

Amaryllis's interview with Susie Powlesland

Sunday 28.04.14 at Susie's flat in London

This interview was more of a long conversation. About 90 minutes of talk was captured by Amaryllis which she later transcribed. Also present throughout was Graham, Amaryllis's husband.

Susie's words are in red. Amaryllis's words are in black.

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Amaryllis Elphick 02.05.2014

1. Amaryllis

What I am doing or trying to do is write a history of Kirkdale. The skeleton, or the middle bit, will be the facts that I can get together but the other bit, because Kirkdale was an experience **Yes** would be people's experiences. **Yes**. That's what I'm aiming for. The problem is that people had different experiences, some good some bad **Yes**; no two people have the same memory of the same event **Yes** and then it's how to manage peoples identities and if whether they want to be identified or not and so on. So I have no idea how to manage all that, but I thought, if I don't start gathering the information now I'll have nothing to work with in the first place. **Yes**.

2. So I've got as far as, doing some research into the history of the building and history of the plot of land and then what happened in the years following, and the history of the lease, John getting the lease, there's holes in all the public records so I've found the bit where he renewed the

lease but not where you first got the lease, and so on, and (laughs) it jumps from the previous lease holder that bit is jumped over, so what I'm writing, I'm patching in " I know this and I believe this " etc. And then the modifications done to the property like the putting up the telegraph poles and the hut and all those things. I've got one schools inspection report which post dates your time but I found one in the National Archive **Did you...When was this?** That was 1974. And I have some memory of John talking about the first inspection, and also from Anne-Marie 'cos she, she ran though the paddling pool with her skirt hitched up while the inspector was being (laughs) shown round by John she suddenly came across the two men.

3. So I've got bits and pieces and I'm going to talk to Oliver properly in May when he's back from his holiday to get what he remembers but I think the first question is:
4. How did you come to think about setting up a school? What brought you to that point?
5. **Well, John and I were both teachers, and we were both teachers in state schools and I suppose what really brought us to the point was that as our first son, Stephen got older we started to think "is this really the experience that we wanted him to have?" And that's what bought us to that point, and we were both inclined towards the alternative, progressive spectrum in everything. Even before we started Kirkdale we were members of...what was it we were members of? Oliver was a member of the same... The progressive league?, the progressive league, that's right we were members of the progressive league, we read A.S. Neill's books, and of course we met at Forest , John and I met at Forest School Camps and as you know Forest School Camps is as you may know an offshoot of the Forest School which was a progressive school in Norfolk.**
6. In Norfolk? Because they had their Greenwood site in Sandyballs Estate...
7. **Well that was, yeh,(laughs)This is not directly...well it is, yes..! ..it did influence Kirkdale, because I went to Gypsy Hill Training College, my friends were all, you know, alternative, progressive types....and one of**

my friends had been a Pupil at the Forest School, Forest School, and you know *there were a lot* of progressive schools, there was quite a movement, in the... well before the 60's really, and before the war one of those schools was the Forrest School and it was based in Norfolk not in Sandyballs and it had a building in Norfolk, and grounds, and then that building was requisitioned during the war, for the army, and so the school disbanded and never managed to get together again but they kept up...while it was a still a school they were running summer camps, summer holiday camps using Sandyballs because they were allied to thethe Woodcraft Folk? No...the... The Order of Woodcraft Chivalry? Yes, the Oder of Woodcraft Chivalry anyway... no that's great! And that's where John and I met, so he came by a different route, to be a member of staff at Forrest School (Camps) and so did I and so we met at camp. Forest School Camps. We were staff together at Forest School Camps. And after some years all of us, the four of us who came from Gypsy Hill Training College, to join the staff of Forrest school camps we all met men (laughs) at Forest School Camps and we ended up marrying. And so we started with that kind of background, John and I; the progressive school ethos and the camping; we camped together for many years and ran camps together for many years, Forest School Camps.

8. Can you tell me a little bit about John's background, because my memory of John because what I remember of him is being a classics teacher. Yes, yes he was...Can you tell me.. how come he decided to train to be a teacher? Home come he followed that path?
9. Well John came from Swansea in Wales and he came from a very stanch left wing Labour family. His father was a trade union rep his mother started the women's wing of the Labour party in Wales and Aneurin Bevan visited their house and they came from the deep radical left, but John didn't have a what you might have called a very happy childhood in a number of ways that I need not tell you about; and being a very very bright boy he won scholarships all over the place and had a

¹ The history of Gypsy Hill Training College is fascinating and can be found at page 19 on in the document <http://www.kingston.ac.uk/aboutkingstonuniversity/factsandfigures/ourhistory/documents/history-of-kingston-text.pdf>

classical education; and what bright boys did in those days was go in for classics not only Latin but Greek and then went into the teaching profession.

