

Alan Perkins
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Interviewer: David Richardson

Interviewer: I
Respondent: R

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00:00 I So this is David Richardson interviewing Alan Perkins. Erm Alan can you tell me a little bit about your background in your early life?

01:13 R Yea I was born in a nursing home in Marston Green in 1944 and it was a private one obviously because that was just before the National Health Service came into being and then I lived the first twenty four years of my life in Doris Road in Sparkhill which is just off Shell Green Lane. My grandparents had bought their house, I think it was in 1924, and they'd moved from South Grove off Heathfield Road in Handsworth which is a back to back really and they came to live there, I think they always, my mum always used to say because she moved into Doris Road with them in 1924. I think they paid about £750 for the house and I think it was a mortgage, with a mortgage of just over £500, amazing fact really but that was it. And then yea my dad was away in the Air Force for quite a long time when I was little. In fact he was ill immediately after the war, he had a sort of nervous breakdown because he were in the RAF and they were working them towards the end of the war and huge long day time shifts and he went into hospital to recover so I didn't really get to know my dad until I was ooh at least eighteen months old. And er mum always used to laugh at when he did eventually come home I said to her because I was just went to her, who is this man in bed with you mum and that was always a strange one, really she always used to enjoying telling me that story.

01:39 R But yes I grew up in that house in Doris Road and went to the local primary school first of all, which was called Dennis Road, and now it's called Anderton Park. And er and then in 1955 we all of us, no, no exceptions had to take the eleven plus exam, and that was a strange thing really because suddenly it's splits you away from you parents because from your peer group because I was lucky enough to pass for the grammar school for King Edwards at Camp Hill and a lot of my best mates didn't, and you know you got drawn up into a different sort of school environment and it was curious that I'd only get to see them very occasionally from there onwards and you'd meet a whole new group of friends at secondary school who come from all over the city to that particular grammar school. Er life in Doris Road was really interesting because, right from the start, my earliest possible memory, well my earliest possible memory is that amazing winter of 1947 when the snow in the street was taller than I was, great, great channels of snow cut through cut through

to get out of the house, that was a really exciting time and I can really picture that now, the snow at the end of our tunnel back entrance being taller than I was.

02:57 R But Sparkhill was already an interesting place to live because there were a number of right from those days, immigrant families moving in. I remember there was a strong Irish contingent in the road and also opposite us one or two sort of refugees from the war. There was a Polish family lived right opposite us and it was interesting especially in the light of so many Polish people being able to come and live in this country now. That what they did was they changed their name from a Polish name to Saunders, obviously an English name it sounded most like it, and they were a sort of a little bit different, and you were a bit intimidated, it was a very fierce looking man, but it was always interesting looking back now and especially where I've lived and where I worked since then, an immigrant community, a multi-racial community was almost there right from the start, I was born into.

03:50 R Erm mum stayed at home, dad went to work when he came out the war, he came out the war, and er but mum had my gran to look after, she was a carer for her really through the whole of my childhood and she was a great mum was a great sort of mum of conversationalist, she always talked to everybody in the street, especially new people really and she was one of those ladies which as so many ladies did, go out shopping every day, none of this shopping for the week, she shopped every day, down at St Johns, Sparkhill and she'd go to the various shops there and George Masons was one of those wonderful wonderful grocers with an all-round counter where you got served with everything by the people behind. And and it was an interesting area too because there were all sorts of erm all sorts of different shops different shops which you'd go into and a big massive public house. It's called The Antelope now, in fact I think it is still called The Antelope because it's an Indian restaurant now, as so many do become. But The Antelope was a fascinating place because mum was a regular church goer and so was I, but she wasn't particularly, she was always up for life as she saw it and so whenever we passed The Antelope, which we did sometimes, it was one of those that really did have sawdust on the floor and it was a sort of really rough pub where many of the Irish immigrants used to drink and seriously drink and as you heard one day we were passing by and a man came flying out, being thrown out into the street, landed in front of us. When I say "what's he done?" "Oh don't look that way anymore Alan, come on let's go home." But yes she knew all of that life because she saw it in St Johns.

05:37 R My sister was born in 1950 and she came to the same school down the road, where incidentally my mum had been at school as well when they first moved into the area in 1924. And that was again and my biggest memory of that of primary school, well besides the sport and when it came to playing for the football and cricket team which I loved, was the fact that there again mum was a great one for standing at the gate, because when I was eleven

and Sue was five, standing at the gate and talking to mothers and this again was our first meeting with people from the Caribbean for the first time and this was really exciting. In the sense that of course it was unusual to see people with black skins and trying to set up a new life for themselves. And just about that, it makes me quite emotional when I think of it now. The best thing that mum ever did was she made friends with an afro-Caribbean lady who came into this country Harjinder Harding who lived in Birchfield Crescent just behind the school, and mum took her clothes and had her round to tea and we went there for tea and it was really weird for us kid suddenly being friends with black, you know for the first time meeting West Indian kids. But what mum did as her friendliness towards, that lives with me forever you know, so proud of her.

07:08 R So anyway I passed the grammar school test and went to Camp Hill. That was the best year of my whole school life, the first year at Camp Hill, cos it's a wonderful old building well it still is, you know what it looks like on the Stratford Rd there at Camp Hill, full of nicks and corners, full of nicks and corners. And going there in your school uniform and getting roughed up which you did as first year kids, it was always a bit rough. But I loved the place because there were some fantastic escapades that went on down there. The playground slopes on the Stratford Road down to the railway embankment and we're talking real railways now, steam railways and just about it was compulsory to become a train spotter because the trains would come up the bank from St Andrews curve up to Kings Norton and they'd have a locomotive at the front, mainly freight like, and one at the back, banking it up the incline and you always at playtime have your books out ready to right down numbers. The school even had a railway society that sort of catered for us to do all this. That was absolutely brilliant and because of that, I remember we had one maths lesson in that first year which was right up against the railway line and the room there, so we were facing the blackboards, and the windows, you'd see these great locomotives come past the window, and any sensible teacher knew that no way, the only way to stop the kids jumping up and looking what number it was and writing it down, because he could see it clearly, was to as part of the lesson just write the numbers on the blackboard that he could see coming up, and we all copied them down (laughs). And that's great because I've loved railways that ever since, I really enjoyed being part of the train spotting scene, in fact to tell you the truth David I still am, I still go and stand on station platforms and look at numbers and write them down.

