

## Tickhill & District Local History Society

### A discussion with Elva Higgins

by Jackie Thorns

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*So Elva, were you actually born in Tickhill?*

Yes, I was born in Tickhill and lived only in four houses, and still happily living here. The first house was where I was born, I know it was on Wilsic Road, the old part of Wilsic Road... and then we moved, which I can't remember of course to Dadsley Road at some stage. I think it's when the houses were built new and then we went there, and there we stayed until we moved to Westgate, and then after Westgate we came to Wilsic Road where we are now, so that's my distance of moving ....

*Yes, not a very big area (laughing)... While you were at Dadsley Road?*

At Dadsley Road, well, yes, I started school from there and ....., yes, remember going down to school from there very easily..... in the summertime we'd go across down the passage out of Dadsley Road that goes on to Doncaster Road, and we'd cross the road and go on to Common Lane and then in the passage that went across to the school... straight across to the school.... It's still there, by Lilies....

*Oh yes, Lilies Shop.*

Yes, and always come home for school, for lunches and then... there were no school lunches in those days. The school was just three classrooms. Incidentally, my Grandma went to that school, my father did, and then me and then my children. The same two schools in Tickhill all through the generations and they didn't change. So, of course, there were these great big coke stoves in them which had to have coke shovelled into the top to keep them fed. The teachers had to do it in the little school of course, but, then we used to get the big boys to do it in the top schools, and I used to enjoy having the bottles of milk. I thought that was lovely, with a straw, those little bottles ... just right, and, what else can I remember about school days at the infant school. We used to, yes, we used to get dressed up for special days and then the teachers would make us into either daisies or buttercups or something out of crepe paper, and then my mother would always make me a dress, not a bought one ... it was always a nice made, pretty dress for the occasion and then, I don't remember much about school from there really.

*Would you say you were quite happy there or not?*

Well, I think so, yes, yes, I think so. I was... I'd always been a weasly little girl and so .... I did have this asthma trouble but, it was nothing too much so, yes, I was happy enough.

*And were the teachers strict?*

Well, I used to be alright with them, I was always told 'you must be a good girl' and I've always been a good girl... I think! Yes the infant school... there's not a lot more to talk about really I don't think.

*And was it from the infant school that you started Brownies?*

Yes, yes it was in that same period and when I became seven I could be a Brownie and this entailed going on the bus from the cross down to Spital where all the Brownies met on the quarter-to-two bus from the cross and Miss Brooksbank, the Brown Owl, used to meet us at the bottom, because it was that busy road it was the crossroads there. It wasn't a busy road in those days, there was very little traffic, but she always used to meet us because there could be the odd car coming or something, and so she met us and

took us up to the... and the Brownies were held in a coach house there. It was a room above the coach house and a little fire grate in there and in winter she would light it, or perhaps one of the servants would, I'm not sure, but they were very happy days there because we were able to go on tracking in the woods and it was a big, big ... a lot more grounds than it is now, so there was the woodland to go through and we'd like tracking through there and sometimes we'd just go on nature walks, and Miss Brooks-Banks would show us where the squirrels' nests were, the red squirrels in those days, and the owls were, and yes it was lovely, it was lovely, and then we used to have to do our badges and do the training and people used to come and test us ... I didn't know who these people were who came to test us. Of course, I always worry about a test of any kind, and even for the skipping test and I did let it, I can remember that clearly, I let the rope go and I saw Miss Brooksbank, the Brown Owl, talking to this lady after we'd all done our skipping test, and I think she must have said 'well she is asthmatic' you know ... don't know, but anyway I got the badge – (*general laughter*)

*So it sounds that it was very happy actually*

It was, and we would go in,... the kitchen was, you know in these big houses – they had these really really big kitchen with scrubbed tops and, you know a lady, a servant there to scrub them and a cook and all the rest of it and, and so they, yes, we used to go in there and do our, anything to do with making things. We didn't actually bake there though – that came with the Guides.

*So was this actually at Rock House?*

No, not Rock House, Sandrock.

*Sandrock*

Yes, Sandrock, which is the one on the corner between going up to Bawtry and going up to Rossington. That's Sandrock.

