**BUNDOCK Peter**

**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 Peter Bundock describing his memories of the Suffolk Punch heavy horse.

Peter is a horseman and farrier who lives in West Thurrock, Essex.=/

The recording was made by Juliet Pennell who is a member of the Suffolk Horse Society

The date of the recording was 22nd August 2013 and it was carried out at Banham Zoo

The duration of the recording is about 25 minutes.

Peter Bundock

Juliet This is Juliet Pennell interviewing Peter Bundock on Thursday 22nd of August 2013, for Working Horses, Working Lives, Sharing our stories of the Suffolk Punch.

Peter It is Peter Bundock, I am the farrier and horsemen and I’ve just had my 70th birthday a few weeks ago.

Juliet And you are still shoeing horses?

Peter Yes. I went out yesterday actually and done 3 three year olds, all had their first shoes on. It all went okay, it was very good, they were quite... no problems with them.

Juliet Can you tell us how you became a farrier? What led you into it?

Peter Well I’ve always worked with horses, right from a youngster like, I have been around horses. But when I left school there was a local shoe factory, and it was the done thing, but like most of the lads of my age left school, we finished up in the shoe factory. I started there on the Monday morning, and I looked out the window and I thought, my god what have I done to deserve this. The noise, the clattering of machinery and... by Wednesday lunch time I had enough, so I handed my notice in and walked out. When my gran knew... I had two granddads, one had died just previous to that, but my other granddad said ‘Well what are you going to do?’ I said ‘Well I don’t know’. He said ‘Go down and see old Bill... I will take you down to see him’, the old blacksmith. He said ‘He could do with a hand. I am sure he would appreciate some help’. And I worked for him for 12 years until he died. And one of my uncles he said to me ‘What are you messing about shoeing bloomin horses for, there’s no future in that’. He said ‘When you are 18 I will get you in the docks’. I said ‘Well I don’t really want to go in the docks’. He said ‘You are better off in the docks, there’s no future shoeing horses’. And it is amazing all the docks have gone and finished and I am still shoeing horses.

Juliet Amazing. And the chap you were apprenticed to, I mean he was getting on a bit by then.

Peter Yes. He was born January 3rd 1890.

Juliet That is an amazing span of history really.

Peter Yeah. And I started with him in 1958 and I worked with him until 1970.

Juliet And what sort of things did you make. I mean it wasn’t only shoeing horses.

Peter No. No. Because we were close to the docks and the railway, you have got to remember there was no forklifts in them days, and we used to do erm... make a lot of sack barrow blades, to go on the front of a sack barrow. Because where they rubbed on the concrete, they would wear out like horse shoes, and all the porters and the railway workers and that, they all had their favourite sack barrow. If they were going off for a few days, or on holiday, they would wheel across to the shop for us to... like leave it in there while we put a new blade on it, while they was away. And dockers hooks. All the hooks, everything came in bags or bales and barrels, and the dockers had a hook for every job like, whether they were bagging hooks, and rubber bale hooks, all slightly different. And we used to make lots and lots of them, with bright steel. They would come in and there would be a rubber boat coming in the next morning, they had heard about, and we run a few er... make up a hook for them.

Juliet So quite a variety, but you saw Suffolks as well at this stage. You were shoeing horses too.