09:10 R But some other things that happened in that year were astonishing. When it snowed which it did quite heavily in the winter of 55/56, some of the things the older lads did which as teachers later on, we absolutely just cringed at doing but the playground slope down towards the railway line and when the playground slope was covered with snow, they organised these great big slides, not just to stand on, but they were left in the playground, but old P.E. benches turned upside down, put on the top of this long slide and you'd all sit

on them and go down like the cresta run, and some of the older lads could actually steer these great upside down playground benches round a manhole cover and down right to the bottom. It was serious injury but it was great that was, I enjoyed that. And then the other last thing in that wonderful year was as you know Camp Hill moved to a new school in Kings Heath and we were already going up there to use the playing fields on the bus. But at the end in the summer of 1956 when the school was about to open in the September, and the older lads had all left because they'd taken their exams. We had the removals and a lot of the big stuff had gone, they had proper removal vans, but the removal men came back with some of these big vans, and we as the youngsters had to unload all the P.E. equipment, put it in the vans and take it up to the new school ready for use, and again, you wouldn't dream of doing it now, but we all, there was half a dozen of us piled in the back of a big furniture van going up the Moseley Road with all the unpacking it at the school. That was a tremendous excitement. School in a new building was very boring after that really (laugh) but that was a special year, I would have been year seven and that was really exceptional.

11:03 R So er I lived, well I stayed at Camp Hill, I passed, I did quite reasonably well at GCSE and stayed on into the sixth form, by which time I was doing particularly well at cricket, I'd always loved the game. And when I was in the sixth form, I played for Birmingham schools and the Midland Club Cricket Conference because I was already playing for the Old Boys team, and then I went for some metros at Warwickshire, and you know just, when you think you're eighteen, you think I might be good enough to play cricket properly, professionally, silly really, but, you hope these things when you're eighteen. All the time I thought I'd really like to be a teacher none the less but cricket, if it came first would have been wonderful. But it didn't. There's always somebody better than you and so I went to Teacher Training College, a little bit later than I thought I would have, because, I had got University applications in, but possibly because I played too much cricket and not enough studying, I didn't quite get the marks at A Level I wanted, and in the days before the university clearing house, I had an offer to do, I think I wanted two 60%'s in Geography and History to do Honours Geography at University College in Wales Aberystwyth and I got two 55%'s, and they wouldn't have that because it was a really important place for Geography. And then I was scuppered, well not scuppered but I knew I wasn't going to get transferred to another university so I took non-residence really at the City of Birmingham Teacher Training College in Westbourne Road in Edgbaston. And mum and dad were very good about that throughout the three years of college, they let me have a lovely lot of freedom to come and go as I wanted. And then I did a second year teaching practice at Clifton Road School which is just opposite the baths on the Moseley Road and did well enough there and the head teacher said when you've finished your course, if you'd like to come back onto the staff and I did! And we, I had four happy years there and then I moved on promotion, again, it was mainly to look after the sport, the football and cricket to Lea Bank Junior School which is up on the Lee Bank

estate in the inner city centre, and then after that, I've been three years there and then I sort of applied for, they had deputy headships in primary schools, it was sort of the thing they did really and then I got to Wyndcliffe School in Small Heath right by St Andrews football ground. Which as a Villa season ticket holder, it was a bit hard to bear at first but we liked the area and I was really happy there and it's hard to believe thinking what it must have been like there and what one of our colleagues at school used to keep going on about the winter of 1947, and I can't believe they didn't close some of the schools some of the time. That's interesting, I don't know the answer to that really.

14:05 I Did it have any effect on any of the businesses around?

14:11 R It must have done, because especially as we had stuff delivered in the streets by horse and cart, they must have found it particularly difficult. There was, we used to have, the earliest memory having a milk delivery was by a horse and cart, just towards the end of Shagreen Lane, there was on the right hand side going towards the Stratford Road, there was a dairy called Fowlers Dairy, I think it was called and it was a lady from there and she came up parallel streets with Doris Road, with a horse and cart with the actual milk bottles on the horse and cart and there was certain regular deliveries of all sorts of other things, bread and the coalman was always a rare event as well, carrying the sacks of coals up the back entry and into the back yard.

14:56 I Great and er what sort of places did you go to as a child around the area on the Stratford Road?

15:03 R Obviously being keen in cricket and football played in Sparkhill Park an awful lot, erm we used to use the library as well, the public library which is just there on the Stratford Road, and I think I seemed to have enjoyed there as early as I can remember really. The children section was upstairs, yes I think it was, or was it downstairs. Anyway I know you weren't allowed from one to the other unless you were old enough which always seemed a bit of a shame. So we used that and also we used the parks and the library. I was never, I'm not really, I still don't being in the water much for swimming, dad was a keen swimmer, he went regularly once a week swimming at Sparkhill Baths, but he never managed to get me there. And the other big thing of course we used to go to was the cinema, the Piccadilly Cinema which is down just near the start of the Warwick Road. There was a big Saturday morning childrens scheme called ABC Minors. ABC Minors you were called, and you had all sorts of badges and went and saw not big films, just a series of cartoons or comedies. Our favourites that got the biggest cheer were The Three Stooges, I remember that, it was all muck about stuff and slapstick, for that was ongoing on Saturday. And then of course I'd do that sometimes in the morning and then obviously down the Villa Park with dad in the afternoon. There were special buses to Villa Park, football buses from the junctions of Stratford Road and Stoney Lane and we'd walk down there and go off

together and we'd stand at the Holte End terrace at Villa which was always enjoyable. He'd get me down to the front if he could when I was very little, but, erm, otherwise you just had to take it with a big massive crowd, they were big crowds too but you just did the best you can, see as much as you can.

16:55 I They won the cup in 57 as well.

16:57 R They did indeed, that was a great occasion as well, yea. It was good because it was a very special occasion because the Villa played in stripes then, obviously in the claret shirts with blue sleeves, they played in a very old original claret and blue stripes to win that. And it's always controversial what Peter McFarland did to Roy Wood the goal keeper, but football was different then, and, we were very proud of them winning and Johnny Dixon the captain, he was a lovely man, an example to all kids.

17:31 I So did you play football in Sparkhill Park or was it just cricket?