10. How did he manage to avoid, or did he manage to avoid national Service? He was older than...
11. Yes..., I'm not sure about that. He was ill at one point, he had..he had... quite significantmental difficulties at different points in his life.. some of which caught up with him at the end. Yes Possibly....maybe because of them,... I don't know about National Service. I don't know.
12. Maybe he was not called up after a medical or Yeh maybe assessment or whatever? I ask this question because both David Lyle and Oliver Elphick were in the RAF, and David Lyle enjoyed it apparently, according to Cate, David hated his boarding school but enjoyed being in the RAF and he got to fiddle around with radios and do stuff. Oliver hated his public school and then hated the RAF (laughs) he really hated the RAF, so no two people have the same experience... And then I looked up John's details and I didn't realise he was significantly older than the others that is he would have been eligible to be called up during the war in fact. The others, David and Oliver, the war had finished before they well called up so that's a pretty scary thought, that John might have been required to bear arms . And he wasn't sent down the mines either, which was the other thing that Welsh lads might have been required to do.
13. Anyway, go on, its very interesting...!
14. When he was ill he was treated by Glaister. They ran a big alternative centre...its still going [Braziers Park]...anyway John got involved in Forest School Camps because it was recommended by his psychiatrist [John Norman Glaister]² and that's where we met. John was much better by then, he wasn't being actively treated but they were still in touch.
15. So you'd been part of Forest School Camps and you married and you had Stephen..

² <http://www.braziers.org.uk/research-and-publications/john-norman-glaister/>

16. ...and that shows that we both were, ..we came together drawn by a similar philosophy, a similar outlook on life. We were both drawn to the alternative, progressive Rousseauesc³ philosophy.
17. Now the Elphick story bit is that you met at a Progressive League Conference and that then the Elphicks stayed with you in Gillingham because there was a Progressive League conference thing there and during these various meetings at various times over a not very specified time frame there was discussion about progressive schools, progressive education, what are we going to do with your children and all these sorts of things and then there was the Royston Camp. Now you and John must have organised that. So, that one was, as far as I know was publicised, under the Progressive School and Camps Association, that was the banner I think [or Progressive Camps and Schools Association].
18. Well when John and I started to think we disliked the way to go, we were both not enamoured with the usual run of state education each of us had completely different experiences, I was in the primary sector and of course John was in the grammar school, teaching grammar school but neither of us thought this is the ideal we thought well let's try and see if we can find any like-minded people. So we had to give ourselves a name and that was the name we thought of and we had that vision of being able to start some kind of school, some kind of day school, because all the progressive schools at that time that we knew of were boarding schools and we wanted so we wanted to start a day school and involve parents and we thought a way of editing them together was to what we both knew how to do was to run some camps. So I think we ran more than one camp, and that is how the Lyles got involved.
19. Ah, now according to Cate the story is very slightly different in that point because as she pointed out "the Lyle's didn't camp" and she had to wait until she was seven before she could go on a camp because at that point the rule was that you were not allowed to go without parents while you were a fledgling, below seven.

³ <http://www.iep.utm.edu/rousseau/>

20. My memory, I don't remember but I thought that David and or Jo did come to one of those early camps. Not the Kirkdale camps. There was no Kirkdale at that time.
21. No, well, from what Cate said, and it seems to make a bit of sense, I think probably after the Royston camp I suspect, but I don't know for sure, that John and Oliver put their heads together and advertised because Cate says that she remembers coming to a meeting at our house and that's when the David and Jo and so forth got involved or got interested. Which I think makes sense. Because the Royston camp was in 1963 but Kirkdale didn't open till 1965 so what I think that is there was the Royston camp was in 1963 and then there was another camp in 1964 and then the school opened in 1965.
22. Yes, well you see, with those two early camps, there was no Kirkdale School and the name Kirkdale didn't exist, it was just a means of getting people together to see who might be interested in such a school. So I don't actually remember those two early camps. I remember planning them with John, I remember thinking what are we going to do, and I remember getting the idea that if ultimately we are going to open a school we need to get more people together, and we both thought, this is our background, because we'd both spent years together in Forest School Camps so we knew how to run camps, so we thought the best way to get people together was to advertise, and it worked! and get people together to camp together and see if we would get a group together who were interested in starting this school. But we may have well gathered other people together by other means. I don't remember the actual camps; I don't remember who was there.
23. Well I know we were, and Cate knows she wasn't. And we're still patching in..I think what I'll do is go to the British Library and look at the adverts in New Society over those years because I think that was where the adverts were placed and see if that helps.
24. Quite a lot of things written about Kirkdale School say that you and John were the founders. And that's true, I mean, you had these ideas, you did the camp, you found the premises, which I assume John did quite a lot of research on..

