

Audlem History Society. Recorded by Ken Maple / Interview with Miss Ruth Fearnley 1913 – 2009

My paternal grandfather William Fearnley, 27 King Street, Manchester married Elizabeth Lyon-Lamb - isn't that nice – they were bleachers of cotton.

My maternal grandfather Peter Jackson, farmer, of Plumley married Adelaine Beswick, Alderhall Farm, Toft.

And I am Miss Ruth Fearnley. I was born at Woolfall Farm, Hankelow on March 15th 1913, half an hour later than my twin brother John, I believe. We were not expected to live so we were christened quietly at home. John unfortunately had convulsions from time to time until he had measles then thankfully they disappeared. It used to scare us, Arthur and I to death. We used to disappear round the fields until we thought he'd recovered and poor mum had to cope with it alone. We spent some very happy childhood days tending our rabbits in the clover field – we'd take them with a collar round their necks to eat in the clover field.

Our sweet mother had a very busy life making cheese and butter, a big farmhouse to run and all of us to feed.. Mary Mellor came to help her on the Saturday and we loved her, and we loved to torment her, Mary Mellor. She lived in a little cottage on Longhill. She lived on her own and she was a typical country person you know - she'd swear a bit and we used to torment her and she'd curse – we used to get on her back when she was scrubbing the floor and that sort of thing you know.

We had 'askers' in the cellar – we'd have potatoes in there and askers, those creepy crawly things you know like lizards....and my cousin used to chase poor Mary Mellor with these askers - they were like lizardified.....newts. We called them askers, I don't know why? Yes we used to get on her back when she was scrubbing the kitchen floor.

It was hard work in those days but something so lovely about them. We were very fortunate when we were young . There were some children who had no shoes and only dried bread and a little jam for their lunch at school. We walked to school, no cars then, past Longhill Moss with Gypsies on it but they never interfered with us. We used to help in the hay field. I remember once standing at the gate, a gypsy came along and he said to my cousin.....I had a cousin who used to come from Prestwich, all his holidays he'd spend with us, as soon as he broke up from school he was over at Audlem. This gypsy said to Jack and I, he was only so big, he was a bit older than us – have you any dogs, and we said no, and my cousin said “*you should have said yes*” and this gypsy chased him – he went up a tree, he could climb like a monkey up the apple tree.

Q - Tell me about the Buerton School

I started at five - I had to walk. They called me little red riding hood because I had a red coat with three collars, one small one, one a bit larger and one a bit larger....in red, they called me little red riding hood. The men who repaired the roads Called me little red riding hood they did.

Our teacher was very fiery – she had a terrible temper. She could be very nice but if necessary she could be very strict. She'd got a mop of frizzy hair, red hair and a temper to match it actually, and yet she was very nice when she wanted to be.

My eldest brother was one of her pets – he used to do the registers for her I remember. There were about four of her pets who could do no wrong but my other brother was in trouble every day.

Q - Where did you go after Buerton School then?

Then I went to Hankelow

Q – Was that a primary school as well?

Yes – and then I went to Audlem Primary School

Q - So you lived at the Broomlands?

Yes the stable yard – the walls were oak.....there was no papering to be done. Quite roomy – quite nice really but a big change from Woolfall of course. I had some nice holidays over there, we used to go to Rhyl for a fortnight and so we were better off – we were one of the first people in Audlem to have a car, we used to go to Rhyl for a fortnight – that must have been when dad was better off and we had a very nice time actually. And we used to go the chapel Sunday school at Hatherton, Hatherton Chapel – and on the anniversaries we used to sit on the stage and the girls had a new dress, the boys had a new suit – very posh.

Q – You’ve got that picture haven’t you that was taken in 1922

1922 – yes

Q – So this is taken at Hankelow school – now on the bottom row on the right hand side who is that?

Florrie Wilcox

Q – How old would he have been then?

About nine – born in 1913 – so nine was he?

Q – and this girl holding the sign that says Hankelow on the left – that’s Florrie’s sister isn’t it?

Yes – and she fell through the floor at the grammar school and was .killed?

