



Caldwell's Nurseries Project

Oral history

<http://www.caldwellarchives.org.uk/>

Mavis Caldwell interviewed by Barbara Moth

Mavis Caldwell, wife of William/Bill Caldwell, last owner of Caldwell's Nurseries

Duration:	00.45:40
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Recording Location:	Mavis Caldwell's home
Access restrictions:	None
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Recording notes:	-
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Interview summary

00.00.00	<p>Early years</p> <p>"I came from Chorlton-cum-Hardy, a suburb of Manchester, in 1927....I have a sister, just the two of us. My father was a businessman, with a firm in Altrincham, with shareholders and a company secretary, a successful businessman. He'd been in the War, the world war (WWI), and had the military cross for bravery, which is quite something isn't it. He came from the Potteries and my mother came from Yorkshire so we were spread about. When they got married they went to live in North Manchester and my sister was born first. Then they moved to Chorlton where I was born. They finished up living in Bowden. They lived in Knutsford for quite a long time in Goughs Lane; they had a very nice house, my father built it. I wished I could have lived there, it was modern with a nice garden, country views. I went to Whalley Range High School. I went to a little prep school called Crimsworth and you could go straight on to Whalley Range, you just needed to pass an exam, and it was open to the public, anyone could go. It's completely changed now of course, everything has, Manchester's a completely different place entirely. Whalley Range is really a multi-cultural school now, but it wasn't when I was there. It was war time of course and it wasn't easy to think about careers and things you wanted to do. I stayed at school. My one regret is that I didn't go into the sixth form. I wish I had. It would have given me time to mature a bit and give me ideas of what I wanted to do for a career.</p> <p>My parents might have pushed me, but I went to the College of Domestic Economy, a 2 year course. I wanted to work with hotels or something like that. The college was in Manchester at the toast rack building; it's still there, near the infirmary. I did enjoy those 2 years. But I got it wrong, I should have stayed in the sixth form and I probably wouldn't have gone to the domestic science college. I would have thought of something completely different. It was good training and I loved it but it didn't lead to the sort of career I really wanted....But I got my Diploma (IMA -Institutional</p>
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	Management)... I worked in different works canteens as a supervisor. It was quite hard work, it wasn't just sitting in an office. It was very practical. It wasn't quite what I wanted to do. I thought I wanted to work in hotels. In retrospect I think that what I really wanted to do was be on the clerical side. I hadn't really made up my mind and I regret it ever since."
00.06.00	Meeting her husband, Bill Caldwell "A great friend, who lived in Knutsford, Ruth, said it's going to be May Day, why don't you come. She said come and stay the night with us too. So I came over and who should be "on the fair" (because a group of us we all went on the fair), but Bill. My husband had just come out of the army and he was part of this group of friends; they'd known each other since they were children. That's how we met and it all started from there..... I went back home, carried on my life and forgot. Then in about a fortnight I got a telephone call. It was Bill – we took it from there. We just met each other and went out and about. It was a bit difficult, because it was a train ride for him and petrol was scarce after the war. He had the use of a little run-around car occasionally so that was nice. But we certainly used the trains and buses and walked. (We got married) in a lovely church in Whalley Range, which was a very nice district then. My father knew the vicar, actually they were both masons."
00.09.15	The Caldwell family had lots of small property in Knutsford and two houses on Chelford Road. Bill and Mavis lived at No.1
00.10.88	Mavis didn't work. "I was a housewife. I'd like to have worked, I don't think Bill wanted a wife who worked, that's the trouble, but I mean he wouldn't have stopped me. I was quite happy being a stay at home wife. It would be different now. I wouldn't want to be a stay at home wife. Why aren't we mature when we should be mature?"
00.11.17	Bramble Cottage, the nursery was separate through next door. "No-one suggested why 'don't you work?'..... Now I would like to work alongside..... I didn't know I liked gardening then but I do."
00.12.00	Bill returned from the war and "was feeling his way into the business without upsetting the applectart. He was quite a strict sort of father did not like change." Bill was badly wounded in the war, in hospital abroad for a long time and they were glad to have him home "but that didn't stop my father-in-law treating him like a boy and not the man he was."
00.12.54	Bill had one sister who worked in the business when they were short of people. She drove a car, did a lot, sort of keeping Bill's place open but stopped when he returned. Mavis didn't know whether she was pleased not to work or would have liked to carry on.
00.13.38	They were 2 years in Bramble Cottage and had 2 children, David and Jane. Then they moved into the nursery right on the road. Mavis loved it. The place rambled and needed a lot of cleaning.
00.14.29	The Caldwell family always lived there. Her mother-in-law was an athlete but later had arthritis and couldn't get upstairs
00.15.20	Mavis didn't have a lot of contact with the nursery. "We used to have a gathering in the morning for coffee" - Don, Mr Wilson from the office, "he was the pillar". He helped Bill coming back into the business. Thought of him as a boy. Bill was very good at relationships.