Peter Yes we were shoeing lots of horses, and er... the old governor he had a few meadows himself and he was a horse dealer as well. He was always buying and selling horses, he would get on the train and go to the Elephant Castle horse deposit... repository and I can remember as a lad... I was amazed because erm... it had big tin gates on it and you... When you was in there, sometimes you would hear the police would come round and the MPs and slam the gates shut, looking for all the conscripts on the way from the army. There was still conscription then, there was a lot of them... you know, they coming down, they would go right through looking through, check everyone like who were of army age to make sure they wasn’t on the run from the army. I can remember that as a lad. We er... had a Suffolk mare come in from a horse dealer called Ted Poulter, she was a Rowhedge mare, and I can’t remember her name, but I know it was a Rowhedge, because the old boss wanted one to do some hay making. So Ted said to him, ‘She will do your job William, she is only a young mare’ but he wouldn’t have her. ‘It is just that we can’t get shoes on her, they have tried everywhere, and she had been several blacksmith shops, and they can’t get any shoes on her, she just won’t have it. She will fall over’. So the old boss say ‘Okay. Well she will do my job bare foot [?5.14] grass’. We had a bit of a quiet time and I think it started raining, so he had got it in his head now – it was like a challenge. So he said ‘I think we will have a set of shoes on that mare’. He said ‘Ted said she likes to fall... she would fall over on you if you try and pick her feet up.’ He said ‘Well if she likes to fall over, we will have her on the floor’. We put a set of hobbles on her... actually I gave her hobbles to Roger Clarke a few year ago, because I had no more use for them. Four collars like a big strong collar with a chain that run through them, as they move the chain would tighten up a notch and eventually the four feet pull in together and they go... And we covered her over with an old tarpaulin sheet and left her there for about two hours, went up the cafe and had a bit of breakfast and a cup of tea, come back, uncovered her, and undone the hobbles. Up she got and within an hour... just over an hour she had four shoes on, she didn’t want to get on the floor again. [laughs] The thing you have got to remember there was no sedation then, there was no vets to come round and sedate them, you had to cope the best way you can. We had all sorts of little things like that. I know there was one old lady who used to, I believe she was a solicitor’s clerk or something, she had this pony and she used to follow the hunt with a pony and trap. But you could never tie this pony up. So erm.. And she wouldn’t hear of it. And he used to say ‘There’s no such thing as can’t’ and she wouldn’t hear of it. She just wouldn’t have it. She had to hold this pony, it wouldn’t tie up. So erm... One day she said ‘Could we look after the pony, she was going on holiday for a week’, and he had a look of delight on his face. I knew what was coming and erm... ‘That’s no problem at all’ he said. Anyway the pony got left there. I don’t think she was on the train, he said ‘Go and get that pony’. We were in the shop, great big rings on the wall, he went and got a piece of rope with an eye in it, put it round its belly, just in front of its hind legs, up between the front legs, through the ring in the head collar and tied it to the wall. Well the pony jumped back, and of course the first thing that tightened up, was right round its belly. It sort of had a look of shock on its face almost, and it jumped forward again and stood there. And he laughed. He said ‘There’s no such thing as can’t’ and he couldn’t wait for her to come back off holiday. She got off the train, and she had only got to walk across the road like you know, from the station, to the shop. And there was the pony tied up in the farrier’s shop. [laughs] All sorts of little things like that, he used to do, to delight him.

Juliet Experience really paid off.

Peter Yeah.

Juliet Can you tell me did you see any horses on the docks themselves?

Peter Yeah. Not working. In the ‘50s, there was... as a lad, before I started for him actually, like, because I lived near the docks. As lads we used to go down there and climb over the fence in the docks, and any with good head collars on, we used to take the head collars off them because... they were all going to France, going to Europe for slaughter unfortunately. There were councils packing up, and like you know, you would get perhaps 8 or 9 shire horses, and they all stood in crates, and they were lifted up singularly in a crate and put on the decks of ships. I can remember like... it was the Daily Mirror, I believe it was, they had a great big thing about stop the live horse export. It wasn’t... [sighs] They were fed and watered, but not a lot, they wanted them empty, they didn’t want them full of food to go for slaughter, and they had got water, but they never got a lot of food. It was terrible. There were Suffolks and Shires, light horses, mostly working horses, not riding horses, mostly working horses. It was a crying shame really.

Juliet And which docks were these?

Peter Tilbury.

Juliet Tilbury.

Peter Because when you think it was only a short journey across to... from Tilbury across the channel to Europe, Belgium and Holland and France. Yeah [sigh], it was a shame, but I think perhaps... When you think like... In this country now there’s nothing sort of killed or slaughtered. If you have got a mare that’s wrong, or something not quite right in the head, which you know, you get... they say ‘Well turn it out and have a foal out of it’, but like in Europe they eat them. And anything bad, anything with a problem like... but I think in this country we have carried on breeding them, and that’s why we have got a few problem horses now.

Juliet We’ve bred in the problem. We’ve continued the problem.

Peter Yes. Yes.

Juliet Can you tell us about your early experiences with horses. You were brought up with horses, from a very early age. Can you tell us a bit about those experiences.