17:35 R Yes we always played football, we'd play football in the winter yea. Again you know sometimes when we walk passed the parks now in the school holidays and you think where's the kids? Why aren't they here? There wasn't that much to do and we'd get ourselves organised into serious football. And there were one or two at parents evening, especially at cricket, I remember there was one lad whose dad used to get us organised into teams so we'd play proper matches with eleven aside and stuff, only playing with a soft ball but that was tremendous really. But yes we did play in the park. And I played in the back garden too. My sister complains now that she had to learn how to bowl over arm when she was seven or eight, you know but yea we did play in the back garden a lot. Yeah, er I think playing, that was probably just about everywhere, I can think of that we went locally.

18:32 R We used to go by the shops and by bus into town, but by then I was a train spotter so I was in town a lot at New Street Station at the end of platform.

18:39 I And the was Camp Hill Railway Station as well back in those days.

18:42 R No not a passenger station, there was a goods yard there, there was a big goods yard there at Camp Hill, but the line that the station was on that line tragically including Mosley and Kings Heath Stations and one at Camp Hill, were closed, as an economy measure before the war and never re-opened. The lines are used a lot now for traffic, the freight traffic going north to south and south to north, they can avoid New Street that way, and there's always pressure to re-open the stations because both in Moseley and Kings Heath, they'd be very convenient. But the problem then is New Street is just too busy to get the sort of traffic and the regular service that a suburban service would need. I'd like to think I'd live to see those stations open out again but it's looking less likely now.

- 19:31 I So tell me a little bit more about your Saturday morning trips to the Piccadilly. What was it like inside?
- 19:37 R It was noisy, seriously (laughs) seriously noisy and you know the thankless job that some of the commissioners and the attendants had to try and keep some of the kids under control you know there were a lot were running around if you weren't careful and unless, especially sometimes, they'd show cowboy films but, when it got to the boring bits where they started kissing and there'd be lot of whistling and noise like that, you don't want that sort of thing going on when they could be killing the Indians which is terrible really when you think how you feel about these matters now. But it yeah was pretty exciting and pretty noisy and really if you wanted to watch a film seriously it wasn't a place to go, but it was something you did with your mates.
- 20:24 I What was the building like inside?
- 20:28 R Yeah it's very smart really, quite posh at the time, there was erm, a big big upstairs, a big circle area and the stalls were big, it was a big cinema, and there were places, where you could sit and wait, because films were shown sort of continuously then. That was another weird thing though, it wasn't so bad going to ABC Minors because you'd see each of the short films from the start, but the first time I went with mum and dad, they did what they'd always done, they used to take it in turns to go out to the cinema sometimes to watch a film, but you'd just go to the cinema when you were ready and so because the films being shown continuously, you'd walk into a film in the middle, and you really would, you'd go and sit down in the middle. And I remember the first film I ever went to see there was Captain Horn Blower, you know the seafaring stories, and it was lovely, but you couldn't understand what was going on, what had happened before and then even more amazing, so the film would come to the end and then you might watch the feature and then maybe the news reel and then the big film would start again, so all the bits you'd missed so far you'd catch up with. You'd see the first part of the film, and then the most incredible thing and I know parents of all sorts used to do this, comes the immortal phrase "This is where we came in." So we would be watching this to the point where, this is it, I remember this bit, now I can understand what's going to come, but oh no this is where you got up and walked out of the cinema. Amazing. And really all that went on completely and I think it was really, the first thing I can remember really stopping people doing that was Alfred Hitchcock Psycho, because all the posters said that no one would be allowed in after the start of this film and that really did you know, but the thought of going in for the middle of the film and then well, this is where we came in and off we went. That was very strange. Cinema going was different just like everything else I guess, but that certainly happened at the Piccadilly.

- 22:43 I What was it like in terms of the cost? How much was it? I imagine it was quite affordable back then?
- 22:48 R Oh yes, hard to know really, I should think for the whole of the morning session, it might have cost two shillings perhaps, I'm just thinking, that little really, just to get the kids in and get the cinema used, because they'd sell us refreshments, what sort of mess after that must have been to get ready for the Saturday night film. So yes certainly well within my pocket money yea.
- 23:17 I Did you go to any of the others along the Stratford Road?
- 23:19 R Yes I remember going to not then but when I was very young, but there was a cinema just up Walford Road erm called The Waldorf, it was right next to the roller skating rink, that's right and I remember later on going to see one or two films there yea. And we also went to a cinema just off Stoney Lane by the Durham Road, Taunton Road, it was called The Carlton and I used to go there sometimes. Depending what film was on really. But that wasn't in....
- 23:54 I Ok so I was quite interested in about what you said about the snow a couple of times there, once in 46.
- 24:03 R 47 yea.
- 24:04 I And once in the 50's as well.
- 24:06 R Yea.
- 24:07 I What kind of impact did that have on your local area of the Stratford Road?
- 24:11 R Well I can only remember that, you were sort of, mum was never so keen on this clearing your own bits of snow, people always did that, but I don't remember an awful big effect on transport, I think people sort of accepted the winter for what it would be you know and they weren't intimidated by ridiculous weather forecasts on the radio and the television, from the tele it's going to be the end of the world. But the snow was always good fun, certainly it was great fun to play in the Sparkhill Park in the snow. I can't honestly say we ever made anything like a snowman but rolling a big snowball up into a giant one was always something we loved to do and because there's a little bit of a slope there when you first go in off Shagreen Lane I remember, giant snowballs and pushing them down and rolling and rolling and rolling and then keeping your eye on your giant snowball, that was the next thing so nobody tried to smash it up because what you wanted to do was to let it shrink naturally and so it became quite a competitive thing to see how long once the snow started to melt, how long your giant snowball would last.

