

Transcription of an interview conducted 26 July 2018

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Interviewer: KEITH MCMAHON (KM)  
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**[00:01] KM: Right we're good to go. Er my name's Keith McMahon. It's Thursday the 26th of July 2018. Erm. And we're in the Kingston history room. Er. I'm carrying out an oral history with Martin Ursell er from Tolworth. Er. For the ShedX er project. So Martin erm. You've erm you've had your allotment for a number of years er f-in Tolworth. Can you just tell me erm how long have you had your allotment and what - what triggered you to - to actually get an allotment?**

MU: Right OK. Erm. I got the allotment I think in '98. I think. Erm. And I'd always wanted an allotment. I've got a fairly y'know typical suburban garden. 100 foot whatever, whatever narrow. And I've always liked gardening very much, nearly did that as a professional instead of what I - what I do. Erm but I'd always wanted an allotment but always assumed I'd never have time. And **[01:00]** my wife for Valentine's Day got me the plot. Erm rented the plot. Cos she thought I was always on and on and on and somebody at work got one er-an allotment and said oh it's marvellous, marvellous, so I was bringing that home so she got me the plot for Valentine's Day for one year. And I went along to Tolworth which is very near me so I'm very lucky in that respect. And walked round the plot with - with one of the guys. Forgotten their name now. Gary something I think. And chose plot number 27. Erm. And that was it. Hooked.

**KM: Yeah.**

MU: Absolutely hooked.

**KM: Yeah.**

MU: It was a perfect time of year actually as well to get the plot. Valentine's Day.

**KM: Yeah.**

MU: Cos it's February. Early February.

**KM: Yep.**

MU: So I still had chance - it was in a bit of a state with the brambles, and rubbish and you name it. It had been - I think it had been y'know vacant for some number of years. I cleared it. And planted it. And some of the guys there - the older guys who **[02:00]** really mostly gone now. But they all came over very eager to help and give advice like they are. And one guy in particular I remember Tom. He said er the thing is when you're clearing it - cos it's a full plot, have a full plot. And as I say it was y'know 6 foot high brambles and stuff.

**KM: Heavens.**

MU: He said don't be disheartened when you're - when you're er clearing the plot. Clear a little bit. Plant something. Clear a little bit. Plant something. Don't try and clear the whole lot.

**KM: Yeah.**

MU: Just clear a bit and plant something.

**KM: That's some good advice, yeah.**

MU: It really was good advice because it meant while I was still clearing I was actually cropping as well and made me think yeah this is gonna work. That first year was probably one of my best ever. I dunno why, I mean everything grew. And probably because it had been vacant for a while.

**KM: Yeah. So it was still quite f-it was quite fertile.**

MU: I guess. But everything - everything was brilliant. The potatoes were amazing. The [03:00] beans were good. Everything grew. And it actually took me three years to clear the plot totally as I wanted it.

**KM: Yeah.**

MU: Erm it's a full plot. I had a path going down the middle. There was a shed already on it which needed a bit of renovating but i-I did that. Still on there now. Erm. So it took me three years to get it absolutely straight. And yeah. Now I've had it twenty- twenty years.

**[03:28] KM: Yeah. So er do you just grow vegetables? Or do you grow flowers?**

MU: I grow v-

**KM: Is it personal consumption or-**

MU: Yes. I grow vegetables and flowers. But on that one plot we got more than enough - I can't - we can't eat all - it's only my wife and I. So we can't eat all of that stuff. So neighbours get it. Mm y'know other allotment colleagues who aren't growing the same stuff. Erm. My sister. My mum. Y'know we- it's amazing what you get out of one plot.

**[04:00] KM: Yes. Well a plot was originally designed to feed a family of four or five people. So-**

MU: I quite believe that. I'm sure - if we did it properly it would. I also use the plot er - y'know when things like my potatoes when they come up and I put in wallflowers which I take home to my garden at home. So I used it in that way as well.

**KM: Yes.**

MU: Because the typical suburban gardens are quite narrow, especially ours, it's narrow and quite shady. So everything grows better at the allotment.