25. (Laughs), yes it took quite a while and we took the actual initiatives to do the camps and get people together.. It was quite a big risk to move your family from Gillingham to a tumblely down old house in...It was **ridiculous** Amaryllis (both laughing) looking back on it, I think we were **mad** because we had a nice little bungalow in Gillingham, with a big garden a nice little bungalow and quite a little mortgage on it we both had good jobs and we sold the bungalow, we sold it, and I took out my annuity (laughing) my teaching pension. We sold our bungalow and I took out my pension and we put it all the money into this school, It was mad it was on a lease, we didn't own it and we had no idea how well or how it would go and you gave birth to Helen in the meantime, yes, gave birth to Helen (both laugh) . And my mother was still alive and she thought it was a *dreadful* thing to do (laughs). So we really were absolutely mad. So we put our money in..John found this house that we thought was ideal. Half acre of garden, big house, enough room but we have to do some refurbishment, buy some basic equipment and so on, so we just sold our bungalow and put the proceeds into starting this schools and then John went round, best clothes and big smile, to the various people who came to the camp and **barely anyone would send their children!** (laughing) so there we were we hadn't got our home any more, and we had this great big house, and our little family, and a half acre garden .We'd given up our jobs, taken our pensions, well I had taken out mine , I'm not sure if John had taken out his, probably; and about two pupils. Anyway..

26. Well when you started, when the school started the role was Cate Lyle, Mary Lyle, Mark Robinson, Mark Benjamin and I don't know if Stephen counted...well he'd have been just old enough. Just old enough And then I came, I'm not quite sure, either in the second half of the first term or the beginning of the second term. **And Quentin?** He came a little later. **Did he?**

Break

Resumption

27. So there you are.. **So How many pupils have you worked out?** Well I think it's four if you exclude Stephen. It doesn't matter if you include or exclude Stephen in that he didn't bring in any money because of the situation of you and John working in the school. As far as I, ...well Cate's view is that Mark Robinson, his parents, were the primary source of money at that point (both laughing). And then I came along. Because my illness had made it quite clear to Oliver and Anne that I could not go to a mainstream school but we lived a commuting distance away, and also they weren't sure about how they would manage money, but the main thing that concerned my mum, and it still concerns her was the commuting distance and the time it would take me to get from our house to Kirkdale and back again. **Yes, yes.** So I tried the local primary school, Quentin was already happy and settled there, and then it became clear that my illness meant that it just wasn't going to work. The other alternative would be for me to go to a special school, but Anne said that that would have made my illness the focus rather than a peripheral problem (**mmmm's in agreement**) and her observations of me were that I wasn't really interested. I mean I had the problem but I was doing other things (**mmmm's in agreement**), but committing for me to go to Kirkdale meant me having this long commute in the mornings and the evenings, and even now she says "I'm not sure whether I did the right thing or not" **Does she?** and I said "Well I have no doubt, I have absolutely no doubt, even with those issues of travelling", so I went. And Quentin, poor thing, suffers very badly from jealousy; so the fact that he was happy where he was didn't make any difference. If I was going somewhere else, he wanted to go there too, so he just dug his heels in and wouldn't go to school anymore and Oliver and Anne said, alright then. **Yeh, (laughing in recognition), very strong minded chap Quentin; always has been.**
28. So, having set the school up, I don't remember John teaching in the school so he must have gone out and got a money job?
29. **Yes, well we discovered quite early on that the small number of initial pupils and the lease to pay and expenses that there wasn't going to be any money left over for our family. I mean it wasn't that bad a deal. We lived in the nice house, we had the upstairs flat rent free and we didn't**

