

Transcript

Hilary Smith talks to Frank Steiner part 5

Duration: 0:22:39

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Presenter: The next episode of 'Deddington Discussions', Hilary Smith talks to Frank Steiner.

Hilary Smith: So what is your impression, having come into Deddington, what was your impression of Deddington then and how it is, perhaps, today?

Frank Steiner: Oh, it's changed tremendously. I mean, 150 years ago, not only was it the centre of a thriving farming industry, but also it had local industry, is they were – the local product was axles for – whether for farm wagons or whatever, I don't quite know, but it was a major industry and a big exporter.

Hilary Smith: Oh was that part of it being the centre for local agriculture?

Frank Steiner: I simply don't know but, in those days, it had 2,500 inhabitants, and we're just about scraping back to that but, of course, there were no weekenders and no commuters.

Hilary Smith: Right, so they all worked locally is what you're saying, and a mixture of agriculture, farming and some industry, and probably related industry.

Frank Steiner: I think so.

Hilary Smith: We still do have some – not heavy industry here, but we do still have some, kind of, properties, don't we?

Frank Steiner: Oh, very much so. There are about 70 enterprises in...

Hilary Smith: 70?

Frank Steiner: Yes.

Hilary Smith: Seven oh?

Frank Steiner: Seven oh.

Hilary Smith: In Deddington?

Frank Steiner: Yes.

Hilary Smith: This is incredible.

Frank Steiner: Well, I mean, think of all these offices – industrial sites – if you drive to Clifton, on the left you'll find a whole...

Hilary Smith: Oh that's right, yes. Yes, and I was forgetting about Clifton.

Frank Steiner: No, but I mean, this is on the Deddington end of the Clifton Road.

Hilary Smith: Yes.

Frank Steiner: So – and, of course, all these estates hadn't been built. The first one was the Deddings, called after a mythical Saxon chieftain called Deda. What I have missed out on, because I didn't get here in all that time, is the strange structure of Deddington society as it was.

Hilary Smith: And we're talking now of when?

Frank Steiner: Of the 60s and 70s. The road north was the absolute barrier. The west – no wait a minute – where are we – north – yes – the west side, west of the main road was alien territory. It was a council

estate, two council estates eventually, and never – there was a tremendous amount of snobbery from large farmers and their people. There was very much the atmosphere of the wrong side of the tracks.

Hilary Smith: Yes, indeed, so no integration possible?

Frank Steiner: No integration at all. That has gone, if only because of what was otherwise an undesirable element of Mrs Thatcher's policies, a Right to Buy for council tenants.

Hilary Smith: Okay, so people started to buy their own properties in [crosstalk 0:03:43]?

Frank Steiner: Yes, and the other thing that has made a difference is the M40, because there's quite a bit of commuting to Birmingham.

Hilary Smith: Yes.

Frank Steiner: Which, if people had any sense, would be done more easily by rail because it's such a good connection, but a lot of fools drive both ways.

Hilary Smith: So that – well, it's a pathway to the north, in a sense, quite quickly get to the motorways heading north so it's very important.

Frank Steiner: What has also made a difference is the improvement of the service on the Chiltern Line, which was actually due for closure.

Hilary Smith: Was it?

Frank Steiner: Yes, there was a man called Gerald, I assume he had a surname, who was the ticket office chap at Bicester North Station and he organised the position, he organised marches in and around Bicester. There was a time when it was thought that the Chiltern Line as a whole could be closed down and Marylebone Station could be converted into a bus depot.

Hilary Smith: Good heavens.

Frank Steiner: That was shot down, mercifully.

Hilary Smith: So the local population really joined...

Frank Steiner: I don't know whether Deddington joined, but certainly Bicester did.

Hilary Smith: Bicester, right. And Banbury? No?

Frank Steiner: Banbury is a sad case because the Banbury I knew, even 40-50 years ago, was a country town with the largest stockyard in Europe, a major market town and, as John Cheney was saying, it was magical between the wars because not only everybody knew everybody else, but everybody knew everybody else's business.

Hilary Smith: Yes.

Frank Steiner: I got the backwash – the tail end of that in a bit because, when Rosemary lived with her father as a child in Warwickshire, Banbury also was the local big town, so she was familiar with – you know Jones the wine merchants?

Hilary Smith: Yes, yes.

Frank Steiner: Well, she knew the Jones boys at dances and that sort of thing.

Hilary Smith: So you had kind of connections to this area long before you moved here?

Frank Steiner: Yes.

Hilary Smith: Given that, what do you think are the challenges that Deddington faces now?

Frank Steiner: What are they?