Audio 2

- 00:05 I Yeah erm, so yes tell us a little bit more about your time at King Edwards.
- 00:11 R Yes just the interesting thing about that saying how much I loved the first year there. The two buildings were so different, one was a really old building, obviously lots of nooks and corners and usual things and not really meant for education, we had to do P.E. in a hall and that sort of thing and the other one we moved up to Kings Heath was purpose built, modern school for the time with its own lovely playing fields. What was interesting having raved about the railway line at Camp Hill, it was the same railway line, just further along at Kings Heath passed by there, a little bit too far away from the playground to get all the numbers going past, so sometimes if it was something really interesting like an unusual locomotive and we were out at playtime, somebody had to be sent as a runner down the slope across the playing field to get the number and then bring it back for the rest of us. So that was a nice thing to happen.
- 01:10 R It was ever so different because suddenly you went from being in an old building, you were in one of these new well it always seemed like a glass palace at the time, schools have moved on since, but it was really like a big glass palace. The old building was really awkward, the staircases, some of them really dangerous, quite narrow. Near the entrance by the roundabout at Camp Hill, it was like a torrid tower and there was a little deputy head's room at the top there and I remember going up there once to see him because I'm glad to say, he was a real railway enthusiastic himself, wonderful old chap, and he used to get us visits to railway locomotive sheds at the weekend and it was just brilliant. But there were some very difficult classrooms which were almost physically dangerous to sit sometimes. I remember in one of the rooms, it wasn't our form room, but one of the rooms half way up the middle staircase that got really low at the back and you moved classrooms obviously for different lessons and one of the four lads in our class, there was a really low over hanging great big carved ornate fixture at the back and he was sitting at the back in the middle and very keen he must have been, because he jumped up so quick to answer a question, he knocked himself out on this great piece of plasterwork and he ended up getting carried out of the room, because it's awful really but just imagine the minute it happened, he went up bang down, crashed onto the desk and we all laughed, well you would wouldn't you really, and the poor lad couldn't move his head, being carried out of the lesson, that was a memorable lesson that was.
- 02:47 R Mind you when we went to the new school I ended up in hospital myself, banging my head on the playground floor playing football, but there we are that's just part of school life really. Erm the new school has been developed a lot intervening years, the lad next door goes there now and I'm delighted to say that after all the turmoil events of the boys and girls kept strictly

separate, they're now allowed to join, I think there's a joint sixth form now and that's much nicer and as I said to you, there was once when a naughty lad because the hole in the wooden door that separated the two schools but that's all become much more sensible now in modern times.

03:24 I Sorry what was that about the lad?

03:25 R Oh yea there was a brick wall at Camp Hill, there was a brick wall that separated the boys school which was new in the side road and the girls which was near the railway bridge, and the wooden door in the middle and one of these lads, he'd just finished his exams, his last final act of defiance, Felix Felton his name was, a wonderful name, brought a sword to school and sawed a great hole in this wooden dividing door, he left in disgrace did Felix but as a hero. (laughs)

03:51 I That's fantastic. So what was playtime like and break time at Camp Hill? Was it all just the railway stuff?

04:10 R Yea it was and it was all football really, we played football at playtime. The playgrounds are much bigger than they have been at Camp Hill, the old playground was useless for doing anything, it was far too sloping except for the snow, the snow rides as I told you but playgrounds in the new school are much better to play. Played a number of games of football side by side across the big playground so we enjoyed doing that. I think they've still got them fives court, you know that game, I think they had those. I think the King Edward Foundation always fancied itself as a sort of midway between the state and private education and fives was sort of a thing that boys were encouraged to play. It was an interesting game, never met it before, I think they're still there. Like squash but with a hard ball in your hand, interesting.

05:04 I Erm....

05:11 R It was rugby not football and never liked rugby at all. Having said that I go to watch Moseley now. But I was so disappointed at not being able to play football for the school any more you know and that was just the way it was and yet given the chance it was all football and all playground with little tennis balls in playtime, so they didn't acknowledge that soccer was to be played as an interschool sport which is a strange thing, but I don't think they do it even now. But that was ok because I could wait for the cricket season.

05:47 I What was the reason for the change? Was it different personal?

05:50 R I think probably yes I guess so yea. I think it probably was, I certainly think that boys and Girls now are offered a far greater choice of sporting activities to get involved in. For the girls I suppose, it was either rounders or hockey and now there's all the indoor sports. I'm a regular badminton player myself and I wish I'd have learned at school because it's, you can give kids that sort

of choice now I think and you do it in a big sports hall which they have now got up at Kings Heath which is different when I was there it was just outside in the cold. Didn't like it.

06:29 I Were you sad to move locations? Was there anything in Sparkhill that you was...?

06:37 R Yea mum and dad were very sad to go really, though in the end they knew they both had to do it because they were both getting on really. In 1981 they moved to a sort of sheltered accommodation in Kits Green, warden controlled and they lived in a little flat and they both ended their lives, married life quite happily there really. We thought in a way it would be a bit of, my sister and I thought it would be a real wrench because they had lived there from 24 to 81, but no again she surprised us. Again you know we thought she won't like it, it was as if she knew it was she had to do and he did as he was told I think and this was what they were going to do and then they did. She was most sorry to lose her neighbours. There was a lady next door, next door but one to her and she almost adopted to look after really and sadly she had to leave her and even more sad that the lady didn't live very long afterwards but mum knew it was the best thing for them. But from here a couple of Sundays ago I went to Sparkhill Methodist Church, you know the one by the Mermaid which is just off the start of the Warwick Road, because now, I'm in the Methodist circuit I've enjoyed visiting some of the other churches and to walk from here to Sparkhill Methodist Church, I can walk up Doris Road which is great to walk past the old house, which again I'm delighted and I know mum was at the time we drove her past to have a little look, it's still owned by the same men who bought the house off them, an Asian gentleman Mr Ramah and the house really does look well looked after. Doris Road still looks pretty good except that of course it was built just after the first war when motor cars were just unthought-of for ordinary working class people like us to have and now it's like a car park, it really is you know. In fact what Mr Ramah has done to 60 Doris Road and the three houses next door, he's actually moved the front garden, if you can picture this, so he can get like double layer parking. One can park up against the front of the house, then there's the pavement and then there's the car parked outside. So they must have very cooperative way of getting the cars shuffled round at any given time, but apart from the cars, the road still looks good and I'm pleased to walk up it now and then.

09:06 I What else has changed in that sort of walk from here to Doris Road?

