

Harlow and Basildon clips: Transcripts

Copyright in these recordings is held by the Essex Sound and Video Archive and others. To share excerpts from the recordings or transcripts, please get in touch with our Sound Archivist.

Harlow

Mrs Summers talks about moving to Harlow from Walthamstow to work for Kores in 1952 (([SA 22/1364/1](#)))

Mrs Summers: The house was in my name, because I went to work for it, you see.

Judy Attfield: Yes.

Mrs Summers: But obviously, they took a chance, really, by taking us younger married women on, because they near enough knew that when we did come down here, we would start our families, you see.

Judy Attfield: Yes, quite.

Mrs Summers: And it did happen. It was all full of prams... It took me about two years before I classed this as a home. I loved the house, and I was proud of it, but if ever I thought of going to Walthamstow, I was always going home. Because that's where my roots are... you know, was, like... I felt as if I'd been thrown right out of a nest. It took a great deal of time to accept it. Although I loved it, and I think common sense told me that I'd done the right thing. But it wanted a lot of getting used to.

Mrs Thompson talks about decorating her maisonette in Harlow in 1961, just after she got married ([SA 22/1358/1](#))

Mrs Thompson: We had, um, French windows, with a balcony – it was an upstairs maisonette. And all that end was orange, and my father-in-law made us a cocktail bar. Do you remember that cocktail bar you made us? With white quilting on... it sounds awful now!

Mr Alderson: I only got rid of that about a year ago.

Mrs Thompson: And it had sort of, marble on– formica marble, contact, that contact stuff on top. Purple carpet, mustard and grey suite. That was an odd shape, that suite, wasn't it? It had sort of round chairs. And everything had those legs, those screw-on legs. And we bought, um, a radiogram. Beautiful thing it was. It was ever so expensive then. I might even have the bill for that somewhere. We bought that at the town centre, in Leytonia's, was it? And that had black screw-on legs as well. We were furniture mad, you know, all we thought about was the home. In fact once, we couldn't afford any wallpaper, and we were decorating, so George painted the wall white, and we got saucepan lids and even the dustbin lid, and with a black pen, a felt-type pen, I suppose, and he drew black circles and triangles all over this white wall. I've got a photograph of that. That looked fantastic. And everyone said 'God, he's so artistic'. And he's a butcher!

MP Stan Newens talks about people's expectations for the New Town ([SA 1/66/1](#))

People who moved here from London expected a complete transformation of their lives. They expected to have a house in the country, which was totally different as far as they were concerned from the hustle and the bricks and mortar and the totally concrete and smoky atmosphere of London. They hoped to come here and to participate in a new, rural way of life. Hedges, trees, farms and cows were magic to people who lived in an area that was completely built up, without any gardens, and when they came here, they expected – and many of them found, in the garden city atmosphere of the town – a rural type of bliss. On the other hand, however, some people who came here, and perhaps to begin with thought that they would like it, found that it was far, far too quiet.

Jean Searing talks about tour groups coming to visit her house in Harlow ([SA 1/71/1](#))

Interviewer: As one of the earliest families to move into Harlow, were you often visited by VIPs?

Jean Searing: Yes, we were actually, there was— Because it was a Corporation house, one of the first ones, they used to use it as a show house. They used to bring big nobs, I suppose they were, around to look at the house and meet us as a family. I can remember there was a French minister of housing, he came, and he thought that mum and dad slept in single beds, and there was a big laugh about it. But it turned out it was the single beds that my sister and I slept in. And all sorts of people used to come. Sometimes they'd give us sixpence. We used to have to stay in and be well behaved and everything.

