

Trinity Church Sutton

Oral History Project – Charlie Bell

The following is a transcript of a video interview with Charlie Bell recorded in December 2016. The video can be accessed from our [web site](#).

Transcript

The Trinity Oral History Project has been set up to encourage people to share the stories about their lives and so get to know and understand each other better.

In this conversation Charlie Bell shares his life story with us.

Charlie thank you for coming to talk to us. What's that you've brought with you?

My Book

Do you remember who made it for you?

Hallmead

People at Hallmead?

Yeah

Can I have a look? Let's look at the front page.

This says "This is my life story book, Charlie Bell, born 24 Dec 1945"

45

So how old are you now Charlie?

Seventy

Now if we look at this page this tells us about your

Life

... The beginning of your life

Yeah

It says "My Mummy's name is Dorothy Bell"

Yeah

"My Daddy was a soldier, my Grandmother's name was Eliza Bell, and my Auntie's name is Mrs Alsop."

Alsop

The book goes on to tell us that Charlie's mother wasn't able to look after him. He spent most of his first 9 months of his life in various hospitals, and the next 3 years in the South Eastern residential Nursery. In 1949 when he was in his 4th year he transferred to the Fountain Hospital in Tooting where he lived until he was 17.

Yeah

His grandmother continued to visit him until he was about 10.

What's this Charlie?

Hospital

And you lived there for all the time you were a child really?

Yeah

You remember these buildings?

Yeah

And who else lived there?

A lot of people

Lots of people - just children or adults too?

Adults too

Adults too...

Yeah

And boys and girls?

No, boys

Just boys, so you lived all through your childhood just with boys?

Yeah

And what kind of things did you do while you lived at the hospital?

Not going out

You didn't go out at all?

No

What about school?

Yeah school yeah

You had your own school in the hospital?

Yeah

So you had lessons with the people you lived with?

Yeah

Did you have any holidays?

Yeah Hastings

Was it always Hastings?

Yeah

Every year

Yeah

And where did you stay when you went to Hastings

Big house

A big house... And all the children went together

Yeah

How did you spend your days at Hastings? Did you go out from the big house?

Yes going out - coast

Down the coast...

Yeah

To the beach?

The beach yeah

Did you like those holidays

Yes

You looked forward to them

Yes

Here in the book there's a picture of you when you had just gone to the fountain hospital and you were just 4 years old. The next one shows you when you were 23 which is a long time later. Have you got any other photographs between when you were 4 and when you were 23?

No

Nothing at all

No

So that time in your life is almost lost?

Yes lost

So when you were 17 you left the fountain hospital. Where did you go then?

Sutton

The book says you went to this place

St Ebba's

St Ebba's which in in Epsom not far from Sutton

No

There's another place where you lived for a long time. What did you do while you lived there – you were 17 when you arrived...What was a day at the hospital like?

Did you have to work?

Yes work kitchen

What sort of thing did you do in the kitchen?

Washing up like I do here

Like you do here now at Trinity

Yeah

So getting food ready? Washing up? Those sorts of things

Yeah

And who was the food for

All the people

All the people in the hospital

Yeah

So Charlie the book says in 1974 you moved out of St Ebba's Hospital and came to live in Sutton. Where did you live in Sutton?

York Road

York Road

Yeah

Again with other people?

Yeah

And what work did you do to start with?

Come back to St Ebba's

You went back to St Ebba's

Washed up

Worked in the Kitchen.

In the kitchen

Yeah

And how did you get there?

Train

On the train?

Yeah

To Epsom Station

Yeah

And then how did you get from Epsom station to the hospital?

Walk

But then you stopped working at St Ebba's. What happened after that?

Go Hallmead

You went to Hallmead which is a place in Sutton.

Yeah

And you went there every day?

Yeah

And met other people? Are there some of your Hallmead friends in the book as well?

Yeah

Are these the ones from York Road?

Yes

Which is where you lived.

Yes

Do you remember? There's some men and some women. What do you remember – do you remember their names?

Kathy, Lucy

Can't remember them all but you remember some of them. Do you ever see them now?

Yes

Some of them just walking around Sutton.

Yes

Let's turn over the page and what do we have here? Some more friends from York Road. Charlie drinking a pint. Is that beer?

Coke

A pint of Coke. Is that still your favourite drink?

Yes

More friends. This is the Five Club. Do you remember anything about the Five Club?

Yes Five Club St Nicholas Church

St Nicholas church

Yes

That was another club where you went and met friends regularly. What do you remember about that?

Played table tennis, darts

Table tennis

Darts

Darts. Were you good at those?

Yes

Yes? Did you win competitions?

No

And you had a minibus at York Road, where did you go in that?

All over

All over the place

Did you go for holidays in it?

Yes

Oh here's one in Bournemouth.

There's a rather smart bar man wearing a bow tie. I think I recognise him though he's a bit older now.

And here we are at Hallmead.

And there's Mr and Mrs Hallmead - was that some sort of competition?

Yes

And here's a picture of an Order of Service at Trinity.

Yes

When did you first come to Trinity?

I don't know...

We think it might be before you even moved to Sutton

We think you came to Trinity before that, I think you were here sometime in the 1970s. But we haven't been able to find out exactly when, have we.

No

What did you like about Trinity?

Good friends, people are good friends.

People are good friends.

Yeah

When you come on a Sunday morning what happens?

Meet friends

You meet your friends, and you take part in the service, and sometimes people talk about other things you can do don't they.

Yeah

What sort of other things have you got involved in?