09:11 R Well strangely enough starting from here, not a lot. It's a very nice walk along Billesley Lane and down Bell Walk which was always a very posh house. Yardley Wood, Stoney Lane up onto Doris Road and then the minute you get to the other end of Doris Road and then the shops that were once there like people had didn't they before, they heard of supermarkets, there was a green grocers there and a big grocers just on Showell Green Lane and a

hairdressers and a sweet shop and they've all gone really, some converted into other little businesses and others just converted back into housing really and then I turn left there and that's the nice bit that I walk on to Showell Green Lane. Down to the end of Showell Green Lane onto the Stratford Road, that was our family doctors on the left on the corner of Ivor Road, it's now a nursery and then you walk down, a lot of the shops have changed. Mum had a best friend called Mrs Tullett and they owned, just as you go to Stratford Road by the bottom of Showell Green Lane and they owned a china shop, I can picture that a china shop no less and she used to go and see them quite regularly and then there's a chemist still there and that was Boots the Chemist and there were a big grocers called George Mason I think I told you about earlier. On the corner of Durham Road, then there was a big open grocers and a fish mongers called Westwoods and just before then a very smart stationary shop, Rayners that was called, very smart stationary shop on the left before the Durham Road lights. On the other side of course the Salvation Army used to have their little church that's now a very sort of evangelical gospel church. The Mega Church, because we've been to Sparkhill this morning to take our stuff to the food bank in Bard Street, it's a terrible place, but at least it's doing a wonderful business there so we've been to Sparkhill this morning and we've just passed that church. Oh and then there was the big Burtons on the corner of St Johns Road, that had a big snooker hall above it. I think there was dancing as well up there. So that's the bit I knew most of all and then across the Durham Road lights there was a big Woolworths which there was in so many places and then like a commercial college just on the corner of I think is it Wilton Road or Fulham Road and mum used to laugh because when she left school they sent her there to learn typing and she hated it. She said I hated it, couldn't stand it, I much preferred to work in a shop and in deed that's where she met dad and so, these things happen.

11:57 I I think we've covered most things but just if there are any other businesses, once you made that move away when you were twenty four and obviously you were a regular at the church, if there were any other businesses or areas that you went to?

12:19 R No not really, going further down we always used, there was a furniture shop further down the hill by the park called Levins. We used to shop, bought some of our furniture when we first got married there's and there's a big, the carpet shop on the corner of Formans Road, Hartleys I think it was called. We bought carpets from them and there was also a big decorator place, paints and decoration, on the corner of Florence Road, I can't quite remember the name of that yea, but that's about it really I think. Because by them sort of moving up into Moseley and Kings Heath we'd shop kind of the other way to shop.

13:07 I Do you feel like when people ask where you're from, do you say from Moseley or Stratford Road?

13:16 R Well when people ask us now we will always say from Moseley because we just love the atmosphere of Moseley village, it's lively and that's great, but when people ask where do you come from, I'm pleased to have lived in Sparkhill, yea it was good, there was a good community and again it relates a lot to the difference in childhood between now and then you know. We sometimes think, I sometimes talk about it and say you know looking back now, we were a bit of a golden generation because we were allowed to play out, amazing freedom personally to play out in the streets and the traffic wasn't such an issue I know and the parks, but there's for a minute you know "I'm going to go off the park mum", "ok" and "I'm off to the station train spotting" and certainly from a personal sort of freedom, perhaps other folks think this looking back at the rest of their life that things you know we have been lucky, we were well looked after by the NHS, the new NHS right after the war, we were really well looked after as kids and we've also followed a career which we've been lucky enough and that's why we're sitting here in the comfortable Moseley afternoon to have our final salary pension scheme you know which we must have bored the younger teachers to death with at the end of our careers saying, "you don't know how lucky you are to have this pension scheme." But we have been lucky, we generally feel that in life, generally feel lucky, had a happy life and looking back you know mum and dad always voted conservative, it was part of that sort of upwardly, I think they had moved from somewhere very different in Handsworth in the back to back houses to Sparkhill with a lovely house with a front and back garden and they felt that way. Whether it was part of what the war or what come afterwards I don't know, but the history I studied in school, working class now, start of the trade unions and all it stood for and the minute I got to college, the first week at college I joined the teachers union, that's what you did. But the first time I went to vote when I was twenty one, Roy Hattersley was standing in for Sparkbrook and we went to vote at it must have been the library, no, no it was St Johns School next to the baths, and I never particularly spoken and I don't remember arguing with him about politics but mum knew as we came out that we'd cancelled our votes out, cancelled each other out when we voted that first time. We never had a cross word with her about that but we just, well I think we're especially at the moment as far left as we're ever likely to be really at the moment.

16:14 I And did you ever see Roy Hattersley around?

16:18 R Yes I did once, I can't think where it was, not met him but I saw him on a visit somewhere, I can't think where he was going, it must have been to the opening or something. I wonder if it was something at St Agatha's Church, you know next to Ladypool School, I think it might have been there. And that's interesting that church because that church St Agatha's, was designed by the same man William Biglake who designed Sparkhill congregational church and so that's quite a high church that is St Agatha's. So he covered

the full range in his designs yes. I think when you look at the two churches you can see a bit of similarity in his design.

Audio 3

00:00 R When my parents came over to live in Sparkhill, my grandfather had been an elder of the big congregational Church in the centre of the city, and we all went down to Sparkhill congregational church right by the River Cole, lovely walk through the park , through Sparkhill Park, along the Stratford Road to the congregational church. That had opened in 1933, a new building it had been the other side of the Stratford Road until then off Solihull Road, yes that's right it backed onto Solihull Road and wasn't knocked down the old premises too long ago to become the new health centre that's opposite end of the Springfield Road. So we went there, first of all I went on a Sunday afternoon to Sunday School but one of the impressive things they did was and this is all a part of the progress of church worship, but originally the idea of Sunday School was that the service, the kids sat through a service possibly in the morning and then they had the afternoon and then there was an evening service as well, and one of the things that the congregational church did there and we took it, was something called Family Church where you really and it started in 1951 I think, you did away with the actual Sunday School in the afternoon and had it in the morning as part of the Sunday morning worship and the children went out to their own groups there, and that was lovely really, that meant I think from mum's point of view when she went to go down to church just to make the one journey and then we could both enjoy it together. Dad was never a very keen church goer, he'd had a very rough upbringing in Ladywood, his dad was a bookies runner and he left home as soon as he possibly could and went to live with one of his sisters, he had a very unhappy life, certainly young childhood really, and from that point of view, he met mum where they worked, mum did work briefly and this would be in the mid-thirties, he met her working in a shoe warehouse off Bromsgrove Street in the City Centre. He'd just come out of the RAF where he'd done a few years and it was mums first job and they met there and married in 36 and then they both lived with mum's parents in the house in Doris Road, but I know dad was, I think for the rest of his life he felt that he'd finally got the security he hadn't had as a young lad, that was great for him you know.