**KM: Yeah.**

MU: Y'know wallflowers, dahlias, chrysanths all these kind of things. I can't really grow dahlias or - in the garden. It's just not - there's not - it's not open enough.

**[04:41] KM: So it gives you the opportunity to grow different-**

MU: It does. Cut flowers at the allotment to bring back to the house.

**[04:51] KM: So erm over the years you must have seen some changes to how the allotments are run.**

**And the sort of people that are - that [05:00] take up allotments. And - and why they take them up.**

**What would you - what's your experience on-**

MU: Yes that's very true again. I - when I first had the plot I was - I was almost certainly one of the youngest ones there. If not the youngest. Most of the other plots erm were elderly - elderly guys. Errm. A couple of ladies but mainly guys who-who - who had been growing on there for years. In fact one of the guys whose near me, Howard, Howard Hitchcock. Who used to be in charge of the carpets in Bentalls.

**KM: Oh right.**

MU: That was his job. Although he was retired, he was in his 80s then. And he only grew beans, runner beans. But he had had that plot from just after the war. So 1946. He'd had the plot from 1946. And he was longer than anybody else there. And he - runner beans was the thing he grew. In his 80s so he was prob- gone a bit. But he had kept the seed from of the beans [06:00] each year from then. So you could imagine he had white seeds, black seeds, speckled seeds, purple seeds, all runner beans. And he gave me erm a tin of these bean seeds. Which I still grow.

**KM: Good lord.**

MU: Which I still grow. Each year I save some of the seed from th- when the leather beans go to seed. And do you know the funny thing with that is they have become one of the best beans on there - p-I give them to loads of others growing them as well. H-we call them Howard's beans. But they are absolutely amazing. Some are short. Some are long. Y-they need a bit of peeling. You can't y'know

**KM: Yeah.**

MU: They're not stringless. But they are really really tasty beans.

**[06:42] KM: So when you took on your plot to work there were lots of shall we say well established plot holders, allotmenters. What's it like now?**

MU: Well one of the big differences th-that - the plots - the plots at Tolworth Main were massive because they went from [07:00] what used to be - what's now Travis Perkins, it used to be [Bud and Bird].

**KM: Yes. [Bud and Bird], the builders merchants.**

MU: The builders merchants. So i-i-it ran from there right the way over to Alexandra Drive.

**KM: Yes.**

MU: The whole lot was allotment. So I don't know how many hundreds of plots there were, a lot. And in among them erm when I first y'know - when I first got the plot they had just moved everybody off of the Alexandra Road site onto the bit near Hook - near [Bud and Bird]. Because y'know allotments weren't that popular then. And there were just probably y'know a quarter of the plots were actually worked. So in among all of this lot they - the council had the idea - I think the idea was to build on - on the site actually but then they never managed that. So they moved everybody over to this one site. So at least two thirds of that - of that - of the allotment site had gone to rack and ruin. There were [08:00] broken greenhouses, wild greengage trees, plum trees.

**KM: Right.**

MU: You name it. Apple trees. It - it had all gone-

**KM: But completely untended.**

MU: Completely untended. I mean it was an absolute haven for wildlife. I mean in-

**KM: Yeah.**

MU: When I was first there, all this was there - there were badgers. We had a pheasant came once. I-it was - birds, greenfinches, goldfinches. The irony of it is when they - in - when they built Millennium Green, they had a grant to build the Millennium Green which is great and for families it's fine. But the idea of the Millennium Green would be that it would be wildlife and they took all of that out. Completely bulldozed the whole lot. And y'know -

**KM: Yes. Sometimes it's erm-**

MU: That was completely - y'know I - Millennium Green is fine but i-it - not for wildlife. Not like it was. So that's a big change. W-y'know when they - when they built the Millennium Green and [09:00] got rid

of all of the other side. Then - then I - again like these things are y'know th-the minute they did that it seemed like there was a surge in interest for allotments. And people started wanting allotments. The - all the unworked plots on our bit of the Tolworth Main started to go. Then there was a waiting list. Then the waiting list was quite long. So they then put another new set of allotments at the back. At the back of - er y'know when the site was. Probably - probably doubling what was there. And that's how the site is now. And apparently I think there aren't any - there aren't any spare plots.