John Tipton recalls finding out where the Stow shopping centre would be built, on his way to swim in the River Stort at Latton Mill ([SA 1/82/1](#))

The first shopping centre was the Stow, and I can remember the Stow being built. In fact, I can remember discovering where the Stow was going to be in the middle of the parkland across from Mark Hall, quite early on in fact. We didn't have a swimming pool in Harlow, and in the days when I was a kid we used to swim in the river, the River Stort. There used to be a swimming pool in the river where Latton Mill used to be, which is right behind where United Glass factory is now. And in the summer, most of the kids from Harlow, from Potter Street, from all the villages, you'd find them in the pool down there. We used to cycle down there. And there was a lane, which we called Latton Street, which runs right through where the town is now, and runs right past where the Stow is. And we were cycling along, and building had started. And being inquisitive children, we stopped and asked one of the bricklayers,

‘Ere, mate, what you building?’. And he said, oh, this is the post office. And we were standing and looking at what is going to be, in plenty of years to come, the post office on the corner of the Stow.

Architect John Graham talks about what he'd like to see in Harlow in future ([SA 1/67/1](#))

Interviewer: What would you like to see happening in the next 40 years?

John Graham: I would like to see Harlow gaining a greater sense of its own identity. Of growing more aware of its own special character. Becoming strong enough to handle the pressures – and there will be commercial and political pressures – and choosing the developments which are right for it, and rejecting or changing those that are not, and caring for that that’s here already. I would like to see the people of Harlow in the next few decades becoming more conscious of their citizenship in the town, and recapturing some of the idealism of those early years. Today, I know, is thought of as an age of realism, but I suspect that idealism achieves more.

Enid Lawson talks about moving to Harlow in 1951 and living in Mulberry Green House ([SA946-50](#))

Enid Lawson: We came in April 1951. My father had come here in January ’51. He joined Harlow Development Corporation. He was the engineer in charge of building Rye Meads Sewage Works, which was then a field. And indeed I learnt to drive on there. Father showed me how to put the gears in. He then retired to his hut – which was then his office – pulled down the blinds, and left me to it.

Interviewer: Which part of Harlow did you live in at that time?

Enid Lawson: Well we lived in— first of all, when we came here, we had a flat in Mulberry Green House. The house was occupied solely by Harlow Development staff and their families. And then, about two years later, we were the first people to move into Mark Hall South. We lived at Felmongers. Dr Taylor lived at 1 and we lived at number 2 Felmongers.

Mr and Mrs Bawa talk about moving to live in Harlow from India in 1968 (SA946-44)

Mr Bawa: We were told then, by the Ministry of Education, to come to Harlow because there were better chances of getting jobs and housing.

Interviewer: What year was that?

Mr Bawa: 1968.

Interviewer: You were married before you came here?

Mr Bawa: Yes.

Mrs Bawa: We were married. We had two children, so I travelled and followed him in February 1969. Hard work, when we first came, to settle down.

Interviewer: Were you apprehensive when you first came here?

Mrs Bawa: Not really, you know, because we read quite a bit in the magazines over there, you know, Woman's Own and other things, you know, so I knew a little bit of the way of life when we came here. But having no relations, yes, you know. We were only four of us when we first came over here, so made friends quite a lot with the English community, at that time.

Mr Bawa: And I applied for a job, and I was lucky to get a job in STL, Standard Telecommunication Laboratories. Because, I had a science degree and they wanted someone. And anyway, that was

a blessing in disguise, because people working in the labs were so good. I remember them helping me to set up my house, where to buy things, how to move a settee from somebody else's place to your place. And because the salaries were not very good then, but second-hand stuff they helped me to buy, and I managed to get my family here.

Harlow: The Early Years ([SA 1/178/1](#))

Presenter: Happy Birthday Harlow, and here's to the next 40 years.

Frederick Gibberd: You see a town is totally different from architecture. You're really designing an organism which is changing all the time, you see. And although the town is complete in a sense, in that the Corporation has been dissolved, it is still going to go on developing over the years. And it's going to grow, or it's going to die.

Origins of New Towns in Essex ([SA 1/464/1](#))

When I started to think about making this programme, I was going to call it the concrete jungle. But as time progressed, my interviews and research made me realise that this would be most unfair, not only to those who live in Harlow, Basildon and South Woodham Ferrers, but also to the many people who have been involved over many years producing what are now thriving communities. Our story starts during the Second World War, and it's amazing to think that in what Churchill called our darkest hour, there were people looking to a future for those who lived in our great cities.