*And they were quite, were they sort of gentry?*

Oh yes, they were, oh yes plenty of nice gentry people living in Tickhill in those days, and very very nice people. Mr. Brooksbank was the, he was the gentleman farmer there and he'd have the men to work on the farm and Miss Brooksbank was the youngest and there was Miss Cynthia Brooksbank and then there was an older brother, I never really knew him, don't even know his name I don't think. Might have heard it but can't remember it now. And then oh yes, they were there until the war years and then that all had to finish. We finished ... Miss Brooksbank didn't ever wed, so we finished being Brownies at whatever age, but by the time it came for moving up to the Guides, the war had started and the Guides had stopped, much to my disgust, because I had watched the Guides .... this is the only reason I was very disgusted was because I'd watched these big Girl Guides going, setting off in a cattle wagon, big lorry really, which they had a ramp for the cattle to go up and it used to be scrubbed out and straw thrown in for the Guides to all go in and throw their bags in to go, and all the camping gear, and off they went camping. Well I used to watch that when I was still a Brownie, and when it came to my turn, no Guides, because there was nobody to take the Guides, so that was the end of that, and I've never forgotten it! Yes, so that was the story of the Brownies.

*So you were still at Dadsley Road then?*

Still at Dadsley Road for the Brownies yes, and Dadsley Road ... what else did we do in Dadsley Road. Used to play incidentally in the field opposite quite a bit when it was no animals in it or anything. There was a little gap in the hedge just opposite the gate where we lived and came across and used to play in here, I can remember making daisy chains. And incidentally that was the same field where I now live in this house, this Wilsic Road house, my fourth house.

*But you had connections with Westgate?*

I did, yes, that was my grandparents, where they lived, in a shop, and so we used to go up there to visit them of course, and Mother used to do the shopping up there. It had been quite a big grocery business at one time there, but was beginning...things were beginning to change when I was a child but, ...so, yes, but I can remember going up when I was a little dot and it was quite safe for her to let us go, my brother and I would go sometimes, little dots, and walk up there from Dadsley Road, which is quite a way, we'd go through the churchyard and down Church Lane and into Westgate and we had to stand on the other side of the road to where the shop was, which is just where the road narrows, you can see the bottleneck in Westgate if you stand at one end. And we'd have to stand there until Grandfather saw us you see, and then he'd come out .... sometimes I went by myself, and, yes, I used to like it specially, because there was always a few sweets and if we were spending any time there, say perhaps my younger brother who had to be with my Grandma or something in the house, which I never ever remember him being in the shop with me at the same time. I used to be there sort of watching Granddad serving customers and I'd love it when someone came for treacle especially, because it had this great big barrel-like thing, I don't think it was wooden, I think it might have been metal, but I really really can't remember, but it was this barrel on the table, not the counter part, round a sort of corner, and people used to bring a jar of some kind. There weren't as many jars as there are nowadays, and so people used to bring a jar and they'd often have some string tied round the top, in case the child that had been sent to buy the treacle dropped it going home. And, so Granddad used to take it and then I was allowed to turn the handle, put it underneath this little tap, like a tea urn, that's the best way I can describe it. Turn the handle and I used to love watching the treacle come out and used to be there with me watching and 'right turn it off now' and see....oh that was excellent doing that. And they used to have to weigh their own sugar in those days and put it in blue bags and bang it, knock it, shape it and that sort of thing. It was all very intriguing to a little girl.

*So they had to buy things in very large quantities?*

They did, people used to buy, even in my grandparent's time people used to keep their own hens and pigs and, I can't remember what else at the moment, but there was....the corn used to come and the grain and the flour used to come in big things, and there was the warehouse at the back which I can clearly remember because that always used to intrigue me because of this ...there was a hook hanging out of a door I could never understand this high door up above everything else in this warehouse and it had a big, big hook hanging out until one day they delivered some great big sacks and I saw them drop a chain down with a hook on and put the sacks on and then draw it up again. This door was opened and it was pushed inside you see, and this went on with big bags of corn and pig food and I can't think what else there was there now, but in the warehouse, which you entered from a door in the bottom of course, and there were bins all round the bottom one and then there was the steps, wooden steps to go up to the top there where all the things that were going through this top door were put and then they were emptied into the bins and, I suppose, and I don't know how they got them out...I never saw them getting it out to put into, to bring into the shop. Perhaps they might have weighed them up there but I really don't know, I never really thought about that until just now.