02:34 R One really amazing incident I say that had happened when I think I was about seven or eight. My mum had known dad's father, the bookies runner, but as a church going for a lady, she hadn't wanted much to do, she wasn't awfully keen on him, but he knew her. Then one day when I was seven or eight I was with her in town in Corporation Street and this man passed us and she suddenly said to him "Oh hello Mr Perkins" and he stopped and he looked at her and realised who she was and then she said to him "Oh Mr Perkins" she said, "This is your grandson." And he said this is what she's told me, he said "Oh hello lad" and walked off and that was it you know. So that was the sort

of family dad sort of felt he'd escaped from to come and live here. He wasn't a great church goer but he did do his duty whenever it was important at certain times of the year, he came down with us as well. But I really loved it, I liked it down there, but as I grew up as a young man in the congregational church, obviously at that time I'd become fairly left wing in my politics because of the study of history really and what had happened to the people, the working class and how they had had to fight for their rights and for the vote for women and all sorts of things and the congregational church was really quite liberal and you became a full member at the age of eighteen given full voting rights and able to express yourself in monthly church meetings and that was brilliant, I loved that. I liked being with the kids as well as I grew up and before too long I was involved in the junior church myself as a teacher, I was only fifteen or sixteen but I liked that so much, it just made me feel that I'd like to be a teacher full stop. So as disappointed as I was that I didn't get the university qualifications or even a cricketing career I might have hoped for, I was really pleased to become a primary school teacher and I had a lovely career, I enjoyed that.

04:37 R I'm going to tell you a little bit about church because it is interesting and it does relate to two different places on the Stratford Road. As an independent congregational church, when it came in towards the 1960's, church attendance was declining and the area was changing down there, that area of Springfield was becoming at that time very largely Irish centred because the big catholic church English Martyrs on the Stratford Road and the attached school was becoming important for them to worship at. So we had a lot of Irish people and a lot of, again it's the way populations move isn't it and the way cities develop. A lot of the people who had been regular members of the congregational church down there at Sparkhill living in Springfield and parts of Hall Green moved further out of the city, that's the way things happen isn't it, and it became very difficult for us to continue the sort of quality of church life that we had then. There were all sorts of women's groups and men's groups the church had before the war and sports teams of its own you know and all this was declining. But as an independent congregational church, in 1971 we became part of the United Reform Church, where for the first time ever all the congregational churches in England and the Presbyterian churches became united into the new United Reform Church and that was most encouraging I felt.

05:57 R And then we continued like that until later in the 70's when again you know numbers become to decline just a little bit more, people move out and then we had an absolutely wonderful offer which I know mum was overjoyed by. It was a congregational church that hadn't joined the United Reform Church, it was a little place on Ladypool Road. It's still there tucked away between the Asian shops, it's quite amazing really, and they wanted to go independent. Now worshipping there on an afternoon, was the Birmingham Moravian Church. Now this was the church of all Afro-Caribbean immigrants. The Moravian Church was set up right back in the 18th century from the

headquarters in in Moravia which is part of the Czech Republic. Missionary stations in the Caribbean in Jamaica, St Kitts in particular and the church was set up there and families, descendants had stayed as part of the Moravian Church, the missionaries were now had being replaced really by ministers from all over the world. But when people from the West Indies, from Jamaica, St Kitts as they did in the 50's, well to be quite honest they rescued Birmingham's industries after the war.

07:15 R We'd be lost without the people from the Caribbean. They wanted to stay as Moravians, but there wasn't a Moravian Church and eventually they formed themselves into a loose sort of little group who occasionally meet at Ladypool Road congregational church, but when they had weddings, it's not much of a frontage onto Ladypool Road if you know where it is. They needed nice pictures and we had a nice bit of grass in front of our congregational, united reform church, so they would always have their weddings with us and we got to know them quite well. We had a couple of social functions together which when you've experienced a Caribbean evening, it's quite something. And then came the amazing decision that we soon talk, "Do you think that we could become a united congregation?" We'd got this building, we'd got a declining membership, you've got no building and an increasing membership. And so in 1976 we became Sparkhill United Church, so in that building down by the River Cole of the URC and the Moravian Church and that kept us going through a succession of excellent ministries right up until about say about 2004 and in 2004 we were struggling again with the building because what happened, was we suddenly realised that it was a Listed Building, that was, it was a Grade II Listed Building because it had been designed by a chap named William Bidlake who had been a member with William Morrison the arts and crafts movement. He had designed it as an old man, he was eighty and he decided that it was the last church he designed and it was the only non-conformist church he had designed. Beautiful inside but bare stylish bare brick inside all over, anyway it was a lovely building but we wanted to change it to adapt it to more modern use and to serve your community, because unless a church serves it's community, there isn't a lot of point in being there, and what happens, as the numbers of a church dwindle, you are taken over with the need to look after your own premises, so you don't look out to serve the community, you tend to look inwards, so what are you going to do with the flat roof and what if the heating fails which it did really.

09:37 R So we had a real crisis in 2004, and we wondered what we were going to do and. And for two or three years we ummed and arred about whether we could carry on in this building. Because it was a listed building you see, we couldn't alter it dramatically. It had to be kept just as it was and then by some splendid hard work, the two ministers of our minister, he was a young man, in his very first ministry, made contact I think he did it by letter, with the minister of the Methodist church, just further up the road in Hall Green, who was a super intendant minister in his last ministry of the Methodist church and they got together and we had some talks, and it went jolly well

and then he said we should have a meeting of our leadership groups, to think about whether we could abandon our building and move up the road and share the church with them. First of all, just to share, we were worshipping in a church hall while they were worshipping in the church itself. Well that didn't last long, it was daft to do that. There's not that much doctrinal difference between the URC and the Methodist church and the Moravian church anymore, so in 2007, we started this process of becoming a brand new church joined together, and a wonderful thing is that last Saturday we had a celebration service to celebrate the opening of Hall Green United Community Church, which is three churches now all joined together, the URC and Moravian and the Methodist church and we've got new signs this week up along the road, and it's a huge uplift in your church life that you increase the numbers, you can do so much more, we've loved that.

11:27 R But the second part of the story is we all worried, like all people do when they have to leave a church they've loved, and this was a special church for us really for our family, well mum and dad were married there in that church down at Stratford Road. I was christened there, my sister was christened there. She was married there and you know it was the only church I'd ever been to really and so it was a bit heart breaking really, but it's like it happens sometimes to these listed buildings, that nobody will give you a grant for the upkeep because it won't qualify properly for a Heritage Lottery grant, and you can't afford to do it yourselves, so we feared that what would happen would be it would just become a derelict wreck and perhaps the best we could hope for it is it might become a carpet warehouse or something like that, and it was hard for me particularly because every Sunday morning I walked down from here, down College Road, I would have turned into the church and I have to walk past it in its declining and becoming derelict and up to our new church. Wonderful though the new church was, this was a bit sad because it got broken into and people set fires in it and there was drug dealing going on in there.