Today, nearly 20,000 people live in Essex's new towns. That's one in eight of the county's population. Whether or not the new towns have been a success is not for me to judge. All I will say is that given a blank canvas, the architects, the planners, the builders,

and most important of all, the people, have done a pretty good job.

Harlow Talking Newspaper Tenth Anniversary Souvenir Edition, 1989 (SA946-59)

[Music]

Presenter: Hello and welcome to the Harlow Talking Newspaper souvenir tape. The music you hear is played by Cath King, a combination of two pieces of music which she's put together: one, which is the music you normally hear that introduces the weekly newspaper; and the other one, 'Congratulations'. And the reason for the 'Congratulations' is that the Harlow Talking Newspaper has reached the age of 10. So we are making this tape for you to keep, unlike the normal tape, which as you know gets returned each week... Now, to get an overview of the Harlow Talking Newspaper, we'll listen to an article read by Noreen G, which was printed in the very early days of the talking newspaper.

Noreen G.: Amid the clutter of books and library tickets in the depths of Harlow's town centre library, a group of volunteers can be found burning the midnight oil every Thursday night. They're busy editing, dictating and recording the town's talking newspaper, ready for distribution along with the printed paper version every Friday morning. The talking newspaper, symbolised by a cheery logo which the chairman Don Johnson wears on his t-shirt, is in its infancy. The first edition came hot off the cassette machines on September the 21st, and is the product of the working party set up under a year ago to provide a much-needed facility for the blind and partially sighted people of the town. The first issue went out to sixty people, and by the second week, ten more had been added to the list.

Basildon

Jewel Hollingshead talks about watching the New Town being built from her farm, Ghyllgrove, and protesting the compulsory purchase ([SA 4/415/1](#))

I knew that I couldn't fight it, to keep the New Town away, so I thought I would join it. As time went on, I did take an interest in things in the New Town, but there's a few incidents that might be of interest as to what happened when I farmed at Ghyllgrove and the New Town was being built on the opposite side of Honeypot Lane. They got the first road through, which was the first road to be opened in the New Town, Whitmoor Way, and I remember Colonel Whitmore, the Lord Lieutenant of Essex, opening that. After that we began to see the foundations of houses being put in. And the Corporation workmen used to come along, and they thought they owned everything. And they'd often come through gates and hedges into the farm and let the cattle out. They let them out one night, and they all walked across the road through the foundations opposite. So I reckon there are some cow footmarks under some of the floors on the Fryerns estate... From that, I met New Town people, and leaders of the Tenants Associations, and they began to want facilities, and amenities, and I took an interest and said that I would join and help them. I felt that it was something we got to accept, but it was a very hard job to accept it and lose your living... The Corporation wanted my farm, Ghyllgrove, to build on, and on one occasion I laid down in front of the bulldozers, and said actual peril, you'll kill me first, before you'll take my farm. And eventually I found that I could hold them up for seven years, unless they gave me earth for earth, area for area, farmstead for farmstead... So I've had some fun.

Alf Dove, former chair of Basildon Development Corporation, recalls coming to the New Town for the first time, to view the Co-op he was going to manage ([SA 3/409/1](#))

And I remember coming up a road that was Clay Hill Road, and I was lost. I was looking for the New Town of Basildon, and it was still all scrubland and country. And I stopped to talk to a young lady, and I said, 'Could you tell me where the New Town of Basildon is?'. And she says, 'What part do you want?'. And I said, 'Well, are there a number of parts?'. She said, 'Yes, there's the part up near where the factories is being built, and there's the part where the old town of Vange was'. So I said, 'Oh, well I'll have a look for where the factories is'. And it wasn't until years after that that young lady, that I met, she happened to be in the Labour Party, and she was a fellow councillor with me in 1956. And it was 1952 that I met her. So it was just coincidence that she was the first person I met in this town. And anyway, I finally found the first bit of the New Town, and I found this little pantry shop in what is now called Fryerns. Or it was called Cranes at the time. And the people who had it had been thrown out of their little old shop by the Corporation, and so the Corporation had given them a new shop. But they didn't have much money to stock it, and this is why they sold it to the Co-op. And I saw where it was and I thought, this is marvellous, because it was only a small shop. And so I got back on my pop-pop bike, went home, took the job, and we moved out here 2nd August 1952.