**KM: No vacant plots.**

MU: Apparently there aren't. But a fair number of those plots aren't really worked. That's another big difference because when I first had that plot if you had a plot you did have - there was an obligation to keep it tidy. And [10:00] they had a guy who used to come round with a clipboard and he would look at your plot- y'know and if you let it go a bit.

**KM: Yeah.**

MU: Erm. He'd send you a letter. I never had a letter. Erm. But -

**KM: Well done. [Laughs]**

MU: But he did - some people did have letters.

**KM: Yes. Yes.**

MU: And y'know they were suddenly down, y'know working on their plot. That's obviously gone now because of people - people - one of the big changes in - is I think a lot of the younger families who have plots do see them as like a garden. And-

**KM: Right.**

MU: They are trampolines down there and swings. And y'know barbecues and little patios and-

**KM: Yeah.**

MU: And y'know that is a bi-that is a difference because some of those plots y'know at least half of it - it-it - y'know - half of the plots now are turned into seating areas and trampolines and play areas. When I first had that plot that wouldn't have been allowed. I-certain percentage of it had to be vegetables.

**KM: Yes.**

MU: [11:00] And then another percentage you could grow flowers. But there wasn't - it was written down in my contract only so much could be flowers, only so much could be vegetables.

**KM: Oh right. Yeah.**

MU: When I first got the plot. I think it was something like 75% veg.

**KM: Right. And 25%-**

MU: 25% flowers.

**KM: Flowers. And no provision for-**

MU: No provision for patios.

**KM: Family leisure activity.**

MU: N-nothing like that at all.

**[11:25] KM: Certainly that would seem to be erm fairly unusual on allotments. I mean allotments are there for the provision of erm y'know fruit. Fruit - fruit and vegetables.**

MU: The trouble with it is I mean some of the - again we don't have many of the real old guys left. In fact there are probably only a handful of people now who have been there longer than me. There aren't - there really aren't many.

**KM: Yeah.**

MU: But I - y'know some of the older guys don't really like that. Because obviously y'know if you have say like a trampoline and it's noisy. And [12:00] y-y'know - as children run around. Really in a place that is potentially quite dangerous because there's broken glass there. Y'know broken greenhouse. Sticks, canes, all this kind of stuff. But erm. Y'know I understand if you haven't got a garden you'd- you - and you have a flat or something like that. I can see why you'd want an allotment for that.

**[12:23] KM: I think that uh-there is this dilemma that a lot of people now live in flats or their houses don't have very big garden and there's nowhere for the children to play. So getting an allotment is a cheap option of getting them some outdoor space.**

MU: Yes.

**KM: But at the same time allotments may be considered for the provision of er- fruit and veg.**

MU: Yes it's a tricky one isn't it?

**KM: It is.**

MU: I think some of the plots now - there's a guy who's been there just about two years. And he has literally paved half of the allotment. And I think y'know [13:00] quite a lot of the other allotment people think no, y'know that's too much.

**[13:07] KM: Tell me erm - a number of other people have said that erm - how can you put this - that allotments erm - having an allotment is an escape. From y'know d-day to day work or family. Y'know family life. It-it's - it can be considered therapeutic. Have you noticed anybody who goes down there to er to relax, to unwind.**

MU: Yes I think in a way we all got that from it because one it's somewhere else. So y'know the way - the way we are in London it's so packed with people. That just having somewhere to go - it's very nice down there, y'know it's open, there are trees, there are little - there are patches of the allotment which are - which is given over to little copses and wildlife areas. And y'know I think just going somewhere else [14:00] out of your house that's near for a couple of hours in the evening or weekend is very beneficiary, it's very pleasant to do that. Also I think erm there's an-it's another community. So - and we're all interested in the same thing. So you've already got a shared interest. And I do think y'know that's - that's really one of my big things down there. Because sometimes I can go down there and there's some serious talkers.