pay any energy bills, but we never received any kind of pay. So John saw quite early on that this wasn't going to work. And there would never going to be enough money to give us any pay, so he went and got a part time job. He didn't teach in the school, well only very marginally but he did all the admin. He kept the books, he organised when the school had rot, he organised all the building works, he managed to pay the teachers, and he did all the admin work and for instance when [named person] was teaching at the school and had some kind of major crisis, I've got no idea what it was, it was John who she came to see and talk to about it and he made the decision to give her some months paid leave to deal with whatever it was, not me. I was the hands on with the children teaching and organised things actually to do with the classrooms and made the decision that we needed the hut as the numbers grew and we needed to accommodate a new age group but John did all the admin and managed everything else.

30. Did you feel at any point that having done the first bit you had a team of other adults around helping or did you feel it was still you two struggling along?
31. Ha! Well a mixture of both and it varied as to who the other adults were but then with a venture of that sort..., both John and I brought our strengths and weaknesses into it and looking back I can see my weaknesses manifesting.
32. (Amaryllis laughs) Before I ask you about those, I was going to ask you about how you decided on things like the curriculum; and how you monitored the progress of children; and how it worked that you responded to individual needs.
33. Well John and I did spend a long time I mean it was years before we actually managed to start the school wasn't it? At which time we were talking about what our ideas were; why did we want to have a school outside the state system? What did we want to do differently, Where did we concur and where did we differ from A.S. Neill's ideas and there was a whole body of progressive stuff swilling about, Neill, Homer Lane and...anyway there was a lot well there was a lot of it about and we read a lot and talked a lot. So I suppose the basic philosophy was the

Rousseau's idea of original good rather than original evil. That children were born with ...and, this is the crunch, if circumstances were ...if there were good circumstances because it is not only freedom but it is also love. So they were the two principles. That if there was freedom but if there was also love, then children would tend to make the right decisions. That was the basic philosophy and so the individual support came with the love, came from the love side. That you have to make good relationships, relationships were a vital part of it. Freedom without good relationships wasn't likely to work.

34. It is interesting because I know, in our different ways each of us were responded to and it's quite interesting standing from this position as an adult and looking back, there were things like, Jean Rousel came in and taught Billy and Mary, gave them individual reading sessions, which I didn't need and Cate, Cate claims that you owe her a book, actually, because she says I don't remember this, but she says people were given the opportunity to buy a book once they'd learned how to read and because she and Mark had already learned to read before they came to the school they got cheated out of a book.
35. I have no memory of this. I had learned to read at some point. So that was a response to the needs Billy and Mary, they had separate needs, and Jean gave them...and others Yes . I had help from someone called Heather in the Bees, with changing my trousers every five minutes. (Laughing) She and I got very adept at dealing with that. Chris Matthews came in and taught science, and it's interesting that Cate, me and Quentin all went on a did science because we were the core that Chris taught and, there you go, that was obviously to me a need...to do more science, we had music teachers coming in at different stages. It started out with us as a group doing William Appelby on the radio and song sheets and he would introduce a new song on the radio, there was a lady with him and I can't remember her name! It sounds like I've got a sexist brain, but I can't remember. But he was in lots of other programme so I remember his name, anyway we would all sit round the radio and he used to count us in by singing (sings) NOW! And we would all have to join in.

36. So at different points different ones of us had different adjustments made around us. And then I spoke to my mum about this some years ago and asked "Did you ever discuss, you Kirkdale parents the progress of children "oh there were endless meetings, endless meetings about should we do, are we doing the right thing, are they all going in the right direction what do we need to do to adjust things if anything". Is that your memory of that?
37. Well....no...some of it ...and I do remember the people and I do remember thinking, and involving the other people around, the constant members of staff, Jo... and other , we did talk a lot about individual children and what else we could do but I don't remember these endless parents meetings, but probably it all merges together in my mind, the staff meetings the parents meetings,.... and you can do that can't you in a little school Yes and we wanted to do it that's the thing. We had, I suppose there was the third.. it wasn't... freedom .. love... and enabling children to realise , enabling children as individuals to realise their potential I think they were the three strands, I didn't mention the third one just now, but we were quite enthusiastic about that, all the time thinking about ways that the school could meet whatever interests the children showed. Yes Well I've come away thinking that was what was going on Yeh,.. yeh.
38. So at what point did you disconnect from the school because time moved on...
39. Well, I suppose like I said, or original motive was, well I suppose it wasn't only Stephen, it was our own inclinations but Stephen you know was the sort of catalyst, here he is getting nearly ready to be school age and what are we going to do about it? And so when he got to be eleven, that was another turning point. And then we did look at local secondary schools for him but none of us were enthusiastic.
40. [Speaking of Stephen] Yes well there was another strong motive for not sending him to secondary school where I think he would have been pretty miserable actually.
41. At Kirkdale camps there was a woman who came and was staff for a while and did a lot of singing with us, I can't remember her name [Anne-