00.17.00	For the children the nursery was their playground. They had a happy childhood. Mavis would have liked to have been in the firm.
00.17.46	At the end of every day Mavis walked about the nursery choosing her own plants and planning her own garden. She built a drystone wall. She spent ages on the garden and had a free hand. Bill didn't want to garden after a day in the nursery. Walking round there was lovely feeling of freedom. Part of a garden is the planning.
00.19.37	Customers were occasionally shown into the lounge. Mavis had a lot of friends in the school meal service but she could not have worked.
00.21.10	The cart horse A trip to Manchester with the horse and cart took 2 days "The cart horse had its own stable. In the evenings you could hear it stamping, it made a terrific din. My husband was very fond of that horse. They used it a bit, like towing a truck along to Ollerton where there was a rubbish tip. But the poor horse came to a bad end. It fell and hurt itself when it was tipping the rubbish over. That was terribly sad for one of the men who was with the horse at the time. They must have been appalled mustn't they at what had happened. And that was the end of the poor horse. It was a cart horse. You can imagine its big feet stamping.
00.23.00	Mavis went out into the nursery sometimes to see the roses because they were lovely. Peter (Acton) was one of the nursery workers. Denis loved working, he went to Fryers for a bit and then started his own business and is doing very well.
00.24.44	'Baggin' not taken in the kitchen, they would meet in one of the huts, a wooden hut at Ollerton, probably sitting on straw.
00.25.42	Bill shut off discussion of what had happened during the day. After the evening meal he would go back into the office to prepare labels with Mr Wilson for plants to go out next day. He didn't have much family life.
00.26.43	Changes - the greenhouses were altered as they were ready to fall down. They were opposite the nursery. They were heated and whenever they had been out Bill's last job at night was stoking the boiler. "not how you want to end an evening after wining and dining."
00.28.71	She went to the florists shop, she would call in. They prepared the funeral flowers, a lot of work went on. Not an easy life if you were conscientious and Bill was very conscientious. Mavis thought Bill would have liked to train as a vet but it was not to be because the son always took over the business. It is not like that now, think of David doing his own thing. Susan (her younger daughter) always says that it was a pity that Jane and she did not go into the business because then it would still be there.
00.30.21	They used to show at the different shows. Mavis would have like to have helped. She went to see the shows - Southport, Nantwich -small, the big Cheshire Show over Chester way. The men used to love that, getting a display ready.
00.31.50	Women in the nursery. There were 2 ladies in the greenhouse, 1 in the nursery and in the office. They were good staff.
00.32.45	School - David was a border at Rydal, they would take him. Mavis learned to drive between having David and Jane. She lost her third baby and Bill gave her a little Ford car. David and Jane went to Yorkstone Lodge. Susan went to a private school. The girls went to St Hilary's.

00.34.57	David went to Stockport to train in horticulture. He went to Canada and had his 21 st birthday there. He loved it. It was the start of him being weaned away from Cheshire and Knutsford, the start of his wanderlust.
00.36.50	Jane never had a wanderlust. Sue was off to Australia as soon as she could, trained as a nurse, there quite a time, then back home and now back there again.
00.37.38	<i>What did you like best?</i> “I had always wanted to live in the country in an old house.” Mavis used to paint in the breakfast room. There was a courtyard at the back and a washhouse. It was very sheltered with garden all the way round, a lawn, a small apple orchard, a vegetable patch and another lawn at the side. There were raspberries. Mavis recalled surprising two little boys taking apples from the trees.
00.40.10	“You make time for what you want to do. I had all the time in the world.” She went to the local school for lessons and her painting just evolved.
00.41.20	She keeps in touch with Frank Passant. He was great in the office. Mavis did like her privacy, but it was a difficult thing living on the business because there were always people coming in and the telephone. “With Bill business always came first.”
00.43.18	They always got a holiday in Anglesey. You could get back in 3 hours.
00.43.46	“We were sitting down for Christmas lunch and these two people came to the front door and asked for a bunch of parsley. We couldn’t believe it. I wonder if they did it as a joke. But I mean our dining room was situated so they must have seen us all round the table and yet came to the front door..... They didn’t get their bunch of parsley anyway.” Mavis cooked the meal. “Yes I loved doing it. I was a better cook then. Now I take short cuts. I don’t think there are short cuts to good cooking.”
00.46.08	Mavis recalled Caldwell’s 200 th anniversary celebrations. “We had a marquee in the garden at the back. It was a nice occasion. We had an evening meal and a musical entertainment. It was very pleasant.”