*This was called Clarksons wasn't it?*

Yes, that's right. This is Charles Clarkson, but it did belong to my great grandfather, Edward Clarkson before him and he.... they had a big round because there were fewer shops going back to great-grandparent's time in the eighteen hundred and something or other, and they used to have their own horse and dray to deliver to places these big sacks that people had..stone bags or several stone bags of whatever they were ordering, and flour even used to be weighed in big bags, because women used to make their own bread and that sort of thing, and it all had to be delivered to places like Stainton and Maltby, which was a small village in those days, because there was no colliery, and probably Harworth and all the Tickhill ones as well, but apart from the Clarksons there were the Jarvis's who were doing the same thing, and also another shop that did the same thing was down Sunderland Street, and that was Mr Tom Lane who owned that.

*So they must have had plenty of customers ....*

Well there would have been.....

*...for three shops to supply...*

...yes that's right, but they were main sort of things. There were lots of little shops that I can remember with sweets and bits and bobs really. I don't really know they had in but they might have sold bits of this and the other, and I think as time was moving on and there was less need for all these big bags of stuff, then the little shops would have stocked things like butter and things and sell that, hence that's when the shops started, the bigger shops started, well my grandfather did because it was out of the town being in Westgate. Yes they used to have all these things for delivering and I know that my father's older sister used to go with the dray and the horse and take the things off to wherever. Yes, it was her job. She was also a bell ringer that same aunty, she rang the church bells.

*So when your Grandfather died you ....*

.....he died early with the cancer and so then Grandma moved out and my parents, and the shop was sold. The shop and the house at the side of it, and my father and his brother converted these barns at the back, the warehouses and barns, and all the rest of it into two houses, or a pair of semis really, but ....

*Did they do the actual building?*

Oh yes they did. My father was a joiner and my uncle was a plumber and so they engaged a bricklayer and I suppose they would engage an electrician as well and they needed that all the time and then they built these very very nice houses actually. I can remember I was in bed... when... we first moved there in '38, I can remember summer nights we all had to go to bed early in those days, children did didn't they ...and I can remember Mr Haslam who was the architect, he used to often be coming in... asking if he could bring someone round to look at them because he thought they were really very nice houses these. And I think really it was the forerunner of all the conversions ....

*...that have taken place...*

...because there's beautiful ones going on now, but that was beautiful in its time because, I mean, we had things like a bathroom, which we didn't have in Dadsley Road, and bathrooms with white tiles and beautiful black border round the top and the white bathroom suite. Separate toilet may I tell you with not a common toilet roll there, it was a little square one that you slotted in a Jeyes toilet pad with the leaves coming out which I thought was very very posh. And another thing we had there was windows...the upstairs windows could all turn the other way round for cleaning....

*Oh that was excellent*

...and so that was great for the ladies who did their own work in those days. They didn't have to have a window cleaner and that was another wonderful thing about it...

*And the heating was...?*

Oh my word! We had some wonderful central heating. Yes, three radiators were put in the bedrooms upstairs and really they weren't very good because it just came from the back boiler of the downstairs fire, well the main living room one which had the back boiler to it, and so it really wasn't very much heating, it just did take the air off the bedrooms, but I mean to have that in those days in the bedrooms was unheard of.

*Did you put coal on that or...?*

That was just coal, it was all coal that's right, yes.

*So that was really very modern for those...*

Oh it was that's right, yes. We were very proud of our house. Very well done as well, it was, I mean we had the beautiful wooden floors and, albeit covered with lino, but they were all well done. I bet these days they could have been...perhaps are I don't know...could have been cleaned up, you know sanded and polished, and restored and... and also, something else I've just remembered; I can't ever remember this happening, but I heard it talked about, that one of the rooms above the stables, I knew which one it was, in fact it was my bedroom...eventually, used to be the Scouts...my uncle used to take Scouts up there in that one, yes, at one time of the day. I don't think I have anything else to say about that, I could tell a long story about it but it's...

*We'll leave it for another time..*

I can do a talk about it when I'm showing people things, but just describing it all....