Marie Fearon?] but she went to teach at Kilquantity and she wrote to us about it, and so we said let's go and visit that, and we liked it, so that was a big motive because if Stephen is going to go to Kilquhanity somebody has to pay the fees. And while John's part time job kept our family afloat but um not with any to spare and so I started to say "I'm going to do a bit of part time teaching". And that's how it started. I went and did some of occasional supply work right to bring in a bit of extra money.

42. And then you ended up on the staff at Brunswick Park is that right?
43. Brunswick park, yes. Which is where you had the children cooking the porridge? (Laughing) Yeah, that's as near as you could get to a state school that shared our ideas, my ideas and by that of course Kirkdale was in difficulties anyway seems like deserting a sinking ship but because the lease, the lease holders [Freeholders], what were there names, you probably know?, Quadrant housing, Quadrant housing had now realised what a lot of money they were sitting on and they could develop Kirkdale and make a loads of money and so they didn't want to renew the lease or they kept renewing it but with only short, little short renewals, not like they had done previously five years
44. Do you remember how long the short one's were? No I don't remember but ..it was a very..yeah
45. Also, I don't know whether this had much effect or not but with Cate and Mark, Quent and me Buki, Susy, and presumably Bill and Mary pretty quickly after [and Greg and Lucy et al], had all moved on, and that pretty much took away the first tranche of parents as well , I mean not completely, David Lyle had a second family and Pery was still there for a little while, but the old guard gradually had to go off and get money, as you did I think basically, things moved on, so it seems to have happened round about the same time, in my memory
46. yeah, yeah yeah... yeah, and for a while I still had Helen there oh and I had Frank there.. and the other thing that happened is that Peter ..somebody, ...one of the parents offered us his house at a very low figure because the house was subsiding, it had (laughing) a lot of subsidence, just round the corner Yes, that was Peter Reed, they went

to Canada and you bought the house from them Yes that's right and we bought the house from them and we were only able to do that because it was a very low price but it had this subsidence which Quentin poured tons and tonnes of concrete Did he? (laughing) that well known trained...(laughing) ... I believe he did it in consultation with the local authority. Anyway, Quentin kind of made the house habitable; pouring all this concrete under it so we moved we were physically able to move from Kirkdale, which we could never have done otherwise.

47. Did you get a mortgage on the house? Yes. So then you definitely had to work? Yes and that was and that was another reason I had to go to work of course, because I was not only paying the Kilquhanity fees, but also the mortgage and at that time we got the Lodges in, but John decided to stay at the school. Again I may be wrong, but that was when he was starting to become unwell again? Yeh, well, when he first decided to stay he wasn't that unwell, but he and I were splitting up, not...we didn't...not definitely...it wasn't a definite split...in both our minds were the thoughts we might get together again but for the moment we decided to live separately so I moved into Venner Road and to help pay the mortgage I sublet, or I also shared the house with the Lodges, and John said he's sooner stay at the school so he did. And then he progressively did become more unwell.
48. And he was actually walking back from Venner Road to Kirkdale when.... Yes he'd come to supper with us that day
49. (Aside to Graham: John died unexpectedly, in the street between the two premises, the unexpectedly that was an understatement)
50. Yes. He'd come to supper with us in Venner Road and then when he was going back to Kirkdale he suffered this sort of stroke.
51. And that was in 1977....Yes....We haven't mentioned the Lodges, but the Lodges became, well they were teenage boys, didn't they used to park their canoe in your garden or something there was some beginning point, when you were in Gillingham..?
52. Oh yeh, (laughing) That's another whole story. Because that was when there was no Kirkdale, it was even prior to John and me deciding that

was what we were going to aim for, even before Stephen was conceived.