**KM: [Laughs]**

MU: Y'know there really are. You can easily go down there and have y'know two or three hours and then I come back and my wife goes y'know oh what have you done, nothing. Absolutely nothing y'know. We had a character down there called Big Jim. Who has been there - he's one of the longest ones there now. It was actually his - I think his uncle who had three plots and then when the uncle died Big Jim who - whose now late 80s had always helped his uncle. He took over the three plots. [15:00] And he could talk the hind leg off of a donkey. He always has a funny story and - and genuinely - a genuinely funny guy. Without meaning to be.

**[15:11] KM: So the desire to - to grow y'know fruit and veg and flowers is that common thread. And provides a sort of a social hub outside of it as well.**

MU: It does I think. Everybody down there y'know is very friendly - it's always been like that. And erm one of - again - a change up there - we have a lot - y'know a lot of different cultures and nationalities

down there. When I first had that plot there wasn't but now we have erm y'know people from all of the world really who have a plot. There's a - two of my neighbours are from Hong Kong. And they have introduced onto the allotment these Chinese vegetables.

**[15:53] KM: I was gonna ask - do they - have they adopted erm y'know Eur-British and European vegetables? Or have they - are they [16:00] grow-trying to grow the vegetables they would normally have in Asia?**

MU: I think more the latter. I think they y'know - they - they have introduced quite a lot of new veg. Which is amazing. I mean w-they started off with something called you mak choi. Which is actually from Taiwan, not Hong Kong. But it's absolutely delicious. It's a wheat derivative that looks a little bit like a long narrow spinach. But it's actually wheat. From the wheat family. And you mak choi - it's absolutely delicious. I would say a third of that allotment are growing that now. And then they've just started with another one called ong choi. Which is a hollow stemmed leafy vegetable. And that needs a hot year.

**KM: Right.**

MU: So this year particularly it's doing really well. A bad year you won't get it. But erm Chinese cabbage, y'know, **[17:00]** pak choi of course. Erm courgettes that come from - from Taiwan. Most of these vegetables I think come from Taiwan. Erm. Amazing. Absolutely amazing. And a lot of the plot holders, including myself are growing these things.

**[17:15] KM: So it's interesting that the plants that are being grown on the allotments now reflect the diversity of plot holders and the diversity of our comm-our own community.**

MU: They do. They do.

**KM: Which is continuing to get more and more diverse. Erm each-each decade really. And I think - as maybe you're indicating historically er the allotments ref-again reflected y'know postwar communities. Erm and that people grew potatoes and beans.**

MU: Er-yes. I think another thing which-

**KM: Whereas now it's - it's rather different.**

MU: I think it is. There's a - there's a - there's - I think the thing I think with the allotment also is as we're all - and that's - Tolworth Main is quite a big plot, quite a big site. Erm. We're all growing the **[18:00]** same things so we've suffered over the last - again different from when I first had that plot but over the last maybe eight - eight, seven years. We have these diseases that seem to come every year now.

**KM: Oh right.**

MU: So tomato blight is one. So quite a lot of the allotment holders - the plot holders now - unless they have a greenhouse or cupboard space they don't grow tomatoes. Because we get the blight every year now. In the same way we have something - this leek moth.

**KM: Yes.**

MU: You know that? That's a brand new one. Now when I first had that plot, nobody had even heard of that. For the last six years that wipes out probably y'know four fifths of your leeks.

**KM: Right.**

MU: So people have stopped growing leeks now. Erm. Even onions are proving difficult. We get this er-er - earworm. Or stem and - stem and something rot that affects the onions, makes the leaves all curly.

**[19:00]** You can still eat the onions but they don't keep. And again that one - when I first had that plot nobody had that. That - that's come in the last - in the last six years.

**[19:11] KM: And is that because everybody has been growing the same vegetables and once one person gets the disease-**

MU: We all get it.

**KM: It spreads or-**

MU: I don't know. I suspect it's a bit to do with the climate. In that we - our climate is different now. So we - er it's possibly - it could be that. It could also be that quite a lot of the allotment holders now - of which I'm one. Erm. Want to grow without chemicals.

**KM: Right.**

MU: So - so therefore I think when I first took over that plot. Y'know some of those old guys they grew beautiful veg. But they had a chemical for everything. [Bithane] or y'know, you name it.