*And you were saying that there was plenty of activity on Sundays?*

Sundays!? Oh great activity on Sundays, yes. It was Sunday School for ten o'clock in the school, the big school which we called it, and then straight from Sunday School we'd go into church at twenty to, no, at half past ... no I don't know what time we'd go. But I know we used to come out before the sermon started so we'd go straight from Sunday School to church, and then when Mr Cook went up, Canon Cook..he wasn't Canon Cook then, he was the vicar. And when he went up to do the sermon then the children then went home and that was that. But in the afternoons when you were older you would go to the church again at half past two to have service with Canon Cook...

*Was that a special service... just for the young ones?*

Just for the children...not a service it was just...it was ...Sunday School lessons...yes, no singing, I shouldn't have said it was a service, it was lessons again with the vicar this time, and, I mean the vicars really did have to work hard, because they had to go to Stainton as well. In fact, my Dad used to play the organ at Stainton...

*...but not at Tickhill?*

No he didn't. He also used to play it at Hesley and he went in a car. There was a local resident who used to take Canon Cook, see he didn't have a car ever, and so someone else used to take Mr Cook, I keep saying Vicar Cook, it was Reverend Cook I should say. And he used to go and this Mr Sefton used to take him in his car, my Dad used to go with them as well to the Stainton one in the mornings, and I don't think he did it at the same time and eventually he was doing it at Hesley and he'd have to cycle up there to the little church there to the Whitakers to have a little service and the servants...

*...in the hall, yes.... Oh he was very tolerant of them.*

Oh yes, my Dad was...

*...and after the Sunday School and that you went... you were asked to go in the choir weren't you?*

That's right, yes, when we got a little bit older, three other friends of mine and myself used to go to church on a Sunday at six o'clock and enjoyed going and doing all singing...probably it was the choirboys we liked, I don't know (laughter) I can't really remember it being that pointed, but anyway, we did go, and eventually Mrs Bramley, who was the organist at that time, again we've reached the war years

by this time, so the current organist had gone off and couldn't attend or something, and Mrs Bramley then saw we girls going regularly and so asked us to join the ladies, choir. There were already about four or five ladies who used to sing in the choir with the men and the boys, but they were at the back. There was no fancy cassocks or surplices for them you see, we all just went in our ordinary Sunday clothes. So we went to church then and singing in the choir, and so we'd go...by this time I suppose we were too old to go to Sunday School, so we went to the morning service and evening service, and then the choir practice in the week, which used to be held in the Parish Room, because of the...in the war years...and that's where my first boyfriend took me home...from the choir practice. And I ended up marrying that boy!

*Oh really! Oh that was romantic.*

He was the head choirboy as well at that time. He used to walk up the aisle with the cross on his nose!

*Lovely, lovely. And then, I think you said there was the youth club.*

Yes that right. We had a youth club in the war years. Now this was started by another very nice gentleman in town. He lived at Waredale, which is about 1 and 2 Market Place, 1 and 2 now I think but it was the first house in Market Place going up Castlegate. To begin with, the first connection I had with Mr Robinson at Waredale was...because they were sort of a thing apart...they didn't join in things in those days, and I know he had this business at Sheffield, but the first thing I knew about him was when war broke out...by this time I was at the big school in St Mary's Road, which wasn't called St Mary's Road in those days, it was called 'The Back Lane.' So he offered his cellars to the school to go if there was an air raid, because there was no air raid shelters until the air raid shelters were built purposely for the school, so we used to go... had to go just across the road and up the path and into his back gates which were not quite opposite the school but only a little way up the road. So there we had...they must have got these little seats arranged, on logs I should think all the way round the cellars, for us all to practice when...practice doing this so we knew what we had to do if there was one of these air raids, which never came. Thank goodness. We had to practice with the air raid shelters of course which were off the schoolyard, but luckily we never had to use them.

*So, yes, that was very generous of Mr Robinson...*

It was, it was, he was a nice man and he was the same man who got the youth club started for us, the youngsters of Tickhill. I think we had to be about fourteen to go there, and he did a really good job of showing us how to go on with things. I don't just mean the games when he somehow...I don't know who produced these table tennis...there was one table tennis table and we had to all take it in turn for that and there were all smaller games to play round the room...different things; dominoes and I think there was darts as well, I'm not sure, and cards...and mainly children could talk to each other as well I suppose. He always made sure it was well run, there was no hanky panky, no silliness going on. No damage. Nobody dreamt of doing damage in those days...