Peter Unfortunately mother died when I was 6 or 7, and er I went to live with one nan and granddad. I had no chance really because both granddads were horsemen. One was a horseman on the brewery, and the other one was a horseman on the farm, and I went to live on the farm with nan and granddad, in the farm cottage. It was hard I suppose really like... Of an evening time we used to have to make purse nets for the ferrets. So I can remember sitting, they used to make me make at least one, because we lived on like rabbit, and off the farm really – at least one purse net every evening, while we were sitting listening to the radio. Then we used to have the... Then the Archers were on, and then after that Dick Barton, and then it was bed time. One day, granddad hadn’t been well, he wasn’t well and the old boss said to me ‘Can you take granddad’s horses and hoe up between them cabbage plants’. I ran a Kent hoe up between all the cabbage plants. They never had all the weed killer sprays and that, we have got today, and I said ‘Yeah’. Well I put the horse in, just a single horse and I sweated... He was in one row, and then would walk across into the next row, and I got home at lunch time, and I said to nan. Nan said ‘What’s the matter?’ I said ‘Well I have been hoeing, and when the old boss sees it he will sack me I reckon. I’ve hoed more cabbage plants out than weeds. So she said ‘What’s the trouble?’ I said ‘Well old Bowler he goes up there, one minute he is in one row, and then he walk across into the next row and all that’. I said to granddad, ‘He won’t walk straight’. So he said ‘Well you have got him boy, you stick to him, you sort him out. You need to sort him out yourself’. Anyway on my way back to... My nan came out, and I was just getting on my bicycle to go back up the farm. She said ‘Look, he is not going to be about here forever to help you, you have got to start thinking for yourself. Now. When he is ploughing who does he have the furrow?’ I said ‘Bonny’. She said ‘Bowler is for the cart work, Bonny for the row work. I went back, I took the harness off of Bowler, put it on Bonny and we went out, and she didn’t put a foot wrong. She was a pigeon toe mare, she walked right up the rows and never put a foot wrong and we made a wonderful job. I think, within a week, ten days he was dead. But I’ve always thought of that, like... there comes a time in life, you have got to start thinking for yourself. You have got your parents, or your grandparents telling you what to do, but eventually you have got to think for yourself, and he knew that. At the time I thought ‘Miserable old beggar’, but when you sort of reflect on it, that is life.

Juliet And you say Bonny she was pigeon toed and that was actually perhaps quite a good thing was it for.

Peter Well yeah, because if you could imagine pigeon toe, they almost walk one foot in front of the other, and you get something like... a little bit wide, they tread on more plants, like a row 18”, a row perhaps between cabbages, up potato bulks, going in between the potatoes. We used to run a break up between the potatoes to kill the weeds, and then you would bulk them up again. You wanted something that could walk in the row, and as they walk pigeon toed, they walk one foot in front of the other, it was bred into them. I mean the old boy would love a pigeon toed horse, unfortunately in the show ring today some of these younger judges, they see something pigeon toed and they put it down. You can get some nice mares, or geldings, they are pigeon toed, but unfortunately it has been bred into them for years, but that was the reason why. They wanted them pigeon toed for row work, and they would walk up a furrow like a cat. But like I say, unfortunately a lot of people now have them to show them, in the show ring, which is lovely, but they get condemned for it.

Juliet Yes. And could you tell us about when you were shoeing. I mean did you hot shoe, or cold shoe the horses. How did it work?

Peter When we was in the shop we... anything that came to the shop was hot shod. Then we made all our shoes, we didn’t buy any shoes at all they were all hand made. Then sometimes in the afternoon I would make shoes up for the next day, and I would go out on an old trade bike and shoe cold, a few ponies, or hunters. Perhaps someone had got a lose shoe, you would just go out and tighten it up. But most of them that came in shop were all shod hot.

Juliet And when you were making the shoes how long would it take you to make a shoe, a pair of shoes.

Peter Well we used to work them in sets, work them in fours, and you would have four pieces of iron... You would bank the fire up, you would have four pieces of iron laying on top of the fire, and you would drop one down, so they were all bellows if you can remember, no electric, it would be pear shaped bellows, and you had to pump the bellows as you were working, and you would get your first piece in the fire. When you took that out to work on it, you would drop the next piece in the fire, and while you were working on the first shoe, the second one would be drawing like... getting its heat. You would get your toe bed in the first shoe and then you would put like one branch in, and the outside branch back in the fire, and pump it again. But by that time your second bar was hot. You would get your toe bend in that and then put that in the fire, like the branch, like half the shoe in. Then the first one was still hot, a few pumps on the bellows and that was ready to work. So you couldn’t really waste coal or waste fuel like... because you had no... Like now you have got the electric and you know... You didn’t want to waste, so you would pump the bellows to...

Juliet And are you still making shoes today?

Peter Yes I enjoy making shoes. I made two pair up yesterday, like two pair of fronts. I used one set for a lady on a very fine like thoroughbred type horse, she want a pair of aluminium fronts on it, it was its first time that it had shoes on, and she is going to do dressage with it or something, so she wanted aluminium shoes on it, so I bought a pair of aluminium shoes to put on it. But the other two I made the shoes for. Yes.

Juliet And how long does it take you to make a pair of shoes?

Peter I wouldn’t think more than... to make them and put them on a horse was three quarters of an hour, a pair of shoes and they were on the horse, all nailed and finished off. I wouldn’t think it was more than three quarters of an hour each horse.

Juliet Amazing. And making a shoe for a horse rather than adapting a bought shoe, is that easier for you. I mean...