**KM: Yes. Yeah.**

MU: It went on that veg. So these things didn't get a hold. Whereas - whereas now with growing things organically which I - which I do. I - y'know - **[20:00]** w-with the best will in the world, the organic treatments don't really work in the same way. So I'm imagining that might also be part of it.

**[20:10] KM: Yes I think - cer-certainly in my experience on - on allotments is, yes, the erm - th-the er chaps who have had their plots for y'know three or four decades as you say they've still got bottles of-**  
MU: Yes. [Laughs]

**KM: Some sort of chemical that they probably shouldn't have anymore and erm y'know - if they knew exactly what er - what the effects were they might not spray them.**

MU: They might not.

**KM: But every one to their own. Erm. So it may be that erm with the introduction or the diversification of the plot holders - the diversification of the - what's being grown. That may be an opportunity to start growing different things.**

MU: Yes I think - I think you're right. And again y'know maybe after a short break. I noticed again - which makes me think that this might be something to do with the climate. I've noticed this year we've had y'know this long **[21:00]** hot dry spell. And actually the onions are probably the best I've grown in maybe six years. They look alright. And although they got the curly leaf at the beginning.

**KM: Yes.**

MU: I think they seem to get over it.

**KM: Yeah.**

MU: If that's possible.

**[21:17] KM: Yeah. So maybe a - an upside to this hot weather. So how's - how's your allotment fairing with - we're sitting here and we've had several weeks of exceptionally hot weather.**

MU: And we're sweltering.

**KM: And we're sweltering. And we don't see any immediate end to it. How are you - how are you managing to cope on- on your allotment?**

MU: Well the water is a - is an issue. Because obviously one needs to get down there to water and a full plot is - that's a lot of watering there if you're gonna do it properly. Erm. We don't have a hosepipe ban so we're lucky with that.

**KM: Right.**

MU: Because in the time I've had the allotment we have had y'know the water turned off.

**KM: Yep.**

MU: Erm but I think one of the - one of the ways I - I do it and [22:00] mine's quite tightly packed, that allotment. So there's no bare soil. And that helps.

**KM: Yep.**

MU: Because the water can't evaporate. Also I think a lot of the stuff having had the plot for 20 years. My fruit bushes - they don't need water, they'll be fine. They go deep enough.

**KM: Yeah.**

MU: So it is - really just things like the runner beans and the spinach and y'know these things that need - courgettes. The things that need the water.

**[22:24] KM: The ones that haven't got particularly deep roots.**

MU: Yes. I've just - I've just - I don't know about you but I've just concentrated on those.

**KM: Yes.**

MU: And they're great. Yeah, good harvest. Some of the things have gone over very quickly. Flowers. Dahlias. Y'know I haven't watered those and they're not really enjoying not being watered. But I'm thinking they'll come back. Erm.

**[22:45] KM: I- yes I think everything will eventually come back. Er - it's just not looking the same as it might otherwise - might otherwise. So have you taken - taken the lead from any of your er - the new plot holders and - and started growing anything [23:00] different to-**

MU: The Chinese vegetables yes because y'know they are very delicious. Y'know th-th-this couple [Wai Ping] and [Chi Ming] their names are. Er - they're very generous with their stuff. They grow it and they do love you to have it. Er - they're not quite so eager to take stuff back. If you're - if I offer them a bag of brussels, they're not quite so keen with that.

**KM: [Laughs] Yes let me think about that one.**

MU: So I don't feel it's going quite the other way. But erm - but they are very generous offering their things around like goji berries or wolfberry or this yau mak choi. And y'know once you've tried it - some of the things I haven't liked - the wolfberry. Erm. It was not for me. It's a very bitter shrub really. It's a very bitter shrub that you - you - you actually eat the leaves. It's called wolfberry but you eat the young stems. [?] stems. You boil them up and make a soup out of this thing. Very very bitter. So - I won't be growing that.

**KM: [Laughs]**

MU: But some of those things are growing. I also have another neighbour who is [24:00] one of the - one of the plot holders who was there before me from Italy called Guido. And he's been here very many years. Erm. So I must have had that plot probably 30 years or more I would imagine. And he also grows Italian vegetables. On - a-a-marvellous. He had an amazing fig tree. That he got back from Italy. Because if you buy a fig tree it's usually brown turkey. The variety brown turkey.

