

## Oral History – Ivor Mitchell Gillespie

Recorded and transcribed by YVONNE SHAW

*Ivor Mitchell Gillespie was born in Ireland on 27 June 1922. He graduated from university and took up accountancy as his profession. In October 1953 he married in County Down, Northern Ireland and in about 1957 moved with his wife Pamela Evon Grace to Surrey, settling at first at the property Northcote in Hooke Road, East Horsley. Subsequently they and their three children moved to Hooke Farm on Effingham Common. Ivor divorced Pamela in 1971 and died on 2 August 2015.*

### Introduction

Ivor was interviewed and recorded by Yvonne Shaw at Hooke Farm on 5 July 2010. In the interview he reminisced freely and his recollections were distilled into an initial transcript by Yvonne. Some of this material made reference to people possibly still living and so in the interests of data protection the transcript has been slightly abridged by Christopher John Hogger to yield the version in this article.

### Transcript

The Common was cleared during the war to grow food; before the war there was none of this openness at all, it was all scrubland with bushes and so on.

When I came [in about 1968] there were a lot of nightingales and there haven't been any in recent years, until last year – [when I was] coming home from town – there was a nightingale singing in the carpark at the station, and this year I have heard one once. They're around but the other thing of course that's gone – well a lot of things have gone – but I haven't heard any cuckoos this year. And also what has gone are the swallows. I had swallows nesting in my stables when I came, but they disappeared about ten years ago. I had martins and there aren't any martins this year for the first time, until yesterday it so happened I saw a pair of martins flying across the stable yard, but that is the first one this year. Swallows and martins are much less frequent as are peewits – lapwings. There were a lot of lapwings flying up and down on the Common and of course there used to be a lot of skylarks; there used to be a lot of skylark song. All of that is diminished. I don't hear any skylarks song now although they tell me there are still skylarks on the Common. Everything is diminishing, noticeably the sparrows. They used to rise in clouds when I first came here but now they've disappeared completely until this year when they are back in small quantities – half a dozen sparrows hopping round the yard; the most I've seen for a long time – I suppose these things come and go for a bit.

Leebrooke Farm was occupied by Mr Estler, Adrian Estler. He was a character. On one occasion he said to me (this must have been about 1970), he said "Well, my wife left me in 1935 and I haven't done any housework since". [The latter date cannot be correct as Estler's only marriage was to Joan Thora Andrea (née) Turner and he married her in 1936. According to former Effingham resident Doreen Emily Hemus Joan left Estler during WW2 and he had a housekeeper although it is not clear when or for how long.] He lived a very casual life indeed. He used to take a newspaper, and I understand he never threw it out and there was a roomful of daily newspapers going back 40 years when he died. But what he didn't do was look after the house, and dry rot got in there and pervaded the house; and effectively that's why it's got to come down, because it will take too much money to put it right. I think it was in '88 he died [it was actually in 1990].

Estler used to be a tree surgeon but he wasn't very good for business for himself, really. I got him in to look at a tree one day that needed some attention and he said "Oh I'd take the whole thing down", and walked away. He was a very amiable pleasant neighbour although he did feature in the newspapers some time in the 60s, might be 70s, when he had a row over Bill, his horse with another local resident who lived in Great Lee Wood somewhere. And I remember coming home on the train one night and opening the *Evening Standard* and reading headlines about this because it had ended up in court [in 1959]. The other fellow had taken a whip to Bill and to Estler, that sort of thing. Other locals will remember this, but I found Estler a very pleasant amiable eccentric. [During a subsequent discussion in January 2011, Ivor recalled that Adrian had lived with his brother Mervyn James Paul Estler (who predeceased him); the two brothers were not on speaking terms and used to watch the cricket matches on the Common while sitting on opposite sides of the pitch.]

The Common has always been very much as it is. There is [Peter] Skinner who lives in Highway Farm on the road to Cobham, on the left hand side just before you cross the motorway; there are some huge leaves of gunnera in the ditch there, he looks after them well. But he owns most of the land on the other [east] side of Effingham Common Road, and he's split it up into three or four lots of about 30 or 40 acres and he rents them to young ladies as stables. He used to rent the Common from the Lord of the Manor and most years he grew wheat on it but one year he grew oats and one year he grew linseed, because I remember the blue flowers. And in those days it was legal to burn the stubble and he used to burn the stubble, and once or twice I was a bit concerned he was burning the stubble too close – and on one occasion he did set fire to one of my ash trees. It's not legal to burn the stubble any more. Eventually he threw his hand in and it was rented to a chap called [Eric] Miliam who lived in East Horsley [but now Hatchford] just on the top of it but that ended when the Borough Council bought the common. He was a competent operator and he took some quite good loads [of wheat] off it, and he used to fertilise it and that sort of thing.

[Showing a map] That is a map of some antiquity; it's 1932. It only shows part of the Common. Round about 1950s probably, the Lord of the Manor applied to build and he put in outline planning permission to build and those (blue lines on the map) are the drawings. He did this in the full and certain knowledge that he would be turned down and he then got compensation. That was Calburn. I never went to see the plans, someone told me, but those were the roads so I think there would have been a very considerable number of houses there. But he didn't get planning permission, but he got compensation and on those grounds he couldn't apply again. It was a common ploy at the time.

