



Caldwell's Nurseries Project

Oral history

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

George Sanderson interviewed by Gordon Darlington

George Sanderson was an employee Caldwell's Nurseries for 31 years until they closed.

Duration:	00.45:40
Recording date:	25.07.2011
Recording Location:	George Sanderson's home
Access restrictions:	None
Recording equipment:	Zoom H4N
Recording notes:	
Copyright:	Cheshire Gardens Trust

Interview summary

00.00.00	George Sanderson was born 26 th August, 1924, Knutsford. His father was a Railway Signaller at Knutsford Station and his mother a hardworking housewife. Had a very happy childhood having grown up in a family of 5 boys and 1 girl. Born in Heathfield Square not very far way from where he lives now about a 100 yards away. The area is now a Conservation area the houses having been built since the First World War for the soldiers when they returned from the war to live in them.
00.01.55	Attended Silk Road Primary School and Egerton School (now Frank Marshall) in Knutsford. Had general education schooling for those years – parents could not afford for him to go to Grammar School, although later on two of his brothers did go to Grammar School. He was the third in the family.
00.02.57	Left school at 14 his first occupation was as a Railway Clerk at Plumley and Lostock Station for Cheshire Lines before moving on to Knutsford Station. Worked as a Booking Clerk – shift duties 6.00 am – 2.00 pm 2.00 pm until 10.00pm and worked every other Sunday (48 hours week – 6 days a week). Pay was £4 and 10 shillings for a full week and time + $\frac{3}{4}$ on Sundays.
00.04.31	At 18 he joined the army for four years and left at 23. Spent two years in India working for the Royal Engineers. After returning from India In 1947 he married and returned to work as a Railway Tracking Officer working for the Cheshire Lines Railway (Headquarters in Central Liverpool) and was mainly office based.
00.06.00	Very pleased to be back home. In those days money was very tight and he was then eventually employed by Ilfords at Mobberley doing Production, figures and general office work for four years. Whilst working at Ilford he took on a part-time job in the evenings at Caldwell's in the Nursery to supplement his wage. Eventually went to work full-time as Under Study Transport Manager. He knew Bill Caldwell as he

	obviously had worked part-time on a regular basis and got to know him then and was offered the full-time employment.
00.08.07	At that time they had 4 catalogues that were produced each year, which had to be produced. Pricking out was done in the greenhouses. Different staff employed – only one person doing pricking at night. Sorting out the various plants for the different seasons including bedding, seasonal and early spring plants. Helping in the shop and stocking up. Spent 30 years at Caldwell's initially his job was to prepare the rounds for the Transport Manager including the labels, sorting out the workmen to get the orders together.
00.10.02	Transport/Vehicles – two Lorries (after the horse and cart and one van for local deliveries. Deliveries mainly to Lancashire and Cheshire and using “Dennis” lorries – good ones Drivers included Arthur Charlton, Harry Lowe and Eric Tiplin. He went to work on his bike and went home for lunch and was very much office based. As Transport Manager had to check that the lorries were loaded correctly and that the drivers of the lorries knew where they were going – different areas of Liverpool. Produce a Delivery Sheet and a marked route etc., - all very experienced drivers. The Nursery workmen loaded the plants etc by hand. Trees and shrubs bare rooted – Protection bagged and soiled root. An open truck at the back. Bare root shrubs sent to large nurseries.
00.13.54	Big customers – Ferranti's (Henbury Hall, Macclesfield) and Ferranti's at Ollerton, Parks People included– Lancaster, Wigan, Salford, Worsley, Sheffield, Borough of Ealing in London, Stockport, Scotland. Parks Superintendents came to look at the plants and shrubs and were then taken out to be wine and dined for lunch.
00.16.00	Link with gardeners – Jack Ford and Freddie ?? came in with their orders. Sorting out orders early spring for back end. Very few potted plants, nowadays of course, it is all year round. Lifting mid-October – orders for the spring and summer. Shrubs and trees from continent and grown on at the Ollerton and Nursery at Holmes Chapel. Shrubs brought from Holland and France on wagons and brought to the nurseries. Trees and shrubs brought by wagons from the continent or by rail in containers. Heeling them in a huge operation. Bill Scott, a Scottish Nurseryman very efficient. Transport and machinery certainly changed over the past 30 years. Rented wagons – made them last no MOT like today! Machinery in the yard consisted of tractors, one of the tractor drivers being Sid Taylor.
00.20.29	On the rose's side – Alan Sant of St John's Road Knutsford was the main nurseryman. Hours of work 8.30 am – 5.30 pm (overtime if working at night) 5 days and every other Saturday and every other Wednesday. Salary span over the past 30 years wage commenced at £12.00 per week and retired on approximately £180 - £200. Left Caldwell's at the age of 67 in 1991 when the nursery was sold. (22:35) Worked at Booths in Knutsford for 13 years and finally retired in 2004 at the age of 80. Enjoyed his time at Booths.
00.24.35	Caldwell's an outstanding and interesting place to work – special days at Caldwell's. Highlights - Celebrities called in “Freddie and the Dreamers” – dancing around the shrubs. Actors and actresses from Coronation Street use to visit. In 1980 there was a party for the staff to celebrate 200 years. The whole family attended workers, friends etc and party held in a marquee at the house about 60 people attended. Annual Christmas Party usually held at the Royal George for a staff get-together. Otherwise not much socialising between the staff.
00.27.14	Caldwell's Nursery – Layout – small office and main office and black and white shop