53. Is that, I was teaching in a primary school in Gillingham and got involved in one the families of my pupils in one of my pupils where the, where the boys, particularly the eldest son was very unhappy at home and had difficulties. His mother had parted from his father, and she was quite a violent woman and he being the eldest got the worst of it oh it was...anyway that was Bob and he ended up staying with me and John. So that's an old story you know and he ended up in a caravan in our garden, living in a caravan in our garden, and then he married...um...Lynn, Lynn....and they went travelling they went travelling to Morocco.. anyway when they came back from Morocco, they had, at some point they had children,... Paul and Jason yes ...and they had two sons and... they and their two sons came back from their travels and that was when I had moved into Venner Road and was thinking "how on earth am I going to pay the mortgage?" And so they came to stay there as well, and their two sons came to Kirkdale (Yeh). And they now live in Germany and Paul...you know Paul died?
54. Paul Died yeh. But he'd had a heart problem since he was and infant or known about since he was an infant, but he had a sudden death coming off the football pitch that's right. Sad but not prolonged. But the Lodges, and Bob in particular, was sort of like, like a son. **Yes he was. He lived with John and me from primary age.**
55. I remember 'cos he got involved in ...I could be wrong about this, so just say..., but he took the role of eldest son in arranging John's funeral Yes and again I don't know if I'm right or wrong, but the funeral was booked and it was carried out but it wasn't really conducive to John. Nobody meant for that to happen and Bob didn't know any better.
56. It has been a subject of enormous regret to me ever since, ...and great sorrow and sadness to particularly Helen who's has always carried that you know as a real pain, a really painfully, painful memory. But I was in a kind of fog and Bob's motives were the best, he was trying to protect me so he thought that was the best way to protect me.. was to organise it and.. to organise it and then whisk me away and have it all over and

done with. So that was an awful thing. The interesting thing is that I feel quite protective of Bob because I know that he meant to do exactly the right thing, Yeh. It turned out not the right thing, but that wasn't due to lack of care and consideration, Oh no! no!, but lack of knowledge and... Yeah yeah, yeah yeah.

57. So one of the things I was thinking was because we are coming up to the 50th anniversary of the starting of the school to do, ..write something more shaped round John, that's going to be a different bit of work but I thought we could do it now. Yeah I thought that might be a thing to do I mean to have a memorial service sounds a bit morbid but supposing we were to manage to have some form of get together for example Yeah next year to have the focus to be John it would be nice to put some words together, well a picture..for a number of people although he was a big influence they don't really remember him because of the ages that they were. I have memories, but I was seventeen when he died so I have memories.... I remember you reporting at school meetings that John had picked up 27 milk cartons round the grounds the previous night. Poor old John who's put everything on the line went to work for the money, then came back and tidied up after us (Both laugh). He must have felt really, "Well what's the point if they can't even respect the school"
58. I don't think he felt that. He was very very proud of the school and also proud of his family actually and also he, for most of those years, his role in the school was... people didn't come to me with their troubles, they came to John and he was the wise man in the school, like I said with [named person], I have no idea what her problem was it was John she went to it was John who took the wise decision that what she needed was some time off and she couldn't take it without pay. So he was thought of and in a way, not so much the children as the other staff, did think of him as head of the school and me as sort of the executive (both laughing) and in a way the more abrasive person. Yes. John was unfailingly kind and wise and considerate.
59. I might have to come back to you over putting together a decent pen picture of him. Also quite a lot of people have experience of him on camp

60. I remember rubbing him up the wrong way on a rainy morning, because we were camping at Doghouse farm and it had rained for days and I got up before the kitchen fire had been lit and John was down in the kitchen trying to get the fires lit and everything was wet. And he went away and came back and he used some spirits to start the fire. I said "That's cheating!" and he said "Amaryllis, on a day like this, sometimes you have to cheat".
61. Also that same camp was the one where somebody tried to put a bra in the scout's flag so that when they pulled their flag up the flagpole in the morning a bra would flap in the wind instead of a flag. But what they didn't realise was that being Kirkdale campers we'd not learned to do our knots. So it didn't work and the bra fell out and the scout leader marched down with the bra in his top pocket and pulled it out and waved it at John and said "is this yours!" And John said "Well, not personally no" (Both laughing a lot)
62. There's lots of stories about John. There was one camp where we were very short of water, I don't remember which camp it was or where we were.. but the only way we could get water was down some hill and then haul it up again, and the story about John, and undoubtedly that's what he did he'd shave in the left over old tea water every morning. Yeah that would be John. (Both laugh) Expedient. And the evening staff meeting he'd very often sit in the smoke you know the Smokey end of the fire, he didn't mind the smoke So he wasn't bitten by midges then?(Laughs) I suppose that's something.
63. So looking back then, what were the strengths and weaknesses of the whole Kirkdale idea made real?
64. Well my weaknesses and, and still, you know I think I've attenuated them somewhat and the fact that I'm older and more, and you know losing my sight and all the rest of it have helped attenuate them and my Buddhist practices have helped attenuate them, but my weaknesses are... that I always want my own way.
65. Ok. And that's a weakness?
66. (Laughs) It can have some positive results but it is a weakness in that I'm sometimes blinked, or I have been blinkered, I haven't always seen

