



Caldwell's Nurseries Project

Oral history

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

Jeremy Lawton interviewed by Christine Wilcox-Baker

Jeremy Lawton landscape contractor and customer of Caldwell's

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Interview summary

00.00.31	<p>Jeremy was born in Knutsford in 1961. They lived in Egerton Square and he went to Egerton Primary School, Knutsford High School and on to Reaseheath College to study horticulture. Then to Askham Bryam to do his National Diploma in Horticulture - more council work and not so much fruit and veg.</p> <p>When he left he worked with his father who had an agricultural contracting business started in 1962, hedge cutting and other work. It was quite successful and they employed about 12 men. The company evolved into landscape contracting working in NW England - Preston, Oldham into N Wales and down to Stoke. They were based in Knutsford at Bluebell Farm on Manchester Road where they could park all the equipment.</p>
00.03.00	<p>Using Caldwell's as a landscape contractor</p> <p>"Following on from then we started to do work with the building companies; doing show areas, planting up the front gardens, public open spaces, planting trees, shrubs, laying turf, and that bought us into contact with Caldwell's.</p> <p>Because we could go there, buy the plants, take them to the site and then plant them. We'd use Caldwell's because we could always get a very good quality plant. We could arrive there, pick the plants up. Get some good advice from the manager or Mr Caldwell and take these to sites and always have a good impact when we were doing our work. On many occasions we were asked to do show areas. We'd need very good plants for that and quite often the client would like them to be in flower. So, instead of having a list of plants that weren't available we'd visit Caldwell's. Mr Caldwell would walk round with us, give us some advice and we could see the plants that were very nice and take those, and we'd get a very good impact straight away. The clients were always very happy, and we did this for at least 10 years."</p>

00.04.52	Jeremy started the landscape contracting when he left York in about 1978. His father has retired now, in his eighties. They continued to do hedge cutting with one man dedicated to this. He went to cut Caldwell's hedges every autumn.
00.05.48	<p>Caldwell's sites</p> <p>"Of course, they had a few sites. They had the main site in Knutsford on Chelford Road and that was split into two. There was the garden centre side, then on the other side of the road was the glasshouse where they had all the house plants. It had its own small parking area at the front. It was always nice to go in there, especially in winter, it was always a nice warm place to be. The lady who looked after that was very knowledgeable as well....</p> <p>On the other side of the road was the main shop and office, and plant storage area, where all the plants were laid out for the general public to buy plants. You'd drive in and on the left hand side was the shop, containing all your usual spades, watering cans, all sorts of horticultural equipment.</p> <p>It was quite traditional, but I suppose at the time, compared to today's shops, it was quite modern. It had a large glass frontage, so it was quite light inside. But then, to go to Mr Caldwell's office you had to walk down an alley-way, a corridor, you went past lots of seeds, all in little boxes, all labelled up. Then through there, into Caldwell's office, where he had a great big desk, that he obviously did a lot of work from. Next to that you actually went into his house, which was then almost into his front room. He was living there then.</p> <p>The rest of the nursery was down at Ollerton, on both sides of the road. In fact some of the trees are still there to this day. They've been left in by the people who bought the field. That's more or less opposite the Dun Cow pub. Part of that has become Ollerton Nursery. They're still in business. On the left hand side, after the Dun Cow, was the rose production area. We didn't buy many roses from Caldwell's, because they weren't as popular for the work we were doing."</p>
00.09.13	<p>The tree nursery at Ollerton</p> <p>"For buying trees, on the right hand side, we could drive down there with a van and trailer, speak to the guy on the nursery, tell him which trees we would like and he would then say, right follow me. Off we'd go and we'd physically, that morning, dig the tree up, take the tree to the job we were going to do and then replant it. We'd know exactly where the tree had come from; we knew it was healthy and alive and the success rate was very good. We'd both work on it.</p> <p>These would be standard trees, 12-15 feet long, with a girth of 10-12cms. They were quite hard to dig up, you'd have to sever the roots.</p> <p>The good thing about the nursery at Ollerton was that the soil was very good, very sandy, very free draining, so you can have a really wet winter and you can go down there and dig the trees up quite easily."</p>
00.10.40	The staff were very helpful. They had been there for years. They all had their own little departments - trees, roses etc with one man over each.
00.11.19	Jeremy didn't recall any kind of uniform. They didn't have a cafe, they were very traditional and still got their regular customers coming for quality plants. Sundays were very busy with domestic customers and contractors more during the week.
00.12.42	As contractors they could collect what they wanted and go straight to site. Jeremy didn't recall an official ordering system. It was done by word of mouth or telephone. Orders were put in a book which would go in the office and then invoices would be

	done and sent by post. It was quite relaxed, they paid promptly, standard terms 28 days. Their letterhead was quite elaborate with King Canute.
00.14.59	Jeremy didn't use the shop that much but went in there to see Mr Caldwell. It was quite a big shop with deckchairs, tables for patios and all other things for general horticulture - hoses and connections, secateurs; compost outside in bags, labelled and decorative aggregates.
00.16.05	Jeremy vaguely remembers a Mercedes pick up.
00.16.32	Jeremy mainly dealt with Mr Caldwell but got to know him and his wife more when they moved to Great Budworth and he asked Jeremy to put a drive in. They had previously lived at the nursery but it was sold for a housing estate. Jeremy sometimes wondered if the son hadn't gone to Australia whether the business would have continued. The Caldwells had a nice property in Great Budworth with a nice garden with a view into a small valley. Jeremy recalled walking round the garden and being shown a primula that Mr Caldwell had brought from the nursery. Mr Caldwell had a passion for primulas and this one was a rare variety, light blue, a pretty plant. He liked roses too and the garden had some rose beds.
00.21.29	One of the contractors that used Caldwell's in the last years was Lane's who bought quite a few plants.
00.22.45	The trees were mostly bare root but one could specify root balled. The tractor driver was Sid. He drove a David Brown tractor, transported the plants from Ollerton to the main nursery, all the ploughing and towed a planter behind. Jeremy saw him at a garage recently. He has some really good stories about Caldwell's but said he better not tell them. He was a bit of a character.
00.25.52	Jeremy is always drawn back to the Caldwell's nursery site. An area of land off Sparrow Lane was sold to Redrow. Lawton's were the landscape contractor for Redrow. When they came to do the gardens the topsoil was really good making it an easy site to work on.
00.27.30	Recently a client asked Lawton's to price for some drive work. it was for a house built on the site of Caldwell's tennis court. The owner had fond memories of Caldwell's from whom he had bought the land for his house. He shopped at Caldwell's and some of the plants in his garden came from there.
00.29.33	Some more recollections about Mrs Caldwell.
00.30.33	Jeremy was unsure of the location of the flower shop on King Street.