Colin Ward talking about the Plotlands and the development of Basildon New Town ([SA 3/307/1](#))

Until the census of 1951, which was the first for twenty years, the local authorities round here had only a vague idea of the total number of people living in what was called the 'sprawling wilderness' of south Essex. In 1950, Mr Bernard Braine, now Sir

Bernard Braine, who was then Member of Parliament for the Billericay constituency, remarked that the minister had assumed that there were 17,000 people living round here, but his own careful check satisfied him that there were 27,750 people living in this area. And Basildon became almost unique amongst the New Towns in that the local authorities petitioned the government for the area to be chosen as a New Town site. Harlow had already been designated, and it was proposed that Ongar should be expanded as the second Essex New Town. But Essex County Council and the then Billericay District Council and the boroughs of East Ham and West Ham made representations to the government that this should be the place for the New Town. And of course, the rest is the history we all know of the New Town itself. But if the local authority was almost unique in seeking the designation of the area as a New Town to provide that missing urban infrastructure to this sporadic settlement, the inhabitants were almost as united in their opposition. Residents' Protection Associations were formed in Pitsea and Laindon when word got around that the Development Corporation intended to acquire the freehold by compulsory purchase of all the sites in the designated area. Passionate feelings evoked by the idea of freehold possession were very evident in the meetings held at that time.

Interview with Mr and Mrs Walker, the first tenants of Basildon New Town, on Redgrave, in 1951 ([SA 20/2/11/1](#))

This is a Ted Haley recording. The subject is the first tenant to move into the Basildon New Town, Mr and Mrs Walker and their two children, and this was recorded on the 3rd August 1967.

Ted Haley: When you came to the New Town, Mr Walker, did you get an official welcome?

Mr Walker: We were there a couple of days and then we had an official welcome, yes.

Ted Haley: What was it like?

Mr Walker: Well, quite interesting, there was a crowd outside, and Lady Whitmore officially welcomed us to the New Town. They all came in and had a look round the house, and asked us a few questions, just like you are now.

Ted Haley: Was there much panic on?

Mr Walker: Oh yes. When we first arrived at the house, there was wet paint all over the place. And the day before the opening, some gardeners came and they laid down all nice turf, put climbing geraniums up, made it all look very, very nice outside. After it was all over, much to our surprise, we saw the gardener coming back and taking all the climbing geraniums up, and for a moment I even thought they were going to take the turf up as well.

Ted Haley: [Laughs] Didn't want to scrape the paint off! ...Tell me, did you have any highlight in your time there, that you can recall?

Mr Walker: Well, we did have a burglary while we were there. What happened, we went to the illuminations at Southend one night, and when we came back the burglars had been through the house, taken my television, pulled up the carpet, and if we hadn't arrived back when we did I think they would've carried off the carpet as well.

Ted Haley: How did you feel, being the very first tenants of the very New Town?

Mrs Walker: Very exciting. Very pleased to have our own home.

Ted Haley: Was it the first time you'd had a self-contained living accommodation?

Mrs Walker: Yes.

Ted Haley: ... and looking back, on those five years, how would you feel that you found them? Do you think it was worthwhile? An experience?

Mrs Walker: Oh, yes, definitely! We were quite happy there.

Mr Walker: Yes, well it was my first garden.

Mrs Walker: Very happy. We had nice neighbours, didn't we. Yes, we were quite happy. I look back on those as very pleasant memories.

Mr Walker: We were able to grow our own, quite a few vegetables, which we weren't able to when we were in Lambeth.

Mrs Walker: And I like the countryside myself.

Interview with Mr and Mrs Hood, whose son Derek was the first baby born in Basildon New Town ([SA 20/2/13/1](#))

Ted Haley: How many children have you got, Mrs Hood?

Mrs Hood: Three children. Derek was the first baby of the New Town. The first boy of the New Town. The little girl across the road was the first girl of the New Town.