**KM: Yes. Yes.**

MU: But he doesn't actually know what the variety is. But it's a white fig. Very big. And cracks quite a lot when it's ripe. So you couldn't transport it. It'd be for useless for a supermarket. Even getting it home is an achievement, it's so soft. But it is the most delicious fig. And I have now full sized tree on my plot, several of the other plot holders have got-

**KM: That have been grown from-**

MU: From his. He strikes - er-layers, he actually layers it.

**KM: Oh right.**

MU: And gets cutting going for you. And erm - so several of us have this much [25:00] prized fig - in fact my barber is from Italy and I took this - some of these figs in. And he d-said it is like being back at home. He - y'know you don't get figs like that here. They are amazing. And he also grows another thing called rapa. Which I hadn't heard of. It's like a kind of loose broccoli. Quite hot. It's like a mustardy y'know aftertaste to it. Very very nice. And again this is a - apparently I think when he was a child during the war in Italy. It was y'know - huge food shortages there. A lot of poverty. And the y'know - he was saying his family - his mother would use anything she could get to cook. And some of this what he calls peasant food - rapa er came - y'know they got here, they got a taste for it and now he grows it. And it's absolute - again absolutely delicious. It's one of our favourite things.

**[25:57] KM: So in your - coming back [26:00] to this thread of sharing and community er-and very much a s-a social life side to - to the allotment. I-people don't just go down there and work on their own plot. Has that - has that changed over the years? Or has it always been there?**

MU: Erm. Yes I think - I'm trying to think now. People were always very generous. When I first had the plot the older guys, very generous with their advice. And in a nice way. Not y'know like telling. But w-why don't you try doing this or - very generous with their advice and with any spare plants, that kind of thing. But I think you did tend to keep to your own plot.

**KM: Right.**

MU: Erm. Whereas now I think yeah, maybe people share plot more. Y'know you get two or three families have one plot between them.

**KM: Right.**

MU: Erm. A-I y'know - I don't know. To be honest I don't think that actually works that well. Because you always get y'know one - one who does the- the majority of the work. [27:00] You just do. So I think the better plots tend to be the people who are like really keen and quite focused and - I-quite a lot of the plots a lot of the new plot holders now have half a plot. Don't have a whole plot, they take half.

**[27:17] KM: Certainly - certainly lots of people find - I mean looking at - looking after a whole plot, you'll know for yourself-**

MU: Yes. It's a lot of work.

**KM: It's a commitment.**

MU: Yeah.

**KM: And some people's time is very challenging nowadays. Erm an-and sometimes it is better to just have that half plot.**

MU: Yes I think if you can keep it tidy it is better to have a half. But erm I think - if you - if you're gonna take to it you'll probably end up wanting the full plot I think.

**KM: Yeah.**

MU: And like you were telling me your neighbour has six plots. I think our record - we've got big Big Jim, he actually has three.

**KM: Three.**

MU: And he's eighty-late eighties.

**KM: Good Lord.**

MU: Three plots.

**KM: And he still manages to-**

MU: Just about.

**KM: Just about.**

MU: He [28:00] just bought himself a little mini tractor.

**KM: [Laughs]**

MU: So when he's not talking. He's on that tractor. Er.

**KM: Right.**

MU: It's a little tri-tiny tractor. It's very funny.

**[28:12] KM: So is there a - y'know apart from just chatter. There's chatting to-to neighb-neighbouring plot holders and things like that. Is there a social side to the-**

MU: Erm yes there is. Again it's very interesting how we all - we all have - it's a complete cross-section of society down there.