Q- do you remember the others on the picture then?

Yes – (laughs) Ulrika, she's a Farrington, and she's a Leah – I can't remember her Christian name. Milly Williams, Phyllis Wilcox, Kathleen Etherall – she'd got very bad eyes, she was a Millington I think– and here's Florrie Williams and that's George Walker, that's a George Williams, that's Brian Hall, Mary Allman, Ruth Fearnley, Violet Massey, Ethel Plant, Mildred Lear, Dennis Walley, Charlie Basford, Joe Banks – a farmer from up Hunsterson, John Fearnley, Harold Allman and Tom Williams. I know this one well enough but it won't come....Roycroft – I can't remember their christian names some of them – she committed suicide, I think she did anyway.

Q – How long did you live at Broomlands for?

I don't know – about four years I should think. And then we were living at Little Heath – and then from Little Heath to Swanbach Mill

Q – Why did you move round so much?

Oh – just dad at the time. He didn't seem to settle anywhere.....

Q –and then you went to the Grammer School

Well it was secondary modern school then – we had cookery lessons and the boys had woodwork which they don't seem to have now do they. And Gaffer Thomas was the headmaster – he was like a frog, big tummy and he liked his whisky

Q – Did he drink it while he was at school?

I think so, in the teacher's room – yes. And we used to get geography for a whole afternoon – bored to tears. I know less about geography because we were bored with it, it went on too long.

Q – What happened to the girl who got killed at school – how did that happen?

She just fell through the floorboards – they must have been rotten. At the junior school here Miss Rampton was the head teacher. The one that was turned into three houses here....

Q – What was that school called?

Audlem Infants

Q –so did you go there as well?

Yes – Miss Rampton, an old maid – she was very strict. She used to have me writing out the women's institute, she was the secretary in the women's institute I think, she'd have me writing the notes for the meeting – I must have been a reasonable writer then I'd be writing these out I remember. Yes she was a very strict teacher – very good though – typical old maid she was.

I think I learned to ride a bicycle at Little Heath – down the bank, yes that's where I learned to ride a bicycle.

Q- whose the first

And I only had brothers unfortunately, William, Arthur and John and Ruth. Four of us. There was time I used to kick their shins – they used to torment me and in self defence, it was three against one. I wish John has been a girl – it would have been nice to have a twin sister.

But we had some happy days at Swanbach Mill. We used to go jumping brooks – following the otter hounds. The otter hounds used to go to Audlem twice a year. Used to meet at the bridge below the station and follow the river – I used to go via Shavington Park and walk back – or get a ride on the back of someone's bicycle. Sounds cruel but it was very exciting for us then....

Q – Did they catch many otters?

They managed to catch one I think – and then the head ones used to have paws for a brooch you know, made into a brooch – it seems so cruel now but at the time we enjoyed it

Q – did they have fox hunts from Audlem as well?

Yes – used to meet in the square.

Q – did you follow the fox hounds too?

No – you'd need a car really to follow them and I don't think dad went fox hunting. We used to shoot rabbits and we used to have a lot of rabbit pies in those days.

Q – who shot the rabbits?

Dad – or he used to trap them – Mother used to make lovely rabbit pie. I've skinned a rabbit many a time, I could skin one now– very nice, rabbit pie. I remember once some people at Little Heath having roast with blackcurrant jam – it was lovely. See it didn't kill me off. And we used to go ratting, we had a Cairn she was great ratter. We used to go along the brook or down to the mill – we go and sit in the mill and wait for the rats to come out and she'd go for them. I remember one going up a damson tree and she just got hold of it by it's tail and pull it down, it was a big old rat with a big tail and she dragged it down and killed it – she was very vicious – yes Patch, we thought a lot of Patch. And once she gnawed a hole in the front door at Swanbach Mill – it came right down the passage and into the dairy which was opposite the kitchen door so what they did, tied a string to the dairy door and brought it through to the kitchen and we thought the rat was in they pulled the string and went in and the rat was there – it went for them, I can't remember who went in now but it was quite ferocious when it was cornered but they managed to kill it

– it think it jumped from one side of the vat to the other and what happened to the milk? I'm sure I don't remember now.