Ted Haley: Did you get any awards for this, for being the first baby, was it mentioned in the paper?

Mrs Hood: Yes, when he was ten years old, they finally discovered that Derek was the first to be born, so Mr Shepherd presented him with quite a lovely prize.

Ted Haley: How do you like the honour of being the first baby born in Basildon New Town, Derek?

Derek: I find it a bit confusing really, you know. I've really never thought much about it, until the picture in the paper and that, and everybody started talking about it and that.

Ted Haley: Did you find your friends rip you at school about it?

Derek: No, not a lot. They knew I was about the oldest out of the lot of them, you know, but they didn't ask when I was born until the paper, like.

Ted Haley: Pity we couldn't have got your first cries on the tape recorder [laughs]

The opening of Basildon Arts Centre, 21 September 1968 ([SA 20/2/34/1](#))

Ted Haley: September 1968, we're at the Arts Centre, the opening day. The storm has just passed, and the sun is beginning to shine as we wait for the VIP.

T.D. Chapman, chairman of Basildon Council: Today is a very great occasion for our district. We're here to open this new centre, which has cost approximately £100,000. And when you have seen it, I'm sure you'll agree what excellent value it is. It is designed to serve the 120,000 people of our district, and we're particularly proud that it has been designed by our own council architects. There is a theatre for 500 people, cinema, restaurant, bar, and studios for painting, sculpture and photography. It is the only cinema in the New Town, and I am sure that through this medium, it will give a lot of pleasure to a lot of people. Many prominent artists, including Daniel Barenboim, Richard Burton, Elizabeth Taylor, Judi Dench, Alicia Markova, Yehudi Menuhin, Robert Morley, John Neville, Sir Laurence Olivier, Donald Sinden, Paul Scofield, Dame Sybil Thorndike, Peter Ustinov, et cetera have expressed their best wishes for the success of the centre. I will now introduce you to Lord Goodman, chairman of the Arts Council of Great Britain, who will declare the centre officially open. Thank you.

[Applause]

Arnold Goodman: Chairman, councillors, my lords, ladies, and gentleman. It is a great pleasure and privilege to be asked to open this centre. A very important event, obviously, in the life of this rapidly growing community. A testament, if I may say so, to the great wisdom on the part of those who control your affairs, that they have decided that this town shall not merely be a place where people sleep, it shall be a place where people live, a place where people congregate, a place where people can see and enjoy the things that make life really worth living... It is with the greatest of pleasure indeed that I declare this Arts Centre open.

[Applause]

New Towns Festival of Sport, 13 September 1969 ([SA 20/2/2/1](#))

Ted Haley: This is now the New Towns Festival of Sport, recorded on the 13th September 1969. Basildon, Crawley, Harlow, and Stevenage... And next, the noisiest game that I came across in the day, ladies bowls.

[Sounds of bowls game]

Ted Haley: And now in the evening, at the Arts Centre, the presentations.

F.J. Champ, chairman of Basildon Council: ...If you've missed the first part, I was just apologising for the delay that has happened. The table tennis people wanted to battle all night. I don't know who has won now, but nevertheless, I think we can get on. First of all, I would like to welcome to you all, it's very nice to see so many people here... Now the battle has been lost and won, we can see what the results are.

Unknown speaker: Councillor Mr Champ will present the New Towns trophy, and this will be presented to Basildon.

[Applause]

Ann Chapman recalls jumping in puddles and shopping in Basildon after moving there in 1953, aged 6 ([SA 13/7/2/1](#))

Interviewer: Thinking back when you first got here, what were your first impressions?

Ann Chapman: Oh it was lovely to run about and jump in puddles [laughs]. I was only six, remember. They had nice deep puddles. And there was lots of mud, and children love mud, don't they?

Interviewer: Absolutely.

Ann Chapman: And then we used to have all the shops coming round to the house. We used to have a butcher two days a week, and a fishmonger a day a week, and the baker used to come with his horse and cart, and we used to have a greengrocer that used to come two or three times a week.

Interviewer: So, these all used to come on vans?