*...and this took place in the library?*

Took place in the library, yes. Which, incidentally, that was partitioned off partly, so you can imagine how big that library was. You know when you go in for your books now. In those days it.... I think...are there two doors still there that went towards the back?

*Yes..*

Are they still there?

*Yes, I think they've got the archives in one of the rooms.*

Or was that knocked down and made into a bigger room...any way it doesn't matter, but there were these two doors, one was called 'The Reading Room' in the back and the other was the kitchen part, where the taps were and the sinks and a great big table and, so...and then in the middle of these two doors was this partition made, and I really don't know how, must have been about two yards deep into the room and then across, which was the First Aid Centre for the war years. It was Hessian, sort of wood and this sort of Hessian fixed in with lats and that sort of thing, and that was where the ARP people used to meet and have the training sessions and...

*...so it was well used.*

Yes, it was well used, it was well used and also later on it became dancing...

*Yeah, and who took that?*

Well it was different people really, but it was...different organisations would run it, sort of...the Conservatives would have one, and the tennis club would hold one, and the cricket club would hold one. Just to make a bit of money for their own...

*... for their own societies, yes...*

...and they were very nice evenings and there were always some ladies who would make refreshments and they'd go and make it in the back. And then we had an MC who er, Mr Hill he was called, Mr Jack Hill, and he was... he did it the very old-fashioned way to us in those days, used to wear white gloves to make sure we all kept in order, but it wasn't just... that was...the children went, but...and it was also for grown-ups. Everybody used to go to these dances, but prior to that, we youngsters were taught how to do the ballroom dancing by Mrs Rice, who was the head, the current headmaster at the big school...St Mary's Road School, and his wife taught us how to do the ballroom dancing. We all had to do as we were told and boys had to go and ask the girls to dance, coz the boys sat on one side and the girls on the other. The boys had to come and say "may I have this dance" and after they'd danced with you they would take you back to your seat and say "thank you." If you said "no", and you shouldn't say no to anyone at all, but if you did say no, you were not allowed to dance with any other boy who came to ask you to dance. Oh no...

*...she was very strict!*

Yes. So that was the beginning of our dancing days, and then of course these other dances all got going as times changed. There was also happening in the war years was the Parish Room was always used for whist drives and smaller things, little concerts. We also used in the library...it was also...we had a drama group and they used to put on concerts and they were really very good.

*Actually in the library? That was big enough to hold...?*

Well, by this time I think the war must have been over when this came about....

*...and the First Aid Centre had gone...*

...there was a stage there and so they did all that, yes. And, have I missed anything out?

*You mentioned the keep fit classes as well.*

Oh yes! That was later on, after I was married actually. It was in the days when Eileen Fowler started this health and...I don't know what it was called but,...dancing! Health activities. I don't think it was that, but it was keep fit, I think really it was called. So we used to have a keep fit class there which I went to and enjoyed immensely. Another incidental thing that happened there was the now famous Michael

Parkinson used to come and, he was at that time, he was a young journalist with the Doncaster Gazette or Chronicle, I don't know which one it was because there were two separate papers then, used to come out every Thursday. But the council used to meet in the back room of the library which was the kitchen and they'd use the big table and the council used to have their meetings, but when it was the bit in camera as they call it, the journalists used to come out and they'd come and sit in the edge of the room where we were having our keep fit lessons, and it was a very attractive keep fit lady who taught us, and that's where...well he met her I suppose on the bus, coming on the same bus and go back on the same bus and then they'd come and sit in there when the thing was on and watch us and I can remember her saying, "well come and join in" when it came to any dancing that came around at the end. So that's where their romance started...

*Oh really, in Tickhill – certainly didn't know that.*

So that was the dancing there and keep fit and ... I'm just looking at my notes here. Did I talk about my er...I think I've talked about just about everything I wanted...I haven't talked about moving to er...I've talked about moving to Westgate, but I haven't talked about moving back where we are now have I?