Mum was a cheese maker. She learned it at dairy school with **Franklin Goodwins** grandmother - we used to go and visit her every year Mother and I, go for tea.

Q – So where did you live after you left Swanbach Mill?

Mount Pleasant, and then from Mount Pleasant to Mill Lane – and there we stayed for sixty two years. Mother died at Mount Pleasant and dad died at Mill Lane – bronchial pneumonia – there were east winds and blizzards, terrible time, I'll never forget it., awful. The road was blocked, the doctor used to have to come across the fields – he used to come twice a day. He was very good, Doctor Thornton.

Q – Tell me a little bit about what you remember about the village, and the businesses that were in the village and who used to work in them?

Well three butchers, three bakeries and there was Williams' the drapers, they were a drapers then not....they sold dresses and curtain materials, dress materials. Then we had Audlem flower show once a year. It was quite a big flower show – the secretary used to use the office at the back, it was a printing works then, Manchester House – he used to use it as his headquarters for the flower show. It was very busy at that time – it was well known for the flower show, it was a big flower show. On the Crown field sometimes – it was once on the field by the canal and it was once at Lightwood Green, no not Lightwood Green –top of the bank, beyond the station – and we had aeroplane flights then in the old aeroplanes – I think Jack went up, I never went up but Jack did I know. It was so much a flight, I can't remember how much now but there was plenty of room up there. And they used to have an oddfellows club and the foresters and they used to have Sam Greateorex down and there used to be a parade – quite an exciting time – that was around ten to fourteenish I think.

There was the Crown Hotel – that was a big hotel. I remember a prince staying there during the war – and he came across, I was at the shop – and he wanted a night shirt and I remember measuring his neck for a night shirt. He came from somewhere but I can't remember where now but he stayed the night at the Crown. I remember Lloyd George going through too when he was canvassing – and three men at the Crown's windows. There's Frank Rose the auctioneer and Herbert Astle who lived at the Crown and someone else and they had remarks for him but he always had an answer for them – yes I can see him now with his hair blowing in the wind – he was sharper than them. I used to go to the election meetings at the public hall to hear them arguing. I remember once them saying that Winston Churchill, a man with such charming ways, he put thrupence on petrol.

When do I end?

Q – When you get fed up.....

Oh it's awful this is – thinking that it's all being put down – I remember Jackie Leigh, he always slept under the sky so he could see the stars – he didn't live in a house then, he lived at the old mill. Down Mill Lane there was an old mill but it's been demolished now – it had no top and he used to sleep there. He also slept up Kinsey Heath under a tree – he did that for a long time.

Q – What did he do when it rained?

There's no shelter up there I don't think.

Q – How long did he live like that for?

A very long time – years. And he always had newspapers next to his body to keep him warm.

Q – And how did he make a living?

Doing odd jobs I think for people – laughing Jack they called him because he was always laughing. And when the weather was very bad he used to come to the back door but it had to be very bad before he would come and ask for anything so I'd say what's the matter Jack - can't you light your fire. So I'd probably open a tin of soup for him – I wouldn't be expecting him for starters would I? He had to sit on a stool in the back kitchen – a wooden stool. He hated putting on anyone really – he was very desperate when he came – yes very independent. At one time he lived at Cox Bank originally in a house.

There were a lot of old characters in Audlem, used to congregate at the butter market, they used to go out at night after the rabbits. There was **Canon Cotton**, he was brother to Lord Combermere and he'd say "well lads how did you get on last night, did you have a good catch – you know he'd bring himself down to their level, he was a perfect gentleman. Only young. Tiny Booth, and the old characters used to go out at night poaching it was. And the Booths lived in a cottage next to Beemans – just one up and down, just a bit of a back kitchen, they had six or seven children there. Quite a few families in Audlem like that but they lived and thrived.

Q – Where was the blacksmiths?