Ann Chapman: And even the Co-op used to come on a van. Although we had a Co-op in Vange, which I suppose was about half an hour's walk away. It was great, living here, then. It was sort of like Pitsea, you had Pitsea and you had the old market. And we used to go down there— There was a little bakers, and my mum used to buy broken biscuits from the bakers, because we could only afford one packet of biscuits that was whole, once a month, in case the vicar came for tea, you see, so we had posh biscuits.

Hazel Minchin describes the day she moved to Basildon in 1954 and the fair held to celebrate the opening of the New Town ([SA 13/7/5/1](#))

Hazel Minchin: We moved from an upstairs flat with an outside toilet to a lovely two bedroom house in Basildon with a bathroom.

Interviewer: Can you actually remember moving?

Hazel Minchin: Yes, I can remember the moving day. I lived with my mother and her sister, and my aunt said we were going to travel in style. So she hired a car to bring us from Walthamstow to Basildon. Whereas a lot of people, I do believe, travelled in the removal van, or probably came down on the train. I know we had quite big furniture and my uncle, who lived in Chingford, he knew the day we were moving, he was very worried that our furniture was so big that it wouldn't go through the door of what he imagined was this little tiny house. So the next day he set off to find out how we were getting on. And he actually should've gone to Pitsea station, but he went to Laindon station, and he walked, all the way from Laindon. And he was about 47 then, so I mean he wasn't old, but he wasn't young either, and was much relieved when he eventually got to— well I don't know really how he found us in Luncies Road, he must've probably asked a few people on the way— much relieved to find that we had got all the furniture in through the doors. But yes I can remember that day quite vividly, moving down here.

One bit of excitement when the New Town actually opened— they had a fair, down the bottom of Long Riding, and lots of us went to this fair, and we had a huge storm this particular night. It was just absolutely pouring down with rain, thunder and lightning. And when eventually the rain stopped and we came off out of the fair— we must've been sheltering under some rides on the fair— the whole of Long Riding was completely flooded. And there were people's furniture floating down, because the houses at the bottom, obviously all the water went in them, and it was very deep. I can remember it came up to about here on me, because I was only small, and I was very frightened because I couldn't swim. And we were very, very glad when we eventually, as we started to climb up Long Riding, obviously the water went down, and we eventually got home.

A Town is Born ([SA 24/740/1](#))

[Music]

Presenter: This is a story of twentieth century boldness and imagination. The transfer of thousands of people from old towns to new... We take you to Basildon, one of the two New Towns in the county of Essex, to the east of London, a miniature city, rising from what was a shanty town.

Charles Boniface: We have been building this town since 1949, and it's likely to take another ten or fifteen years to complete. When it is completed, it will be a town of at least 107,000. It will be perhaps the most important regional centre in the south-east of England, attracting people to the amenities provided here, from towns where no provision is made for the motor-car and no provision made for the convenience of shoppers.

Presenter: That was Charles Boniface, who as general manager of the Basildon Development Corporation, has played a vital part in the creation of the town as it is today. His task has been to put the idea into reality, to supervise planning, design, architecture, but not only bricks and mortar, but also the settling in of New Town citizens, to administer this great venture.

Basildon Voices project, BBC Essex, 2003-2005 ([SA403](#))

Jingle: Basildon Voices, celebrating your community, with BBC Essex

Presenter: And all this week on BBC Essex at breakfast time, we've been hearing all about the Seven Wonders of Basildon, as chosen by the people who actually live there. It's all part of our Voices project, which aims to reflect everyday life in the town and get unheard voices on BBC Essex.

Liam Golder: My name is Liam Golder, I'm 22. I've lived in Basildon all my life. I'm actually a musician. My wonder at the moment is actually the Towngate Theatre in Basildon.

Interviewer: We're privileged to be standing on the stage at the Towngate Theatre, looking out onto the empty stalls and balconies, where hundreds of people could sit if there was a performance on. What is it about this place, then, that you like?

Liam Golder: I think it's because it's a great venue. I mean, looking at the place now, there's a lot of potential there for people to come in, get a big crowd, and a big audience, if you can get the publicity and the people to actually come here, obviously.