. It was rather heart breaking wasn’t it.

John Mhm.

Juliet Heather. Have you got your own five, perhaps because you have now got your part breds as well. Who would you say were you five?

Heather Well if I was going on Suffolks, I have definitely got my own five. It is ones that we have bonded to growing up. The first one I ever did Young Handlers with which was ‘Old Bells Glenda’. The second one would definitely be ‘Tonic’, ‘Golden Grandchild’, because I spent all my time with him, at shows and everything else. I got him ready and braided him and worked with Ernie with him. ‘Millennium’ because I used to ride him out in the forest. ‘Ike Ruby’, we did spend a lot of time together. How many have I got up to.

Juliet Four.

Heather Four. So one more. Probably Ruby’s... either Ruby’s mother ‘Ike Dainty’, because I really did like her, I had a thing for flaxen manes on Suffolks, or erm... her son, that we didn’t quite register. He died before we could register him, which... We pet called him Rainbow Warrior, he was a little chocolate foal, and we sort of slept with him, all the way through until he did pass away, but he was very sweet.

Juliet Thank you very much. I mean it is amazing, so you have lost two Suffolks with grass sickness here.

Fiona Yes.

Juliet Having lost our Suffolk to grass sickness I know it is... and they are no further on in finding out, or knowing anymore about it, I don’t believe.

John No. The first one we took to Greenwood and Ellis, which was... We lost them seventeen years apart, and Hughey Neil was there then, and he thought it was something to do with Hares. But since then that’s all been ruled out, so really they are no further forward.

Juliet There’s no cure, no treatment.

John No.

Fiona Although I think we have been told recently, that they are going to try out a vaccine in Scotland, which is erm... I think is only just coming through isn’t it at the moment. It is at the kind of preliminary stages of trying out a vaccine.

Juliet I mean there are many more cases in the borders aren’t there than down here, but if there was a vaccine, would you have the horses vaccinated?

Fiona Well if it worked, yes, it is much better than losing a horse. Definitely.

John But the strange thing is about grass sickness. Roger Clarke told me this tale. George Coulson used to have one side of Kentwell Hall parks. His brother had the other side. George Coulson would lose horses, one side of the park with grass sickness, but his brother never lost nothing the other side. So that... that is on your meadow somewhere.

Juliet I have heard that actually, that it is in places, and not in other places.

John And the same meadow caused our two problems, which we don’t use now. I think the trouble was we got a little too relaxed about it, because we had lost one, and they used to come up onto this meadow, and then... we let them keep coming, and then to our cost that we lost another one through it.

Juliet John, Fiona and Heather thank you very much for sharing your stories of Suffolks. Before we finish is there anything else that you would like to tell us about Suffolks. Any stories or special memories of them?

John The best advice that I was ever given when I started helping the Hutchinsons, was not what potions are out of the bottle... Phil Parkinson used to say, never be afraid of them, because a horse knows if you are afraid of them.

Juliet Well thank you very much indeed.