the wider picture I've gone for what I think I want but have not always seen the wider picture and didn't always include the other staff as well as I might have done.

67. Are you looking at your whole life there or just the Kirkdale...?
68. Well this is a tendency of mine which obviously had its effect on Kirkdale.
69. It's interesting because it's one of the things, I've thought about this quite a lot because of watching the dynamics between the adults at Kirkdale and on camps, because they were quite often the same adults and it occurred to me, this is the sort of thing I think about... If you want something to happen, you need somebody with that single mindedness to do it, the problem then is, that if that's too extreme it is then difficult for other people to come on board, but... with Kirkdale, they did. That is it is possible to manage a situation with people who are steaming ahead through the ice and people who are coming up behind dealing with the wider picture if you like. I can't imagine things happening at all if you didn't have a mixture of people.
70. Yes, (sighs), Yes well, (pause) I don't know.(pause) Are you interviewing any of the people who were staff? Have you managed to get hold of Romey...and Jo? I don't know what Jo's present abilities to think and remember stuff are at the moment.
71. I've sowed the seeds with Jo via Cate. Well there are two things. One is whether Jo wants to be thinking about these things and the other is whether she's got the energy and capacity to. Cate's going to try and get what she can so to speak..
72. Jo and I clashed a lot, Yes and of course, Jo was not exactly easy because (laughing), she would be really high and you know, she would get carried away and other times would be the opposite, anyway I don't know that I always did the best, that the way that I worked with Jo was always to the best, and because she is a very talented teacher, Jo, has been a very talented teacher and I think I sometimes could have given her her head more than I did. I don't know though. I don't know what Romey, or Chris, Chris's views for that matter....are of me.

73. Well my intention is to try interview as many people as possible. Yeah But I don't know over what time frame that's going to happen and I also don't know how much people are going to feel like saying what they think, because that's quite a big deal isn't it, to actually say what you think.
74. I know what you mean about clashing with Jo, but I don't think it eclipsed the fact that she's a very good teacher.
75. One of the things I witnessed was when a young mother came into the school [a local mother visiting to look at the nursery with a nursery aged child], and was saying things to her child like, 'oh don't get dirty, don't fall in the water etc' , Jo saying "Why don't we have a cup of coffee. Why don't we go and sit on the mound, we can watch them from there" and gradually getting this mother, who didn't want to be appear to be a bad mother, to calm down and just let her child play... sometimes Jo could just do this magic spell thing **Yes! Yes she could!** And no other adult was there to put her off her game, of what was really quite a deliberate thing...**Yes, yes,** So we benefitted because of the strengths and weaknesses being part of the parcel **yeh yeh yeh** so it doesn't annihilate the fact that there were these tensions and stuff, **yeh,**but doesn't make it bad, just makes it real!
76. **Yeh. And Jo brought some fantastic things to the school and as I say, and we were very lucky to have her. And as I say, I think I could have worked with her much better than I did. I don't know (laughs) what her memories are..... On the whole I think she, Jo enjoyed her time in the school. She wouldn't' have stayed, she wouldn't have stayed there if it wasn't a place she enjoyed working. And she wouldn't have kept her girls there if she didn't think it was a good place. Yes exactly.**

Long silence

77. It is very interesting.really ...if you manage to stand right outside and look in...you've got everything...group dynamics....(laughs) all those things...

