

John Adams sharing his memories & his father 's Jack Adams.

Interview 7th November 2023

At John's home, Lyminge Kent

Interviewed by Alethea Lester, Lynda Ryan, and Iris Pearce on behalf of the Hythe Local History Group (HLHG).

Transcribed Verbatim.(Edited)



John Adams and Frankie (2023)



Jack Adams

My first question was what's my full title, name, date of birth and where was I born?

My title is Mr and date of birth is 17/03/43 and I was born in Bournemouth, Dorset. In those days it switched between Dorset and Hampshire, then later we were living in a flat in West London on the A3 as you come out of Wandsworth, so that's the main Rd.

What was my father's full title, name, DOB and where was he born?

He was only a plain Mr as well. His name was Jack Adams and his date of birth 16th January 1912. Now, where was he born? Birth certificate. That was one of the things which appeared in tidying up. He was born 21 Clonmore Street, Wandsworth, but I can't give you any further detail than that. Yes, the rest is all the usual guff from a birth certificate.

Can you tell us about your father's middle name and my middle name as well, and his father's middle name.

It does go back to the clan of Colquhoun in Scotland and over the two or three hundred years they've gradually moved South and they were quite wealthy at one time. Then, when they got down to the edge of London, they went on really hard times. One of my predecessors ended up in the workhouse as well, but things seem to have perked up. I have records of them buying things and apprenticeship papers and so on. I can't give you much more than that, but I did find - and you can take this away if you want to - is a commercial piece of paper about the family. (Colquhoun, Ancient paper). Yes, you might want to look at that in more depth later.

Can you tell us about your father's childhood and where he went to school?

I can't tell you anything about his childhood because I wasn't there and I have no idea. I did meet his mum and his dad, Grandma, and Granddad, but although they lived only about a twenty-minute walk from the flat in West London we weren't terribly close to them. We'd go down Sunday afternoons and that was the dreaded Sunday afternoon of nothing to do. Grandma being one of the old ex-Victorian type people and so I can't really tell you any more about dad's childhood. I think the school he went to was the City of London School .

What was your father's first job and what other jobs did he have?

Now for dad's first job and what other jobs did he have? I have just given you the card which explains better than I can remember.

Jack Adams AIBP ARPS

1912-1998

Jack's photographic life began at the age of 14 or 15 when he used his second-hand 'bellows' Kodak – a present- to take a photograph of an overturned Evening Standard delivery van near his home in South London and sold it- to the Evening Standard earning himself five shillings!

His early working years were spent with various photographic firms, gaining wide technical experience. With the RAF Photo Section in wartime he was involved with Aerial Reconnaissance and Interpretation, and after the War he ran both Selfridge's Portrait Studio and the Store's advertising. It was all excellent preparation for running his own business.

In 1954 Jack Adams acquired the Photographic Studio called Clark's at 153 the High Street (now Crowe Associates-1988)- his 'bread and butter'! His wide past experience meant he need never turn away a commission.

He retired in 1980, and enjoyed a long and active retirement in Hythe, serving to the last weeks of his life on the Committees of the Hythe Civic Society.

Do you know when and why your father became interested in photography?

I don't know when and why he became interested in photography. He was at one time a cinema projectionist, so I remember him talking about how hot it was in the projection room. He did spend many tours of duty on cruise ships taking photographs of the passengers as well. But I don't know how many trips he made up to the war.

What did your father do in the Second World War?

Well, he started off in the Auxiliary fire service and he, very gallantly, waited until the end of the blitz before leaving the fire brigade and joining the RAF. It wasn't an exciting posting for him. He remembered going up to Catterick and square bashing, which they did with all recruits, hour after hour, marching around. Then I don't know how or why, but he ended up in West Africa the hub of the centre of the Second World War and he never saw an enemy the whole time he was there. Someone found out that he was photographic and so he was brought back to do the interrogation of photos as they came in from aerial reconnaissance. He did this to the end of the war. I found in this box, these little model planes he made during the war. Now, they've been in the loft for who knows how many years and how many houses. Would you like them? I thought they'd be enjoyed by more people - than just me putting them back up into another loft. They are an indication of his love of model making.

