



**Tony Gentil** interviewed by Barbara Moth

Tony Gentil (1942-2014) worked at Caldwell's 1966-7.

Duration:	00:44:27
Recording date:	03.08.2011
Recording Location:	Tony Gentil's home
Access restrictions:	None (permission given by Tony's wife Elizabeth.)
Recording equipment:	Zoom H4N
Recording notes:	Elizabeth Gentil contacted Cheshire Gardens Trust about the project. Tony was terminally ill when the recording was made. Elizabeth (Liz) Gentil can be heard in the background making suggestions and prompting Tony.
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### Interview summary

00.00.11	<p><b>Background</b></p> <p>"I was born in Cheshire on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1942, a New Year baby and a wartime baby in Hale/Altrincham. My father was Swiss and he came over in 1916, looking for a job because they were looking for people to contribute to the war effort and, because he was neutral, he was exempt from a lot of things.</p> <p>I was the second youngest of a whole string of five of us (wife talking – <i>your dad took a job as a chauffeur eventually didn't he and you lived in the gardener's cottage where he was chauffeur</i>) at Lowther House – it's still there.....</p> <p>I went to Stamford Park Junior School, then Altrincham Grammar and then, that was it."</p>
00. 2.12	<p><b>Early career</b></p> <p>I wanted to go in the Forestry Commission. I put in for some exams, passed them, but declined. In those days if you went into the Forestry Commission at my level then you couldn't progress beyond a degree. That's all changed now. (He did go and work for them for some years up in Scotland, but decided to come back home , because of family circumstances, and went to work for Altrincham Parks department). I remember saying to someone at Altrincham Parks, how could I get a good all-round knowledge and they said "That's easy – you go to Clibrans", because Clibrans was much bigger than Caldwell's in those days. So, I went to Clibrans (1962-65) and then went to college and did my NCH at Celyn College, Northop (now Cambria College, previously Welsh College of Horticulture). Then when I came out from there I wanted to extend my knowledge, and I'd picked up very good knowledge at Clibrans, so I went to Caldwell's in 1966/7 and worked there for two</p>

	<p>years.</p> <p>I phoned them up – in those days you could jump out of one job and into another job and said I'd had good experience at Clibrans , can I come to you and they said yes. There was a garden centre, which wasn't really a garden centre in those days. They grew pretty much everything. We used to buy stuff in form all sorts of places, such as Boulton Brothers of Moddershall (near Stone in Staffordshire – still going as a wholesale nursery)”</p>
00.06.40	One day Tony demanded waterproofs (they were not provided with any work clothes at Caldwell's.) He cut a bag open and tied it round the middle to shame Billy Caldwell.
00.07.15	Tony travelled to work from Altrincham in a Triumph Spitfire.
00.07.50	Tony didn't feel that he learnt as much at Caldwell's as at Clibrans as Clibrans operated 2- 300 years out of date.
00.09.21	Tony could remember one customer, a District Nurse. He found it strange that he could go round all day with her and then she would buy goods worth about 3p.
00.10.48	<p>Tony recalled Denis Meade, Peter Acton, Frank Cash (Passant?) and Jonny Crimes - “a little guy about 5 foot two. He had some sayings - ‘Think of ease but work on’ was a favourite saying, and ‘You can't do enough for a good boss and you can't do too little for a bad one’.”</p> <p>Johnny came to work in a Hillman Minx wearing clogs - other cars went up the bank!</p> <p>John Prince was at the Barnshaw nursery and he is still around.</p>
00.12.35	They brought a fruit farm of 30 acres down near Mangoletsi's. Tony went and helped when they were struggling. “They used to resent us as we were like blue eyed boys, a lot of jealousy, and I had this Spitfire.....it made me feel I was making progress somewhere.”
00.14.00	Tony recalled the propagator at the greenhouses, a lady called Carol (?)
00.14.54	Tony recalled his colleagues heckling Joe Sunlight as he walked down the pathway by the nursery to catch the train from Knutsford each day. Joe Sunlight was an entrepreneur who introduced central heating and a vacuum system to a big office block in Manchester.
00.17.00	The soil was very deep at the Knutsford nursery through years of cultivation.
00.17.40	They had lunch in the packing shed, no facilities. Packing a big mixed order they used to put a big stake up the middle, pack the other plants round and stitch up with baler twine.
00.19.09	Tony recalled Denis from Boulton Brother chucking plants off the back of the lorry and saying their names. Denis said if you look carefully you can tell the difference.
00.20.18	Caldwell's were a good frm to work for. Every Saturday lunchtime you got a pay packet. Tony was paid £11. 3sh, perhaps slightly less. Tony recalls going to Swettenham Hall to prune a big Magnolia soulangeana.
00.22.00	“After I left and was working in local government as a horticulturalist, I met Don Leaman. He said here's a very upright field maple which (they were) going to

	propagate. It was going to be called Cranford, then William Caldwell. I've got one in the arboretum 30 foot high.”
00.24.04	<p>They used to buy in Abies grandis. Tony said to Bill Caldwell, ‘you shouldn’t be selling that. It grows to 300 feet. Bill said “when it’s 300 feet we’ll know about it’. He was importing things forbidden to be imported under another name. Tony thought he did this to make money.</p> <p>A lot of material was imported from Holland, Germany, also Italy.</p>
00.27.51	<p>Clibrans were packing up when Tony went to college. The owner had two adopted daughters who had been the off spring of one of his travellers who was killed in a car crash. The girls were attractive, became mannequins and there was no one to take over the business.</p> <p>There were three ethnic groups who worked there - English Irish and Pakistani or Indian. If people wanted to come over from Pakistan one of the jobs they could do was work on the land but they didn’t like it because they thought it was demeaning. The Irish worked all winter and went home for the harvest.</p>
00.31.48	<p>Mr Caldwell was a gentleman and entered into an agreement with someone who was going to build him a garden centre but it didn’t get planning permission.</p> <p>After Caldwell’s Tony went to Todds for commercial glasshouse experience, and after 18months there went to the parks department at Tameside.</p>
00.34.13	<p>At Clibrans they learnt to bud in the same way as taught in the old textbooks. They had a whole range of weedkillers they could use.</p>
00.41.36	<p>At Knutsford they were a small intimate little team. Tony enjoyed his time at Clibrans, college, Caldwell’s and Todd’s.</p>