I remember Hooke Common because originally that piece there was called Hooke Copse. Now when I was a child in Ireland, I used to sometimes hear the British news and there was a fellow called Ludwig Koch. He was a German and he was very much into birds and he recorded and broadcast the Surrey nightingale and he was recording it in Hooke Copse. It [the copse] is now gone because it was knocked down and this is the back of Heathview in East Horsley now. I was surprised when I discovered this because I read somewhere it was Hooke, but in the Ordnance Survey Map (and they're wrong) my house is spelt Hook without an 'e'; but my house is spelt with an 'e' because it was named after Hooke Copse and Hooke Common of course.

Next door of course that is the pond/lake, call it what you will, on the left hand corner of the road going down the hill towards Effingham village. That was tarted up by the council in 1977 in honour of the Queen's Silver Jubilee and I don't think anyone's lifted a finger to it since, but it did look smart then. And along here is the entrance to Tunnicliff's place; Leewood Farm. [John Levi] Tunnicliffe died. The house is a dreadful house, undistinguished 1930s. There is a very ancient moat there which was inhabited until 1232 or thereabouts and you can still walk through and there is a ditch still there. And I thought one day when somebody knocked and said could they do some metal detecting? And I thought "Well there's that moat there," so I said "Yes you can check on that field there." And I [went] back and I waited. And they turned up with their findings – a whole lot of horse shoes and a cannon shell which they said was from a Spitfire – but nothing from 1232. But that moat is one of the original antiquities of Effingham.

Tunnicliff died six or seven years ago [actually in 2005]. He was 93 or 94 when he died. You could always tell when Mr Tunnicliff was coming because the Effingham Common Road would be empty suddenly and then eventually he would come along going at ten miles an hour with 500 cars behind him! And he always did that, he drove in the middle of the road, very nearly in the middle of the road, very slowly and to hell with all the cars behind him. Nice old man.

I don't remember where the gates were on the road. The [Effingham Common] road was tarted up between 1956 and '68. I know that because I was in Horsley at the time and I remember people talking about it at the time, but I don't remember what it was like.

I've often heard of Lee Brook but I've never found the stream. The new house is being built next to the old Lee Brook House [Leebrooke]. I have it said that there was a stream called Lee Brook which flowed into the pond. Well I suddenly found that I owned all round the pond, but not the pond itself, so I claimed the pond and that pond was bigger at one stage. But before my time they built that road through one side of the pond and the pond was pretty nearly silted up. And about fifteen years ago, I suppose, I got a digger in and we cut out the pond and restored it to something of its natural state, but it's gradually silting up again. But there's no trace of Lee Brook that I know now. There are some ditches around but that was part of Mr Estler's land and I bought it and that was in fact his market garden.

I bought it from Joe Matthews [who died about 2 years ago – the police felt it prudent to close all the local pubs on the day of his funeral] who was a gypsy who lived in one of the houses up against the wheel sheds in West Horsley, and he used to quarter his horses on the Common – chain them there – and he had a deal with the Lord of the Manor and he must have paid rent for it. And he used to have two or three

horses there chained down, with a bucket of water which was soon gone, and all the locals were complaining about it. As Estler got on in life he sold Matthews the plot that was his market garden. I then sort of felled all the apple trees and I got a grant from some government department and I planted it with trees. The rule I remember was that they had to be English trees; but what's an English tree bearing in mind that 75% of what's planted in this country now comes from overseas. Well an English tree is something that was here before the Romans. It was a very restricted list you know! Oaks were all right, but chestnuts for instance weren't. Hornbeams were OK – anyway I planted it and they monitored it for a while and it took off, and anyway I've left it to grow wild now and it's just natural woodland now.

When I lived in Horsley I lived in Hooke Road and my gardens backed on to Heathview and the other side of Heathview backed onto the Common, so I got to know people in Heathview. I remember I was round there one day and I could see a building going up and that was around 1960. And it transpired that a chap had got planning permission to build a house on this (site), which was originally part of the land of Middle Farm and a house went up and it wasn't obnoxious from a distance but it was the house of the chap who lived here. The chap who lived here was a small time builder and he built the stables down there and if you go down and look at them, you'll find that they're built of all sorts of odds and sods because he used his leftovers. But when I arrived here the then wife didn't think much of the house and to cut a long story short we knocked it down and the rule was you had to put up a new house within 200 yards of the old one. So this is here and the old house was 200 yards away. I can't remember the name of the person I bought the house from but he had been here only a few years because there was a Mrs Ingram who lived in Orchard Cottage in 1910 and so on, she owned all that. She had bought from Middle Farm but I don't know what happened to it between 1910 and 1950. I could look up the title deeds. I'll look up the paperwork and see what I can do.

There's Lazy L which everybody knows because of the name. Sylvia has lived there since 1958 I think and she still happily rides her horse around the place which is good and she was there long before me. I actually totally surround it.

I've heard it said that the fair and the circus used to come, but I've never seen it. The nearest approach I've seen to that sort of carry on is that for some years (and there may have been a deal, I don't know) there used to be vehicles parked on the common just around Derby Day. Now whether they were there by agreement with the Lord of the Manor or not I don't know but there was never any fair.

I do remember several attempts to run days when the various people made an attempt to exercise their manorial rights. Somebody has a right to operate sheep and someone else has the right to operate goats and Lee Brooke has the right to pick up firewood. Slaters Oak have the right for goats. I have no rights for my part because it was a new house.

The Council owns Effingham Common now.