78. From my point of view it was, you know, the best of the best. It was really important to me, Kirkdale was really important to me when my parents separated (mmmm yeh), it was the thing that kept me afloat, because I had this group of people for whom, none of that was relevant, and I was just myself..Yes yeh yeah.
79. For Peronel, it was being with her brother and sister because she had had to go off to a child minder while we went to school and she just hated being separated from us. And when she first came to Kirkdale every time that she got upset she would come running to me. And I would hear her running from the Bees to the hut you could hear her “wahhh!” and could hear Jo running behind saying “Peronel why don’t you come to me and tell me what the problem is?!” (Both laugh) And then Jo said to me if did not respond to her, if you could just not respond to her then I might have a chance to Yeh... she might get used to me “It’s not OK. You can’t get on with what you’re doing she’s got to get learn to come to somebody else”. So we said OK. So when we would hear this people would say “Quick Peronel’s coming” and I would rush to the back of the hut and out the back door then Pery worked this out and would cut me off. (Both laugh) But then she settled in and did learn to go to Jo.
80. So that was very important to Pery and then of course she and Helen were bosom buddies she has a lot of memories of spending time with Helen and staying the night with and Helen and doing things.
81. Yes, I’ve got a photo somewhere of them when they were both in pushchairs feeding each. You’ve got that have you? I’d love to see it. I don’t know where it is...well they used to fed each other on camp...
82. (Aside to Graham: because there’s on month’s difference between them)
83. Yeah yeah well I don’t know
84. I actually don’t know very much about either about Chris or Romey in terms of their teaching. I mean I knew Chris on camp. He was a boy. Then he was a lad at Dartington. Then he was an older lad and the next thing I know he’s turned up being a teacher. I don’t even know if he did teaching qualifications or any of that know anything about him doing his teaching qualifications or any of that but he was Pery’s teacher for a while.He taught Pery and Helen’s group for a while. Yeah.

85. And Romey was after I left Kirkdale but I to know her and I did a lot of child minding for her.
86. **So who were the teachers you remember?**
87. The main ones were you and Jo, but we also had Miriam and Rosemary, Hugh Harris but then we had all sorts of together people. At the very beginning there was a guy called Victor who was employed to move bricks according to Oliver, and he used to drive me home after school . And then there were all the Lodge boys but particularly Bob and then Chris who was the youngest. And we had Trevor, taught for a little while **That's right...** And he was teaching when the moon landing happened because we made a play. I remember walking round in great big cardboard cylinders that we got inside and we went round singing "Will you have a game of golf? Yes. No. Yes. No". (Laughs) Which must have been based on the fact that they took a gold club and golf ball to the moon. And Neill Innes the pop singer was singing the song I'm the urban spaceman. So this play involved the playing golf, singing "I'm the urban spaceman" and going round saying Will you have a game of golf, yes no yes no" (Both laughing). Trevor was part of the school at that time. **Yeah.**
88. But there were lots of other things. I remember going to the museums regularly and I remember going to gym regularly and learning, well improving swimming. And because we were a school we got booked into these things as a school and then five of us would turn up so we practically got 1:1 tuition (both laughing). And at the museum we got advance science because we asked advanced questions.
89. We didn't just have inside the school life, **Yeh, yeah. I do remember we were always on the lookout for ways to expand what we could offer.**
90. So have you got any message to the world about Kirkdale?
91. **Yeh**
- Long silence**
92. **Well I feel very despondent about the way education is going at the moment so message to the world..**

Long silence

93. Is that the separation into all these different types of schools....?
94. Less and less notice being taken of children's own, children's interests and children's potential and children will fulfil their potential if they are given opportunities to follow their interests and if they are to be surrounded by good will towards them and people who take notice of them.
95. We seem to be going back to the instillation of a body of knowledge into a child's brain. Yeah.

Pause

96. You know there's quite a group in South London that Frank slots into whenever he's in England, ex Kirkdale and associates mainly based on music?
97. I'm sort of aware though others
98. There's a whole group of them. Not only Kirkdale but semi Kirkdale.
99. What's quite interesting about that there is an annual camp that Chris Nicholls runs which is not all Kirkdale as well, though there is a lot of Kirkdale type stuff about them I think one of the interesting thing about Kirkdale School and Kirkdale camps is the ripple effect, that people have found like-minded people in the outside world...
100. and they've brought them in..It's something to do with shared values. People place a lot of value on ...well the goup that Frank's with it's a lot to do with music, and being creative both in what they do and in the way they live their lives. There's this house in Wycombe Road. A lot of people have moved out of it recently, as they've got partners and children, but the house is still there and they still go there for parties.
101. Well thank you. Shall we make some tea?