	<p>building on main road – timber floor which was well worn and needed to have sawdust put down to keep the dust down. A long counter with seed boxes piled at the back of the shop. This all changed when they got their new building. Plants bagged in big packing sheds at the back of nursery, storage being in old fashioned style farm buildings. No “Cold House” as such. For lunch went home there was a small staff room for breaks. Plant system – marking system labels sent out in the morning plants marked off and labelled – all good stock top grade. Good nurserymen – Bill Scott, Dennis Mead, Peter Acton – Roses – Alan Sant, and Fruit - John Princes.</p>
00.30.48	<p>Caldwell’s fluctuated- in one year 6 – 8 weeks bad weather no work done. Dry cold and frozen up during the 60’s – everyone walked round doing nothing. However, men kept on – nobody laid off. Every Christmas an annual bonus until one year nothing and everyone was disappointed no bonus and it was at this time the business began to decline.</p>
00.33.18	<p>People used to ask for rare plants – good connections “Pieris” – popular plants and roses very popular. At the end of the year job satisfaction – four catalogues produced Bedding Season, Trees and Shrubs, Seeds and Sundries and Roses – quite an achievement. Supported the shows at Liverpool, Southport, Shrewsbury, Harrogate and the Alderley & Wilmslow Show. Plenty of furniture, especially Lister Furniture - orders sometimes items delivered direct from the shows to the gardens. Always knew customers names etc. On the stands – waterfalls, Garden furniture, general supply of sundries, fertilisers – took orders and delivered.</p>
00.38.05	<p>Best thing about working at Caldwell’s – meeting the customers – given tickets for the Cup Final on two or three occasions by the Gibson family from Manchester United Football Club. A very happy and content working at Caldwell’s – good people to work for and they looked after their staff.</p>
00.39.40	<p>Memories – very happy working there and really enjoyed my thirty years with the company. Types of machinery, wagons, tractors and rotavators Conversion to machinery for lifting of plants, especially the use of the back of tractor which was built by Sid Taylor to cut under roots and lift the trees etc. Loading usually done by two or three people previously. Buy in the seeds measured out in a small bowl with a metal piece across showing the number of the seeds, which would then be packed with names on. Bags of peas and beans packed in envelopes. Joe Jones did the vegetable seeds and roses budding. No longer got any catalogues but roses were approximately three shillings and six pence. Still got the anniversary mug given to him in 1980.</p>