Peter Sometimes. When you have the first shoes on, their feet are a little bit broken, or worn. A horse when it walks it lands outside of the foot first and slides, and you will find most horses that are unshod, the outside is worn off and the inside gets long, and their feet are a bit twisted, and they get a bit of a funny shape. So I find it is easier to make a shoe... It takes you almost as long to shape a machine made shoe up, so er... I quite enjoy shoe making anyway.

Juliet And as well as shoeing you’ve also broken horses as well, for the drays.

Peter When the old boss died in 1970 I sort of drove a lorry a little bit, and I shod weekends, there weren’t so many horses about then, and there was a few local riding schools, I used to go there shoeing weekends. I went on a local... a local farmer, old Jim Young, he had a few working horses at the time, and I used to go down and help him, then I started shoeing his heavy horses. Then I finished up on Whitbread’s Brewery. I went up there as farrier, when I went up there, went to London we had 42 horses in the stables and two old farriers, old Perce and Johnny Walker. But Perce didn’t want to retire, he carried on, so the boss there said we will keep you on, but like if anything happens to any of the others, if you don’t mind going in the farrier shop. So I said ‘No that is okay’. So I went up there... I stayed there as horseman, which was actually more money than a farrier, being a horseman, and I never did go in the farrier shop as a farrier, because the horses gradually got cut down, and old Perce retired, but Johnny Walker said he could manage, he could carry on. He was a funny... Irish man, he could be a little bit of a character. So I finished up... After the Lord Mayor Show in November, we used to go down to Paddock Wood, where Whitbread had a great bit hop farm, and any youngsters down there, any young horses that the boss had bought, I used to sort of get them ready... Get them broken to chains, and then go up to London with them in March the following year, and then spend five or six months taking them out street training. That went on for a number of years.

Juliet And it was very important presumably that they were very quiet in London.

Peter Well it was, and the thing is you couldn’t buy broken horses. Years ago you used to like... on the farm... When farms was in full swing, farmers... A two or three year old, they would have horses broken and working, and they would work them for a couple of years on the farm. When they have matured, you get a nice big gelding, five year old matured, he was worth quite a bit of money. And the railways and the breweries they almost used to fight over them. They were ideal for what they wanted, they had a couple of years light work on the farm, because farm work isn’t that heavy like, perhaps a little bit of light carting or hay making, then a little bit of ploughing as they got older. But they were ready to go to work. But unfortunately, like there’s quite a few farms about, as the old farmers died off or retired, their sons didn’t mind carrying on and having an old mare about the place and breeding a foal, but when that came to weaning age, or a yearling... they wanted it gone. They didn’t want to mess about breaking it in and keeping it until it was five year old, they just wanted it gone. So the only way we could get grey horses, that we had Whitbread’s, when you see a grey youngster was to buy it as a yearling, or a two year old, and then we would turn them out on the hop farm in Kent and ran them on from there. They would run out on the grass all the summer, then in the October/November time I would go down to Paddock Wood, and anything that was sort of mature three/four year olds, and start getting it broken ready to go to London.

Juliet Peter, thank you very much for telling us about your stories with horses. I mean before we finish are there any other stories that you could tell us or?

Peter Well I could tell you. When I lived with nan and granddad on the farm, granddad he used to like to buy and sell a few ponies. He would like a pony. And because we were quite a way out of town, nan... On a Saturday morning I would take her shopping, and she er... Granddad bought this pony one day, and it was a Hackney Welsh Cob cross, and it was a bit sharp, and I loved it. It is like a youngster now with a motorcycle I suppose, but I loved a bit of speed. I suppose I was about 13. We got... We have gone to town and almost sparks coming out of its feet, it was really sharp. So took nan shopping, and stood outside in the town, I would stand by the cart with the horse, she would go in the green grocer and get a few bits that she needed, a bit of fruit and whatever. She never bought any veg because we worked on the farm. And then she would go and get some bread in the bakers, and the groceries, they would fetch them out in boxes, or the grocery would fetch them out and put them on the cart, and home we went. Nan never said a word. The next morning, Sunday morning, Granddad has put the pony in harness, I thought that’s unusual, he usually goes to the pub on his bike, but I’ve got to clean the ferrets out and I had got a few jobs, I wasn’t going to the pub, like at 13. Off he went. When he come home he had got this mouldy headed old pony, grey headed, it must have been about 25 year old. I never said anything. He put it in the stable. All the week it is out in this bit of a paddock. Saturday morning, I went and got him, I touched him with the whip he would trot ten paces and straight back to a walk. Saturday afternoon granddad said ‘How did the old pony go?’ I said ‘What did you sell Old Tina for, the pony I can’t get a trot out of it’. He said ‘Well I liked the other pony as well, but it is your grandma’s fault’ she said ‘She would sooner die of boredom than fear’. [laughter]

Juliet Peter thank you very much, and it is a lovely story. Thank you.