*No.*

That was when my parents left Westgate and we were getting married and so we were able to stay in the same house, which still, by the way, belonged to my grandmother, because my grandfather left the various properties he had about in the town with rents coming in; that would be her income you see. So that still belonged to her and didn't come to us until...to my father...until, you know, until she passed on. And now I've digressed and I've forgotten what I was going to tell you.

*You were going to come back...you came back here to this area.*

Oh, that's right! I'd come back. Yes. So then we lived there and my children were born there and went to school and university and then that's when we moved here, by which time they had all started... they were at university – Jane was, but then the boys eventually grew up and went off to university and they never really come back do they.

*No they don't, they don't nowadays. They don't stay in the same village do they. But you were also saying that you thought that Tickhill now has many sort of advantages to what it was like in your time.*

Well, I do, because although we were all very happy and did all those things, things have changed and moved on and new people coming in just brought some new blood in. I feel that they stirred us all up, they started organisations and whereas we were all quite content as we were but... I think it's good, I think it's much much better. Of course, the place has grown a lot...

*...yes, of course, the population has really increased.*

I mean all my young life I think, you know, in my parents' days two and a half thousand; it was that right up to me being...I was married when it starts, when Tickhill starts to have houses built...extra houses built. Because, remember, when I was growing up, we knew where every person lived in Tickhill.

*And you'd just about know everybody as well.*

Yes, that's right. People didn't move very much...

*No, not even around Tickhill.*

No, they didn't move very much at all. People stayed a lot longer and....

*Yes, but I think it's still retained that sort of nice atmosphere where people are friendly...*

Do you think so?

*Yes. But obviously, we don't know everybody now, but I still think there's a very friendly atmosphere.*

I think this is why I keep... I'm so busy, because I've got to know some of the people – a lot of the people who have come to live in Tickhill, which has been good. But you still know the older people...

*...from school, and er youth club...*

But of course they're getting less and less now, the older people, and... I can remember when Tickhill was first beginning to grow and then some of the old ones, you know, my Dad's age group, although I've never said it, but I can remember some of them would say "Eeee luv it's not like it used to be is it." (Laughter). But, I don't agree at all, I just think it's lovely.

*Yes, it's nice. Good.*

It's made it... yeah, everybody's broader minded and whether that's good or bad I don't know. When I was young married I could often come down to the shops to do my shopping and never lock the door...

*...can't imagine it can you...*

Mr & Mrs Robinson never locked their doors. I mean, I know that not probably everyone did, but... have I told you... I'm digressing again, but did I tell you that Mr Robinson showed us how to run a committee? I didn't tell you ...

*No, no, you said he was very helpful in organising the youth club.*

...which I thought was a very good thing. He showed us how the way was to run a committee and he wasn't on it at all, but he would come and sit and watch and told us, you know, how to elect a chairman and committee and how the treasurer had to work and the secretary ...

*And you all had a position did you on the committee?*

Yes, everybody knew what they had to do and we'd always meet when we knew what to do in the youth club. I mean, we couldn't do much really, but it was nice to have something like that...

*... yeah, useful for later as well...*

Well, that's right. Bits of things, not a lot, but... and, er, he let us use the.. they called it The Lodge in those days, at the side of Waredale there was a little house. It's still there...bungalow I suppose it is, but it goes down below, you can see a window lower down by the pavement, and we used to hold our committee meetings there.

*Good training.*

Oh yes, very good training, yeah.

*Right!*

Two nights a week I think, the youth club was...

*...that would keep you occupied.*

I'm just going down my notes here I can't see anything else that I've forgotten. My Great-grandfather Clarkson, Edward that was, he bought Westfield House. He was in the shop before...I don't think I mentioned that...

*Before your grandfather – yes.*

Before my grandfather and then he went... then he bought...I don't think he moved straight away, I think they bought property and invested...and he bought Westfield House on Westgate just passed from the shop, and I've just been talking with my brother and I know my father was born there but we don't know why. (laughter)

*Why he was at Westfield House...*

Well, he must have been in the grocery shop by then, so whether my grandma went there to, for... Maria, Edward's wife, to keep an eye on her, to look after her I don't know, but I know he was born there. that's the house with the metal railings at two of the bedroom windows.

*Oh yes, I know, it's a big one.*

So I think that's the story that I can think of - can't think of any more.

*Lot's more things later I expect. OK then thanks very much.*

A pleasure.