12:42 R So eventually the United Reform Church managed to sell the old building, it went through a couple of hands until it was bought by this Mr Liaquat Ali who saw in it the possibility of this fantastic Indian Restaurant, Mughal-E-Azam. He couldn't touch the building at all, it was a Listed Building, but he and his architect, they looked at it and they saw on the inside and we didn't notice this did we until we sat there and noticed it. The features, they were quite distinctively Islamic in some ways. If you've ever been to the magnificent Mosque in Córdoba in Spain, it's got patterned arches of coloured brickwork, and along the side as part of the arts and crafts design, there were these same arches and they looked at that and thought we can keep all this, and the story is that he spent best part of £2 million on it. He sand blasted the whole of this fabulous internal brickwork and set about decorating equally as well, really extensively with no expense spared in some ways. The back room, because we had a big church hall with a stage at the back and he was seeing it as it certainly works now as a wedding venue, as a big Asian

celebration venue, but also a place where you could have, what was once the side isles, little tables for two. So this took two or three years for him to restore it and we'd go past and think well it's beginning to take shape now. The interesting thing was that there was Christian like in other things inside it in the stain glass windows, and facing the Stratford Road is a lovely picture called the rose windows because of its shape of the face of Jesus, and he couldn't touch that because it was listed, and what he's done, he's very discretely to put blinds either side of it and also so you can see it if you want to, if you know where to look you can.

14:55 R So that's beautifully done, but what was interesting, it is interesting too, is one of the reasons why we struggled so much with that old property ourselves, is that immediately after the war, we were protected by prefabs, you know built up that little road Colgreave Avenue and we had our own site, but when they were taken away, we were really exposed and as the city opened up that Cole Valley walk way, they didn't want fences, they wanted everything to be open so we suffered dreadfully for vandalism. The property would be struggling with in the first place, and what is interesting is Mr Ali's dealt with that problem in no uncertain terms by twenty four hour security. He has a man on site twenty four hours a day, making sure that nothing, and it does absolutely beautiful, the gardens and carpet, is safe, and now this is the best bit, I love this bit. So on a Sunday morning when I walk down College Road past the front, there's the security man, he's got this little hut on wheels. So I've explained to them who I am and now they know who I am. So as I walked past I waved to him, "good morning" you know "salaam alaikum" and he waves back as I go off to church and he carries on his security work, so that's the story really of that wonderful building, and now almost sitting in the same spot where you once worshipped you can now have splendid curry. And people say to me sometimes, "does that upset you?" There are one or two members, especially some of the older Moravian members of church, who wouldn't dream of setting foot in that building ever again because of what's happened to it. Partly because of the Islamic influence and partly just because you don't do that with a church you've sold, but I, quite a few of us think it's absolutely brilliant. We've taken our family there again, we've taken other church members down there again to eat and they welcome us don't they, they like us to do that and to talk about the old days and what makes us laugh in particular is that of all the things that we struggled with at the end, oh my goodness the toilets were dreadful. Whatever you do, oh they were brittle flat roofs at the back and well now the toilets are in the same place but it's now luxury tiling and gold taps and it's wonderful and we say you know, we come down and we pass it in the evenings now and the church is ablaze of lovely light and colour and the car park's absolutely jammed full, and you know I think mum had died in 2006 just before this happened, but I think she would have been tolerant enough to know, this was the right thing to have done, to have sold it. Having said that, what we've replaced it with is brilliant but the story of that building there, is just fascinating and it was once on the edge of a city there and just

round the back, if you go, there's some closed public toilets on one side of the building, there's a, it was a tram depot, the trams used to turn round at the edge there, go back into town. So there we are, that's Sparkhill United Church.

18:01 I Fantastic, I'll let you to take a little sip of water. I was just going to ask you to just describe that first time you went for a curry there. That must have been quite something.

18:14 R It was quite something and I remember, it had just opened and I was walking past after a meeting, a leadership meeting at the new church, and suddenly the doors are open and it was open for business the day before, so I thought ooh, I walked passed really and I turned round and I thought this is silly, I need to go and see this and I walked in and I said "Hello this was our church" I said "I've only come to have a look and to see what you've done." My mouth was open at the time, I couldn't believe what they'd done in there, fantastic and he happened to be there, Mr Ali that time and he said "let me show you round" and I had a little walk round some of it then and then on the way out I said "well we will book a table for this Friday then" and we did didn't we. And it's not licenced, although they do some wonderful non-alcoholic cocktails but you can take your own drink in, they're not totally strict on that one, and we went down, we got a bottle of red wine didn't we from the Off-licence. And we went in and there were big tables, their main purpose is party bookings, there's no question and most Asian families when they go out for a meal, they will eat in small numbers at home but by and large when they go out for a meal they take the village don't they really, as one of our colleagues used to say. And so but they have got some little tables for two and we sat at the side aisle and had our curry and then we got to have a look all the rest, they did take us to look round that night didn't they? Yea. And then so we've taken along members and then we took our minister, who he'd just retired and we wondered what Jeffrey would think about this going back into the place. He'd been a Moravian missionary all his life a minister all his life, and very formal member who had been introduced to the real traditions of the Moravian church. Which liturgically were far more different to what we'd use as a United Reform Church but he was astonished, he couldn't believe how wonderful it was. He was one of those ministers who used to spend time repairing the building himself, whenever he could, and he told them who he was. It was his 80th birthday and he went there as part of his 80th birthday treat and he was overjoyed. We was delighted really, he saw this as a real.. If the sale of that church had meant we all got disbursed and went to different places and we hadn't moved on up the road, a few hundred yards to become part of something new, he might not have felt quite like that, but he did, he loved that and since then we've taken my family, our families and we've taken lots of the church members, so yeah, I never thought it was strange right from the start really, not at all. Because one of them vital things is a church really is not the building, it is the people. The people are the church and not necessarily the building. Having

said that, you know what we are like, we all get emotionally attached to these things and it isn't easy for everybody, you know, to just get over it really, but I got over it straight away. People still say "are you alright going there still?" I say "yea it's great, it's the ongoing city life, that I've always been part of." Mughal-E-Azam but they are very welcoming up there every time we go.

