*Typist’s Note: The interviewer’s comments have been underlined for ease of reading*

**Mill Street Memories – Malcolm Brown and Bernie Thorn by Frank Voss**

Frank: My theory is that it wasn’t so much where we lived it was the people more than anything. My theory now is that if you took all the people who lived in Mill Street in the 40’s and 50’s and put them down there now, we’d still get on. If you look at the people down there now.... they can’t get on.

Unknown 1: The simple reason is that everybody who lived down Mill Street when we were talking about 40’s and 50’s were all Dorset people, now you’ve got such a strong influx of, god forbid I should say this because 3 out of my 4 children live away somewhere else but what I think happens is that people are moving more, I remember I was cussing one day somewhere in Mill Street square and Earl Bowren, not Earl... Jack Bowren, he must have heard me and the first thing he said was “I’ll tell your father of you, my son”. Now that worried me to death and that was the difference I think Frank because everybody knew everybody’s father and because we were static, whereas today, the human race today is all over.

Unknown 2: I think a lot of it is when we were kids, you wouldn’t dream of calling anybody by their Christian name...

Unknown 1: Because everybody knew their background.

Unknown 2: Right up until Mrs Arson died, it was Mrs Arson. I told you about working with Eddie out Winfrith, I was on a crane, sending the concrete over to him. Eddie came over to me and said “ere, for Christ sake, Farnie, you’ve got to call me Eddie, all the blokes are turned around like whose Mr Arson, what are you on about”. I remember the weekend in Noah’s Ark, the old man came in with Bill Ruffle and it was my turn to get a round in with Eddie and Mrs Arson, Lippy(?), Cubbie and a few more, so I said “what you having then Ed”, our man comes straight across and I nearly had a smack upside the ear for calling him Eddie. He had to get up and say “hang on a minute Bern, I’ve told him to call me Eddie because we’re working together, he said “I can’t have him calling me Mr Arson” and the old man said “that was alright” he said “I don’t want him being out....”

Unknown 1: but that was the thing, because everybody knew the parents, grandparents, bloody great grandparents if you like, because they were more static, people stayed there. I mean, as I say, I can remember, like what I was saying about my auntie Polly saying “bloody foreigner, he married a foreigner” she came from Bridport! I could walk up through Mill Street anytime and say “hello Mrs Symes”, now she wasn’t a friendly lady, bless her heart, but “Hello Mrs Symes...” “...errgh” – but you spoke.

Unknown 2: Kids now, 4 or 5 years old, “Hello Bern”, they’re all grown up now but 2 doors down from us, they must be 17 or 18 now but I remember them coming out and going to school 5 or 6 year old “morning Bern”, I mean, it doesn’t bother me.

My old man would give you one upside the ear if you didn’t call them Mr or Mrs. You automatically called them by their surname didn’t you.

Frank: Well you knew the families didn’t you.

Unknown 1: I suppose it’s covered by the word ‘community’, it’s just how communities were. Having said that, 3 of my poor children live away, so they’re breaking up some other community.

Unknown 2: Nobody moved in them days, how many neighbours do you know from up here?

Unknown 1: I’ve lived here for 44 years and I can count how many houses I’ve been in, I’ve been in more houses in Mill Street than i’ve certainly been in here and I was only a baby down there until I was a young man. We’ve been here 44 years, I have been inside the hall in that one, the kitchen in that one, the bungalow i’ve been by the back door and I could go on. I bet a third of the houses down here I haven’t been in.

Unknown 2: People move so much today, we didn’t move in them days, not unless you were dead.

Unknown 1: It must have been a bit grotty when you think of our parent’s time down there. There was a lot of drinking done, I think that’s where the reputation comes from but if you tried to work out up through Mill Street, start from the bottom and look up through Mill Street, alright, the men would go for a pint, some men; some men didn’t go for a pint and then you had the extreme... my old man, when he was younger, he didn’t go for a pint, he went to get drunk but not all men were like that. I don’t remember Mr Clark living next door to us in Holloway Road – remember Tom Clark? I don’t remember him being a drinking man, I don’t think they drank.

Unknown 2: I wish my dad wasn’t. Nothing I could do about it anyway was there? My old man had a top army pension.

Unknown 1: our old man worked overtime, I didn’t like my father as such, but I never knew my father out of work. He always worked overtime and he had a good army disability pension. So there was no need for us to be as ......

Unknown 2: On this army pension alone, his dad and my dad, we could have had a beautiful home.

Unknown 1: Yes, we could have had a holiday, had school uniforms....

Unknown 2: In 1941, my mother had £650 left her, so what would that have bought her in those days. My mother could have bought a house, lived in it and most likely bought 2 houses in them days.