The chip shop – it was the Shukers living there. There was 2 brothers and the sister – very quaint, they used to lead a cow – I forget where they took it to. They had a cow anyway, get their own milk I suppose. There were two blacksmiths in Audlem – there was one at the Green – it was Powells at the Green and Shukers – the smithy, quite quaint. And then Miss Shuker in the choir – she was quaint too. It was a wonderful place then – as nice as it is now.

Q – What was our Lucy doing in the old days?

Well she didn't live in Audlem then. She came from Sound I think or Aston or somewhere that way. Then she married Mr Hollins and lived at Bath Farm – do you know where that is?

Q – Up Sandy Lane?

Yes – then he died – she been a widow now for 20 years. Sam Hollins she married. Oh that was exciting.

TRACK 2

Q – So how did you fill your days, what did you do when you were a teenage girl – did you go to the village dance on a Saturday?

No I didn't – there were no village dances to go to and we never went to public houses in those days ladies never went in public houses. There were three ladies in Audlem who used to go on a Saturday night and everyone thought it was terrible you know. I couldn't afford to go anyway.

Q – Tell me what you did for a living?

When I left school and it was the aftermath of the first world war – and all the marches like to 10 Downing Street from Jarrow and there was no work about. You had to take what was going or starve so that's when I went to Williams's the drapers as it was then – I was fourteen and there was nothing else available. I wanted to go in for hairdressing but you had to pay £25 down - premium down, and you got no wages while you were training so that was out of the question. By that time dad had taken to drinking so we went through a very hard period at that time. It was worse seeing mother suffer really. Oh dear – you'll have me weeping.

Q – What made him take to the drink?

I don't know – he just seemed to lose interest somehow. He was spoilt for one thing, he was the youngest of seven and he was spoilt – that was his failing, yes he was spoilt I think. And he was very good natured to people when he was out – not particularly to us but if someone was hard up or they'd got to get out of their house because they were in debt for rent he'd pay the debts

for them. Yes and all this is being recorded so I must be careful – I don't know what to say next

Oh and when Peter was five my aunt came to live with us. She'd nowhere else to go. She kept house for a school master and the son was at home then so she looked after the son and they said they would have her – she could go and live with them for a month when his wife was ill..... and it was 'could we have her'? you see after that. I hadn't got the heart to refuse....unfortunately. So she came to us when Peter was just five and I had her fifteen years. She didn't appreciate me one little bit. I used to cook for her every day but she was very nice to Peter – we'd say are you going to say goodnight and he'd say goodnight and she'd say "*goodnight love*". We'd say goodnight aunty and she'd say "*goodnight*" (in a gruff voice)– that's all I got. Then one day she said "*you know Peter's a lovely boy – you shouldn't have had him*".

He (Peter) was a lovely little boy, very healthy and he was no trouble and I don't think I ever heard him cry – he used to sleep for hours. And we had a nice Baptist minister here at that time and he came and invited him to a social at the Baptist – he was two and half then and they used to have a service in the afternoon so he used to go to Sunday school there on Sunday afternoons so eventually he became a baptist. The father used to preach a bit – and he was also the headmaster up here.

We didn't need the milkman when we were at Woolfall or Swanbach Mill – we had our own milk and cows and buttermilk. I used to love buttermilk, drank quarts of it.

Q – Who milked the cows?

Dad – I tried once and the cow put her foot in the bucket. I was about twelve then and they didn't let me try after that. It was quite interesting really, hand milking. They don't have it now do they?

We used to have these oddfellow /foresters clubs every year – as I say we had Sam Greatorex down for them.

And then I was in the church choir from fourteen until I was in my thirties. And we used to have a garden party at the vicarage every year. The vicarage was where Moseley's houses are now – it ought never to have been demolished... are you listening?. Oh the grounds were lovely up there, it's a sin and shame, it was a lovely place. We had a garden party every year, well attended and the choir used to have a stall, a sweet stall – we'd make sweets and then have a sweet stall with various ones. Some made dresses, Mrs Thomas always made one for me with me in mind when she made it - and mother would buy it.