**KM: Yes.**

MU: You've got in - in the time I've been there my all-my immediate allotment neighbours. I had my first neighbour Terry. He was - he played viola and still does actually, viola in the English National Opera Orchestra. So erm I got y'know very friendly with him and often go to the English National Opera to hear him play. And then I had another guy from Australia who - who erm. Y'know. Was absolutely amazing. I think he was an architect. [29:00] I've had a justice of the peace. Erm. And I now have erm [Wai Ping] and [Chi Ming] who are from Hong Kong. I think he was in banking. So you get a complete range of all kinds of professions. In fact the irony of that is I think we don't really go near that. So often you don't know what somebody did - I didn't actually find out Terry played viola until he left the plot and offered me some of his stuff. And I - y'know I noticed he was often there in the week. When y'know when he - y'know -

**[29:33] KM: And in many ways that can be - that that's nice - it's a wonderful leveller.**

MU: Yes. Yeah it is.

**KM: And whilst there may be different stratas of society - by the time you walk in through the gates to the allotments all that's gone.**

MU: Yeah. Exactly.

**KM: So everybody is there for the-**

MU: For the growing and the digging. Yeah. Exactly that.

**[29:55] KM: So apart from the change in the diversity and the change in the - in the [30:00] plants.**

**Erm. Have you - have you noticed any other changes? Any other attitudinal changes over the years?**

MU: Well the one we touched on before which was a bit - is to do with the er y'know how - how careful you are in keeping your plot tidy.

**KM: Yeah.**

MU: I mean it is a much more relaxed thing now.

**KM: Yes.**

MU: Y'know I think if you can't manage to keep the plot in good - in a good state. Maybe somebody does mention that after - after a year.

**KM: Right.**

MU: But erm that - by that time it's gone pretty much. Y'kn-I think having a plot you know yourself, you've only got to not go down there for a couple of weeks and it's getting away from you.

**KM: Absolutely.**

MU: So I think that's a big difference. I think the more relaxed attitude t-to how plots are. Erm. Maybe another difference is I think people erm y'know - people perhaps more focused now on the weekends. You - you see - perhaps because the old guys who have retired would - **[31:00]** could be down there all the time. I do notice if I do happen to have a day off work and go down there, if I went there now it would be pretty sparse. Wouldn't be many down there.

**KM: Right.**

MU: And again when I first had that plot that was almost the opposite. The real time was in the week.

**KM: Yes.**

MU: Because everybody was there then.

**KM: Yes.**

MU: Now the real time is Saturday, Sunday.

**[31:21] KM: So would that indicate that 20 odd - 20 years ago er the majority of plot holders were retired?**

MU: I think it would.

**KM: And therefore could get down there during the week. Whereas now as - as you've been saying there's a lot of families. We've been talking about how challenging people's time is. And therefore it's evenings and - evenings and weekends.**

MU: I think that's exactly right. And also I would add to that when I was - y'know getting very keen, read quite a lot of books on allotments. And it is interesting how very often some of these like the allotment handbook or the allotment manual. Y-the guys are - **[32:00]** who are writing these books, probably in the 1930s. Are saying y'know they came home from lunch from work, they had y'know half an hour down the allotment. They had so much time - can you imagine. So I think people maybe worked more locally and were just nearer whereas now people y'know living where we live on the outskirts of London. Most people work in London. And the idea of going down to the allotment in your lunch hour, it seems to me inconceivable. There's never been a moment where I could have managed that. [Laughs]

**[32:43] KM: No. The only place I've heard of - heard is erm in Regents Street they have some allotments on the roof of one of the buildings. And it's a - it's a communal allotment and you can say I want to go and do one hour on a Thursday lunchtime. Or two hours on a Wednesday afternoon and you book your - you book your spot.**

MU: And I - and I think another - there's another change there in that - a change obviously for the better that if I think of my - of my **[33:00]** mum and dad's generation. Mum did the cooking and she looked after the house and she did everything inside. My dad did everything inside. So I think families aren't like that now. Y'know. Both my wife and I cook. We both do all the household chores. Erm. The allotment is an interest that I have to fit in with all that. So it's a different - it's a difference.

**[33:23] KM: Yes absolutely. Martin, this has been fascinating.**

MU: Thank you very much.

**KM: No, thank you - thank you very much indeed. It's been - it's been really good to - to get your-**

MU: A pleasure.

**KM: Your experiences of allotmenting in Tolworth. Thanks very much.**

MU: That's a pleasure.