Unknown 1: I remember Mr Bags coming down through Mill Street collecting the gas meter and the rent man, he used to smoke a pipe, I can remember my gran saying “oh no, not this week” as if he was doing her a favour. Gran, her husband died as a result of gas, he died of meningitis but she sort of lived on the parish virtually from a woman of about 30 and reared 5 children on the parish. She did go out to work cleaning, she used to take a bit of washing in and that. Same as Lizzy Marchant up the end of Shorts Lane pushing a cart with great big steel wheels. She used to have them all hung on the gooseberry bushes. She used to do the Exhibition’s washing.

Unknown 2: Walt Vallard’s mum, she used to have her sheets, when you walked by, you looked over the wall....

Unknown 1: It was all cotton sheets, it was all boiled, cotton boils white, whereas this synthetic stuff, I can’t remember sleeping in white sheets can you?

Unknown 2: What makes me laugh now is that when my brother was alive, you know the flats down the bottom, where the Kings Road garage was, all the flats around there. I forget what the flats are called down there. Where my brother had a flat?

Unknown 1: Lubbecke Way?

Unknown 2: Yes, we go down there now to see Caroline’s son, we were saying the other day, I counted (and I wasn’t lying) over 40 ducks led on the grass on a Sunday morning but I remember when we were kids you wouldn’t see a duck down Mill Street, the only ducks you would see would be what old matey had on the bridge, old Bailey. I said to Caroline “see all them ducks?” She said “yes”, I said “I’ll tell you what, when I was a kid, you wouldn’t have seen a duck, somebody would have ate them”.

If you went out round Algy(?) Mills or up over the top fields, if you had seen a field of Swedes, you picked up what you could carry, come back and before you knew it, everybody would be going up there in the dark, you’d bump into people.

You know Grey’s Bridge on the London Road, my old man came home one Sunday dinner time, from the pub and he said “Bill Ruffles just said that Gray’s Wood...” (out where the toilets are on London Road) he said” it’s white with mushrooms”, so I said to our Carol “right, grab a couple of baskets”, she was on the back of my motorbike out there and we went up there, within 10 minutes we had filled 2 bloody gert baskets full, so my old man could flog them up the Ex again. Just as we’re going to get on the bike, this farmer come leaning over the gate, he said “I’ll have them”, now I’m about 19/20, so I said “have what”, he said “them mushrooms, I watched you and that young girl picking them”, so I said “is it your field” and he said “yes”, I said “why didn’t you stop us”, he said “I waited until you had picked them”, I said “you’ve got some chance of having they, the nearest you get to them mushrooms is on the end of my nose, I can assure you of that, you can ring the police, do what you like but you aint having them”, I started up the bike and told Carol to hang on and we came on home. I would have ran over them rather than let him have them.

Frank: it’s another confession, we’ve got on here then.

Unknown 1: we went out there with a trolley, our Lance. Right opposite that layby, down in the dip was some army huts, it was built for the war, billeting. I remember we took a lot of wood from the cladding, loaded up our trolley to go back and a police car stopped us and said “you can’t have that my son”, he loaded it into the back of his car, we never heard no more but that copper had a nice fire.

This business you hear about how the police could only go down Mill Street in 2 or 3’s, I don’t remember that.

Frank: I think it was in the 1800’s.

Unknown 1: A copper couldn’t walk anywhere anytime down there. I mean, don’t forget, where else was there such a concentration of poor working people in Dorchester, other than in Holloway Road? There’s no council estates, so if you think about the council houses and private houses that have been built since about 1947 but prior to that there was none, I suppose there was Windsor Road, when was that built, 50’s?

Unknown 2: No, 40’s I expect.

Unnown 1: Where was there a concentration of private houses.....

Unknown: 2: What about Weatherbury Way, that was built for Winfrith.

Frank: That was built in the 50’s.

Unknown 1: Syward Road that was 50’s and 60’s. So if you think about it Frank, Mill Street, Holloway Road, Hardye’s Avenue, Harvey’s Terrace – if you drew a circle around them, that would be the biggest concentration of working people in Dorchester. The rest of them if you take Queens Avenue – they weren’t working as such – they were professional people, where else was there such a large concentration of houses. I remember boys living in say Queens Avenue, Prince of Wales Road but it wasn’t the big estate like there is now. If you look into some of these council houses now, they’ve still got the same... not so much in Dorchester but in other inner cities, it’s the same thing going on, it just seems more vicious now than it used to be.

Frank: Yes, we were hard done by. Anyway, we had a fairly good upbringing.

Unknown 1 and 2: Yes.

Frank: Ok, we were hungry sometimes...

Unknown 1: Yes but so was everybody.

Unknown 2: With the chapel, I think it was good because all the kids were drawn together.

Unknown 1: It was rough from about ’39 to the 50’s, there was rationing for everybody, so I mean, we went short of some things but there were somethings like a good stew.

Unknown 2: They reckon we were better as children health-wise than they are today. You didn’t eat a load of rubbish. My missus, she went to Asda yesterday and come back with 5 donuts in a bag. She wasn’t going to eat them because she’s on a diet, now who ate 5 donuts? Dopey. What I’m saying that when you were a kid, you didn’t have that did you? Our mother used to make a fruit cake every week.