21:55 I Fantastic and how is Hall Green at the Methodist Church because it was 2004?

22:00 R 2007 we started the process of becoming a new church. Now it is incredibly complicated now, because the charity commission, from now on if you do that you actually become a new church and that implies all sorts of new charity commission regulations that have to be gone through and this was a union of three churches, not just two, it was three which made it much more difficult. Everything had to be passed round, all three denominations up to headquarters, back to solicitors to have it checked, you know and to draw up a new constitution to safeguard everything that we'd individually cared for. It has taken a lot of time and a lot of give and take between, but it is something that we're really looking forward to. The church, now because it's bigger now, it has some good outreach into the neighbourhood, yesterday I cleared the tables for like a community lunch which they do there every Tuesdays for people in the neighbourhood who come, and then they do a lot of work with mothers and toddlers and that's particularly good because that draws in, I couldn't believe it the first time I went, virtually all Asian mothers and toddlers group it is. They live very local, round the church and the school behind, and that's a lovely sight to see that, to hear Asian mothers and I know they do because they've said it, I've heard them say it, they talk about our church. Not in the sense that Islam, must always come first for them, but you know that's our church and we use that and the fact that a community can begin to feel that is really good. We run an open youth club which it struggles on, not many churches do that but they do their best to keep it going and things like Brownies still carry on. So yea there's all sorts of ways in which hopefully we can expand now in years to come. It's ever so much an issue now with the churches, as numbers get smaller and the fact that you know, what do we do with this building that was once full on a Sunday in there and has twenty/thirty people now, and as I said to you earlier, if you're prepared to do it, if you're prepared to take a risk and is a risk you know, you don't know if everybody's going to come with you and one or two, not everybody, 100% has come to this new venture, one or two, mainly because they live a long way away, have gone to local churches, but the vast majority have stayed with us and that's lovely really. It's not easy, you've got to decide what you're going to do with this building and erm maybe if you have to take the hard decision you just have to take it, I think that's something the church, all churches have increasingly to do in the future.

24:40 I And having, I know you just said that the church is the people and not the

building, but could you describe the whole Methodist church itself.

24:49 R Yes again funny enough it's a church very much of the same vintage, built in the 1920's as the Sparkhill United church was. Erm, again you see you've got to constantly change, it's very hard to stay where you are because, although the church itself is lovely, the main worship area is lovely, again you know using it for once a week, you know, could we make better community use of that, so we're now undergoing, now we've got over the actual joining of the churches to become one, we've now got a plan for redevelopment of that building, and there are all sorts of obstacles to overcome, like for instance disability access is now crucial you know, and there are more steps in that ridiculous church hall, than possibly could ever have been necessary, so we've now got an architect's plan that we're going to start working on in about a year's time once we've raised the cash, because the good thing is the United Reform Church sold that building by the River Cole for £245,000. That's listed as well. So the URC have let us have the best part of that £200,000 to redevelop the building up the road. Now they will only release it as long as they've got specific and definite plans about what that's going to be used for and they've released about £25,000 so far for a new heating system, because you have to have that, you can't have folks getting cold on a Sunday. We had enough trouble with that down the road and so gradually we will redevelop the programme for the building. It might even in the end become, which many churches have done, even the worship area becomes multipurpose, you know and the church down the road and Cambridge Road Methodist have done that. Where you sit in the churches to worship on a Sunday, there's badminton court markings on the floor and we sweep the chairs away and use it for that, and I think that's the way the future has to be, we just can't afford quite the standards that we had in the past. Not necessarily a reduction in worship or in people's commitment, but certainly in the sense of physical entitlement people once thought was essential.

27:04 I And how was that first time going there to Hall Green?

27:07 R Well it was different, it was strange at first, finding ourselves worshiping within a church hall and for that first Sunday, but we were so glad to be worshiping in somewhere warm you know you were just glad to be there. But right from the start it was always thought, the two ministers had always thought there was going to be more than just meeting in the same building every Sunday so I remember on that first Sunday we both agreed to start at 10.30, finish at 11.30 and have coffee together, together so and people and again this is quite good that people who live locally knew each other, so like you might have known someone who went to that church, that was true of the Afro-Caribbean's and their folks as well, and so they knew some people, so immediately you knew people from the congregation that made getting together quite easy. I do sometimes think that's a strange thing to say because I know that in lots and lots of places, church unity hasn't gone like that and people haven't felt they wanted to be together and in some cases

sort of given up and they've disbursed and that is particularly sad so we were blessed that it did work out really well and we've got on well with each other.

28:19 I Do you go to many places around Hall Green? Do you spend much of your time in the local businesses?

28:26 R Well, there's one little business across the road called Jyoti Vegetarian Restaurant that was really our favourite, we're both vegetarians anyway, but we knew that we knew Raj the bloke that owns the business, we knew him when he once had a little café down the Ladypool Road, Jaan e Mann, it was called and it was in a little block on Ladypool Road, it's been knocked down to make a car park just opposite the end of Clifton Road. So yes so he moved down to a restaurant and opened up where Showell Green Lane meets Stratford Road, just around the corner on the Stratford Road there, they opened up there and we used to go, and in fact we were there on a famous occasion, Jamie Oliver came in as well, oh yes. He had been doing the Good Food Show and he came in and they got his name and his picture in there, and that was lovely but again it was a pretty decrepit old premises and so in the end he sold that and he moved up to Hall Green Parade, where we are delighted to still go and see him and it's lovely. What I love in particular because he opens on a Sunday morning so I can sometimes come out of church, go over the road, buy our samosas for the afternoon tea, so that's really good yea. A lot of shops... I love the Stratford Road now because there's all those fantastic colours in the shops, saris. Where mum and I used to shop, it's just brilliant, there was a record shop just there called Levy's, I remember we used to buy our 35's singles from, and that's now a fabulous accessory sort of shop selling this wonderful bling, but again much like we say when we go down Ladypool Road because we used to drive down there every day to school, to work, and the colours are just fantastic really aren't they, and the way the area has changed, but you know, cities change don't they, cities are a living thing, it moves on and it makes me sad sometimes that people say, use words like gone downhill and not like it used to be. Well of course it isn't but then it never was in the first place, the farmers and his land they sold to build Sparkhill estates probably didn't think much of the change in the first place, it's you know, things move on.