And Audlem's totally different now – used to have three bakeries, three butchers, two drapers and Beemans then was a shoe shop – Sold shoes and Mr Beeman, George's father used to repair shoes and make shoes and so did Andrew Smith's grandfather – two shoe shops. There were two solicitors and there are none now. There was Eric Smith's, you know round the bend – Eric Smith's house and then where the alley is you know where Arthur Walton lives you know the big house on the alley across from the post office – the big house on the right there had another solicitor living there. There were two in Audlem. There was a grocery shop a little lower down from that house, on the left going down – there was a grocers there. There was a grocers where Arthur Walton lives across from the big house where the solicitor lived on the right as well. The grocers on the left would bake bread – Sheens and then there was Woods next to the post office, that was a bakery. And then down school lane there were about five cottages on the left down there and then of course the Grammar School used to be a monastery. The monks used to walk down Monks Lane, that's where it gets its name from. And it became a Grammar School and then it became a secondary modern and eventually a home for the elderly.

And now **Joe Beeman** lives in that little cottage – a family of Shukers lived there – there was mother, father and two children brought up there and I don't know why it isn't still called Shukers Cottage.

Q – So what sort of things did you do around Easter time?

We went to church – there was always a Good Friday service from twelve to three. You'd go in and out during the singing of a hymn. That's carried on till the new one came and now go to town parading on a Good Friday. Carry a cross I believe, I haven't seen them yet. I used to like the three hour service when you'd go in and out - and you'd have a different preacher you know coming from away. It was a very solemn day, no shops open, nothing would happen on a Good Friday but now that's changed. Anyway that's gone now they go round the town carrying a cross – and if you're in Audlem, twelve till three on a Good Friday you'll see them.

Q – Tell me about Jack and what he did for work?

Oh Jack's done all sorts of jobs. He's worked on farms, he worked at the Co-op, he's worked at Parkers at Lightwood Green. As I say it was the worst time when we finished schooling, terrible time. Oh when he left school he worked on a farm I think – there was nothing else for it then. My eldest brother worked on the railway. What did Arthur do? He fell into something, he was in Derbyshire a lot, the forestry commission I think. They were awful days and I used to have to go down Mill Lane at seven o'clock at night, black dark, no lights and you could hear the Germans going over, chuck, chuck...you could always tell their planes

Q – How old were you then?

In my thirties would have been. I was a nervous wreck because of my thyroid.

Q – When did they sort your thyroid out?

Well it started at eighteen and it was six years before Dr Thornton diagnosed it – he said it was nerves and once he said *“you'll have to get away or you'll be no use to them or anyone else”*. So I went down to Surrey then to a friend who'd married and gone down there but I was no better because it was this thyroid. I went in one night after seven o'clock and he felt the palm of me hand and he said oh it's that gland – you've got Graves disease. I was in a

shocking state. Telling him all the while I'd got indigestion, I was in a state that night. He told me all this and then I had to come home – up the lane in the dark, no one in when I got there. Then I just thought I'd collapse down on the rug – shocking state, I'll never forget it. Oh it's awful this is. Oh and he said the thyroid must have rest so he said you'll have to rest so I had to finish work.

I was at home and he came one morning. He said I'd like you to go and see the specialist at Stoke – wanted me to go to the hospital, you know the state I was in. So I went to see Mr Ramage at Stoke. The district nurse took me and he said "*oh definitely Miss Fearnley, we'll have you in*" – we'll put you to sleep in bed, you won't see the theatre but he said "*we've got to get your pulse down*" – it was racing at two hundred and odd and a normal pulse is about seventy five. That's why I felt so terrible, he said it affects every nerve in your body so they kept me in bed for a week. They wouldn't operate until my pulse was normal. Then I was put to sleep in bed and the next thing I woke up and he said "*a wonderful demonstration Miss Fearnley*" – I said well at least someone enjoyed it and we both laughed. To take some of your thyroid away and get just the right amount. I was operated on at twenty nine and I was in my early thirties before I was anything like and here I am to tell the tale. After all my heart went through it's a wonder it's still going now – it must have been a big strain but I think I've been compensated for what I've suffered.

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