Unknown 1: Sugar was at a premium because it was rationed, it wasn’t until the Yanks came here, the officers mess was out at Kingston Maurward, not in the big house but the other big manor there. They were good to local people, I mean, it was for years that I thought that pineapples grew in tins, I never realised that they grew wild.

Unknown 2: My family scored 10 times better than anyone around Mill Street, my oldest brother was a chef in the Navy, he was 15 years older than me, of course, when he came home on leave, he would have had it fiddled that he would have had bloody great big hams sent from the railway, tins and tins of peaches and pineapples under the bed. When he came home, we used to live like Lords.

I don’t know how he fiddled it off the ships but it was never when he came home the same day, it would be a couple of day’s afterwards, I tell you who used to get a truckload from – that little Georgie, you remember Georgie from up around Fordington Hill, used to sell newspapers, half mast trousers we used to call him.

Unknown 1: Remember Whistle? Used to work for the railway, he used to drive a little 3 wheel lorry.

Frank: Bubbles?

Unknown 1: Bubbles or Whistles.

I can remember, I read in Forrester’s book about the horse that ran away, I can remember the co-op having a horse and cart for delivering bread. I remember that.

Remember Sid Norman coming around with the milk churn?

Unknown 2: Yes.

Frank: He was a miserable old thing.

Unknown 1: You remember Glad Norman’s husband – Sid. He was a nasty bugger.

Unknown 2: Remember Tiddler’s dad used to drive the 3 wheeler van with bread, same as whatisname did. He wouldn’t give you nothing.

Unknown 1: Harold Ellis – he used to cut hair in the Mill Street flat.

Unknown 2: Tiddler’s mum was ever so nice. I used to pick her a bunch of flowers, didn’t care what it was, bloody daisies, she would always cut off a big slab of cake, whatever, she had made. I always remember that.

Unknown 1: You could walk down Mill Street on a Sunday, Sunday dinnertime and smell the dinners, they used to cook dinner for about 4 hours.

Frank: They would have only just packed away the breakfast things; that was the only day of the week they had a fried breakfast, pack that away and get on with the dinner.

Unknown 1: I remember... and our gran, that they would have their dinner cooking for about 3 hours, the cabbage water they’d keep topping it up. We didn’t know any different did we. Let’s be honest, you can’t tell me that other houses weren’t the same as that.

Frank: everything was cooked in about 3inches of fat.

Unknown 2: The dripping, mother would say at Sunday teatime “what do you want? And I’d say “corr, lets have some of that dripping”. I loved it.

Unknown 1: What we ate – offal, sweetbreads, brains. Now that’s classed as a delicacy, cost you an arm and a bloody leg. Sweetbreads is a thyroid gland above the lungs. If you bought that now it’s dearer than fillet steak. We had it till it was coming out of our bloody ears.

Unknown 2: We had a gas stove, the fire was.... oven one side, a plate what you pulled out to stand a kettle on. I remember our mother doing a stew, a gypsy dicksey our mother had, about that deep, oval with a lid and he would be stood on the side. Our mother came back from Judge Jeffrey’s and there would be a swede chucked in, she would keep adding in to it. I do a stew even now for three days.

Unknown 1: Rabbits....

Unknown 2: I killed 100’s of them down Chickerell. My cousin, the one I go to see in Cornwall, I used to go to Chickerell, they had their own place down there. They had a field out the back where they used to keep their horses and we were up there one Sunday and between 3 lads with a stick each, we killed over a 100 rabbits and they weren’t running, just walked by and we went bang, bang. In the end we got fed up with killing them and I’ve never had a rabbit since, I’ve shot 100’s of them since, because I always bring Tubby up two on a Monday.

Unknown 1: I remember when I worked at Fletcher’s; I used to have to go in there Friday nights to skin rabbits. We had to skin the rabbit to head and then cut the fur around the head, so you left the rabbit hanging up, skinned but with the head on. Apparently, Mr Parsons who was the manager of Fletcher’s, you remember Fletcher’s the butcher. He was the manager, he said that was the law because, during the war apparently, they were skinning cats. The Yanks eat rabbits, the American Indians eat dogs, the Chinese eat dogs, we don’t know what it’s like because we’ve never tried it but if you were hungry you would eat it.

Unknown 2: It’s like squirrel, have you ever had squirrel? I have. Not much different from rabbit. Now they’re selling them in restaurants in London aren’t they – grey squirrels.

Unknown 1: They’re breeding them for it aren’t they.

Unknown 2: You can go round Culliford Woods, you know the flats there? You can count a dozen squirrels running round there. Why not eat a squirrel.

When they keep on about “oh no, I couldn’t eat a horse”, well why not. What’s prettier than a lamb? I used to love horse meat, Bob Warren used to get me a couple of steaks from Sturminster Newton. He lived at Charmouth. I’ll try anything once.

I don’t like pig trotters.

**Frank identified the interviewees at the end of the tape as Malcolm and Bernie. I don’t know though which was which when they were speaking.**