Don't know

Colin - Caretaker

Working with the Caretaker. What's the caretaker's name?

Colin

Colin

Yeah

What sort of things do you do with him?

Books

Sort out the hymn books

Yes

Anything else?

Mop

You sometimes help in Oasis don't you.

Yes

What do you do down there?

Do washing up

Washing up

Yeah

You've got a long history of washing up don't you Charlie?

Yeah

Well we've passed over the fact that you've moved house again two or three times in Sutton haven't you.

Yes

And each time it's been a bit different.

Yes

Where did you go when you moved out of York Road? I think there's a picture here...

There we are. It says "Independent living with Pat and Bill, Green Wrythe Lane 1983"

Yeah

And that must be Pat and Bill I guess with you. And someone else. Who's the other person?

A friend

A friend.

Yeah.

And the three of you lived together. Was anyone else there?

No

So you looked after yourselves.

Yes

That's good

Charlie one of your best friends for a long time was a lady called Mrs Marsh. How did you meet Mrs Marsh?

Going out for tea.

She took you out for tea.

Yes

Where did she take you?

Her house

To her house.

Yes

And how often did that happen?

Once a month

Once a month

You must have looked forward to that,

Yes

What did you like about going there then?

Oooo... Tea, cake

Cake

Yeah

And I think you did other things with Mrs Marsh as well?

Going to the coast. Eastbourne, Brighton, Hove, Worthing

Pretty much the whole of the south coast of England then.

Yes

And did you go on those trips with Mrs Marsh on your own?

No Mr Marsh

Mr Marsh came too.

Too yes

And they went on for quite a long time didn't they? Did you go on going out with Mrs Marsh when you moved to Sutton?

Yes

And when you were living... when you move on from York Road?

Yes

So she was your friend for a very long time...

Yes

And then you spent a lot of time at Sutton College or SCOLA as we used to know it. What sort of things have you done there?

Art

Art?

Art. Writing

Working. For writing and things like that?

Yes

And I think you used to make things didn't you?

Yes

You have a friend who lives near me who went to some of the same classes...

Pottery

Pottery. What kind of things have you made in pottery?

Bowls

Bowls, and other things?

Yes

You've talked a little bit about holidays?

Yes

And you've had some quite interesting holidays over time – what's your favourite holiday looking back?

Going on aeroplanes

Going up in aeroplanes?

Yes

You've been, you've flown to several holidays haven't you.

Yes

And I think you've exhausted some of the people that you went with.

Chuckles Yes

Sometimes when you come back from holiday you bring a diary with you all about what you've been doing. And reading those diaries it sounds as if whoever goes with you really has their work cut out!

Yes

You want to see everything....

Yes

Tell us about your friend Dave

Dave my friend going out

Where did you meet him?

Here

Here at Trinity.

Yes

And what kind of things have you done with him?

Going out, football, rugby, loads of things.

Watching sports...

Yes

And he moved away didn't he?

Yes

Where does he live now?

Bristol

You go on the train to see him.

Train, coach

So you go to Bristol to see Dave, on the coach

Friday to Monday

You go over the weekend, and you stay with his family

Yes

And you've been doing that for a long time, because its 20 years since he moved away isn't it?

Yes

You're still in touch with him.

Yes you saw him last year, you know him.

And he came to see you when you had to be in hospital didn't he.

Yes

So he's a really good friend.

Yes good friend yes.

What about riding? You go to the Diamond Riding Stables

Yes

And do you always have the same horse there?

Yes

What's your horse called? Can you remember?

No!

A big one?

Yes a big one yeah

And what colour is it?

Grey

Where do you go for your riding?

Sometimes outside, sometimes in

Outside and inside. So you've got a big covered space where you can ride if the weather's bad

Yes

And you can go outside as well?

Yes

And I think that you've got a certificate to say that you've been going there for a long time?

Yes

Can you remember how many years you've been going?

Ooo... twenty-five years

How many?

Twenty five years

Twenty five?

Yes

Gosh. There aren't many people who've been riding that long in the same place!

No

So Charlie we've moved over the road now and come from the church to the flat where you live.

This is the first place where you have ever lived all by yourself isn't it.

Yes

And how did you come to move here?

Did you get a choice about coming here?

Yes

And did you see more than one place or did you just come to look at this one?

No move here

Just this one

Yes

And that's quite a long time ago now

So you've had a chance to adjust to being by yourself

Yes

Who are the people you see who come to your flat now?

Oooo.. You, John, Liz Wood...

So it's a place where your friends can come and see you...

Yes

And you have some people who come to help you with things that need to be done here don't you.

And do you like living on your own?

Yes

And in this place in this flat, there are lots of photographs. The Red Book we were looking at earlier doesn't show anything from about twenty years ago onwards

No

But here in the flat you are surrounded by photographs of things that you've done and people that you've known

Yes

So over there we've got pictures of the ministers of the church

Ministers of the church

Pictures of some of your friends – Dave on the wall up there and other people

And there are one or two photographs of holidays that you've been on

Yes

So this place is surrounded by memories of things you've done, by yourself and with other people

And it's also full of your pots isn't it

There's a desk-lamp there which you've made

And there's some more things down on the floor

There's a big teapot, there's some big pots, there's a little ship on the window ledge

Yes

And you've made all those things

Yes

Must have taken you years and years and years

Yeah

Well it's been really nice to see all things that show us about your life outside church as well as in it

It's been really great to talk to you Charlie

Yeah

And I'm sure lots of people will want to look at this little film to find out a bit more about the story of your life

So thank you very much for sharing it.