Hilary Smith: Yes, to keep – you know, to keep itself as a prospering – prosperous village?

Frank Steiner: I don't think any village can do it by itself, I mean we're being globalised.

Hilary Smith: Does that take away the identity of the village?

Frank Steiner: No, but I think with – the danger is, there is a point at which people buy new houses on the periphery then, because of the financial burden, you need both incomes, so they both commute, so since – I've seen this in Fenny Compton, which is the village very near where Rosemary came from. The shop hasn't survived and the butcher hasn't survived because people – the new people don't come into the centre of the village, they drive out, they drive back, the commute on the motorway, they do their shopping probably at a supermarket somewhere else, at which also they buy such wine as they might drink at home.

So they don't come into the pub, they don't come into the village shop. Here we're unusually fortunate with our shops.

Hilary Smith: We are.

Frank Steiner: Absolutely. I don't know if you – do you patronise the Co-op at all?

Hilary Smith: Oh yes.

Frank Steiner: Have you met my daughter?

Hilary Smith: Not in the Co-op, at least I'm not aware that I have, but usually I'm so busy looking at shelves, I don't...

Frank Steiner: She has a badge which says "Claire, Supervisor".

Hilary Smith: All right, I'll look out for her next time.

Frank Steiner: Actually she's at home because she's got Thursday and Friday off. Anyway, the difficulty is to stop commuters having only outside interests.

Hilary Smith: Yes, to get them involved.

Frank Steiner: In Deddington, the advantage is that there is a school.

Hilary Smith: I was just about to say that because, when you're like that, you're so busy, but at least if you've got a school with your children you are meeting local people.

Frank Steiner: Yes, and I'm told it's a good school.

Hilary Smith: Yes, and they seem to do a lot of activities all year round, don't they?

Frank Steiner: Yes.

Hilary Smith: Which, again, brings village life.

Frank Steiner: The other thing which is peculiar is – I mean, Deddington remains a certain amount of rural – character of a rural village, not only because Park Farm in the High Street was the last building in Deddington to be thatched. That's gone now.

Hilary Smith: Park Farm?

Frank Steiner: Park Farm is no longer a farm because Peggy Pacey has moved to a bungalow behind Park – what was her farm, but her horses and things are being looked after. But, anyway, what is relatively important in Deddington life, and you can get it in the Deddington News, is the importance of the parish church.

Hilary Smith: Yes.

Frank Steiner: Which may not be representative of 21st century England as a whole.

Hilary Smith: Indeed, no.

Frank Steiner: My late cleaner, the late Pat Bliss, of whom you may have heard before, who was the village mascot, a woman of 4'8", but she knew everybody and – something, when Mr Hannah, the vicar, retired, she said something – I said something about Hannah's retirement, I said, "Oh yes, did you know...?" She said, "Of course," she said, "The vicar is the centre of the village." You wouldn't hear that from an urban working class woman in London, in an inner city or in a suburb.

Hilary Smith: You most certainly wouldn't. So do you think the church plays it right, and has in the whole?

Frank Steiner: As well as it can. Hugh White, who you may or may not know, works very hard in the primary school, and little thanks does he get for it. I mean, my heart bleeds for him if I go to the mass in Banbury, on the 10.45 and the church is full of young families and of teenagers serving and things and eventually, at the beginning, “Will the children please come out for the children’s liturgy,” which is separate for part of the service and, at any given time, there could be anything between 20 and 30 children young enough to go to the children’s liturgy. Well here there were never more than six, and I believe they’ve given it up.

Hilary Smith: And you’re talking about – you’re not talking about the Roman Catholic church at the moment, you’re talking about...?

Frank Steiner: I’m talking about Hugh White’s church. I was comparing the Roman Catholic church in Banbury.

Hilary Smith: Yes.

Frank Steiner: And the reason why it is so well-patronised is not merely because it’s an excellent priest, but there are two Catholic schools in Banbury, there are by now quite a number of Poles.

Hilary Smith: Oh yes.

Frank Steiner: But, it's also that there are more young families and more teenagers and Hugh's difficulty is he has an elderly, and I suspect, dwindling congregation.

Hilary Smith: Yes. So, in fact, at the moment what's going on in the church, we have Deddington Online and Deddington On Air and so on, it's tried to rejuvenate or tried other ways to bring younger people in.

Frank Steiner: Well, yes, not only the younger people but, of course, older people, as I know to my cost, I'm not all that mobile and there are lot of people in Featherton House of that generation who would want to go to church but can't. So the idea of broadcasting the services at Featherton House was an inspiration of genius.

Hilary Smith: Absolutely, it's really playing an enormous role there. One last thing, we've got about 12 minutes left of tape, but just to – just thinking of the village and thinking of your own voluntary work, that you – obviously, you've mentioned working with police and being part of the police, do you see the role of the police here in Deddington has evolved since you've been here?

Frank Steiner: Negatively, in the sense that there aren't any.

Hilary Smith: Ah, yes.

Frank Steiner: I mean, there was a time when the police office in Deddington – note the word “office”, it’s not a police station, it’s a police office.

Hilary Smith: Yes.

Frank Steiner: Had a compliment of a sergeant and four constables.

Hilary Smith: Goodness.

Frank Steiner: We now have a sergeant responsible for this area who’s based on Banbury. We have one constable in the shape of Richard Miller. I believe there’s another woman constable but there are two PCSOs.

Hilary Smith: What’s that?

Frank Steiner: A PCSO is a Police Community Support Officer, who wear the same kind of uniform but it’s blue instead of check. If you see a girl called Angela with a police hat, she’s got a blue bade here.

Hilary Smith: I think I saw her the other day because they were checking the speed of traffic going to – up the road there. So your role in the police, has it been...

[Respondent plays answerphone tape.]

Frank Steiner: Sorry, where were we?

Hilary Smith: We were talking about the role of police and the fact that it used to be well-policed but now it's an office with two Community Service Officers.

Frank Steiner: Support Officers.

Hilary Smith: Support Officers.

Frank Steiner: Yes, it...

Hilary Smith: What has your role been then in this, and volunteering?

Frank Steiner: Ah, in order to keep the office open – the office has two functions, it has a front counter and behind that it serves as a base for the uniformed officers who do the rural beat. They have a kitchen there and things, so when they're in the course of their patrols which are, of course, 24 hours a day practically, that's a base, as well as a frontline office. Now the frontline office here – front office counter –

front counter – is not particularly busy and it was getting rather boring sitting there reading the paper.

It does, if you – it has certain functions but, by and large, it's quiet. The volunteers come and quite often don't have much to do. That's one thing. So that's why Stephanie Higham, who you may know, who at 88 or 89 was a volunteer, gave up and said she was a waste of time, which from her point of view it was. When I – yes, there's a rule that, unless you are single and you are particularly young and virile, there's no single manning, you always have to have two volunteers in the office at the same time.

When my partner for the shift, John [Meald 0:18:35] gave up, I lost my other half and, anyway, it was – and I said, "Please could I have a reassignment?" and the reassignment was that I was asked to do the – Superintendent Stone at Banbury was the local area Commander, wanted to save the local press and so instituted the press cutting service, which I took on.

It started with my going in when the office was busy because I couldn't be there by myself, understandably, taking in the local paper, such as the Guardian, the Bicester Advertiser, the Banbury Cake, clipping out of it what seemed to be – what I thought would be of relevance to Howard Stone, and sending it to his PA. Well that seemed to be a waste of time when it could be emailed with a scanner. I then expanded it a bit by taking in the correspondence columns, because he might as well know what the Great British Public think.

And so, that was my first assignment. And, eventually, I noticed on the office circular, or this circulating on the computer, that somebody at force headquarters – somehow the word press cuttings had got round – was interested in whatever and said – so gave the name of a chap in the press office so I told Rosie White, who's the coordinator, the volunteer coordinator, that I was interested in this and she got onto David Staines who then sent me an email saying he was grateful for the offer, would I come and talk, and so I now go down there and do a shift two or three times a month.

So it's a double assignment, which I can do so long as I can use the car, because from here to police headquarters by public transport really isn't on. For a start it would take me quarter of an hour to walk to the bus stop and then it's a good half a mile from the bus stop. Police force headquarters is a very large area. You've driven past it in Kidlington any number of times and it's quite – anyway, this is manageable only if I can drive myself. So, so long as I can, I'll keep it on. In the course of all – over the years, I've acquired the police long-service medal for volunteers.

Hilary Smith: Congratulations.

Frank Steiner: There are splendid pictures of me being presented by our Sarah with the medal.

Hilary Smith: I think that's wonderful. A long career in the police.

Frank Steiner: Which I didn't start till I was over 80.

Hilary Smith: Yes, yes, so it's been a late burst of career.

Frank Steiner: A late vocation, yes.

Hilary Smith: A late vocation, yes. Frank, I think, on that note, I would like to thank you very much for contributing to our Deddington Online, the very first.

Frank Steiner: A pleasure.

Announcer: The final episode of Hilary Smith talks to Frank Steiner. Hilary will be back talking to another local resident in the near future. If you would like to be involved in 'Deddington Discussions', then please do get in touch. Drop us an email at studio@deddingtononair.org.

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