Did your father have any hobbies or belong to any groups?

We moved from the flat over the shop, which is where I grew up and they had a house built in Dental Street. He made a model of the House that was erected and you could take the roof off and look into the top floor, first floor and ground floor. When Jack died and we moved out I left it with the new owners, because I thought it was more relevant to them moving into the house, than it would have been with me and I hadn't really got room for displaying it.

This is a kit yacht called Windrush I don't know whether there was relevance in that, but I remember him making it in the kitchen, (needs repairing)

He did make a beautiful yacht, which I don't know where it's gone. He made another sailing ship of individual planks for the hull. I think other people would enjoy seeing it than me putting it back in the loft. He wasn't a sailor and didn't sit in and sail boats.

I remember going from the flat up to Wimbledon Common and the lakes were Kingsmere and Queensmere. With the two lakes, we went up there and every family had their own boat. Some of them were motorboats, some of them were yachts. I can remember, so I would have been six or seven.

House in Dental Street was number two and they had it built. I was in the flat over the shop for about six or seven years. We moved into the shop in 1954, so it would be approaching 1960 when we moved into the House.

Showed picture of Queen Mother at Saltwood Castle. John said that Jack signed all his photographs professionally. (I would like to donate it to HCS) John brought more photos to look at.

I haven't got the photos from Portland Plastics factory after it went up in flames. Jack had to take the pictures for insurance record. (John brought more photos, to look at of Jack and family).

House was called Foys. I don't know why. Yes, it was initially called Stone house because there was a huge great rock, and it was the builders that came across it. They couldn't move it with the digger. When it was lifted up the digger's back end went up and crashed down.

What was your father like as a person?

I really didn't have a close relationship with him, he was always quiet. Routine.' When we moved down to Hythe, he would shut the shop at 1:00pm go upstairs, have lunch, half an hour kip and then go downstairs, open the shop, and start the afternoon. In the evening I know that they would go out. They were members of the dramatic society and his model skills came to the fore at Christmas and he made all-star shaped reflectors to go behind all the bulbs on the Christmas tree. which I would imagine he probably got the aluminium from Military supplies. The bombers, during the war would drop lots of aluminium strings almost to distract the bombers. The stuff was to confuse radar of the Germans because it would reflect the radar beam back and I would imagine most RAF people had a bucket of that to use. We burnt his RAF uniform as a guy on 5th November. We stuffed it with paper and so on. I was looking back on it and I thought what a waste. I don't think he had any love for the forces. It was probably a year or two years after the war that guy was stuffed.

We were able look over London to Battersea Power Station and all the highlights of London. I remember the end of the war, wave after wave of planes flying over

London, I would watch them come over the back of the house, then run to the front and see them disappear over the front of the house to the hospital opposite. There were big planes, little planes. All I can think is that it was the Victory fly past. Here's a dated thing - the hospital was for incurables. It was a large hospital opposite us. We went to visit Auntie Anne every other Sunday or something like that and then one Sunday, we didn't go. I asked, "Are we going to see Auntie Anne?" 'No, not this week.' Auntie Anne then slid into obscurity. What a name (for a hospital) - you go in there, you're incurable.

Jack was keen on gardening .

The business and flat over the shop.

So, he was doing that and he was the mechanic behind the drama group. So, any electrics he dealt with. They were in the dramatic society until we moved down to Hythe. I think then he spent all his life in his business, because he would do the touching up, taking the photos and going into the retouching room, colouring out spots on the faces and things like that. He did the developing and then the printing and the retouching. After a while he employed someone but I can't remember his name now he was a lovely guy. We hardly saw him (Jack) in the evenings. We didn't have television until I'd done my O levels, which was so I would not be distracted. This was a bit of a waste of time because I had a small desk in my room up against the window which looked over the bus stop and there was plenty to watch while I was in there. I don't think they ever checked on what I was doing, I had two hours to do my homework and I would get that done in twenty minutes and then spend the time doodling, looking out the window and looking at the girls as they went past.

Did you have an interest in photography?

I did, but only as a hobby. Having seen, particularly when we moved to the shop, seeing the hours that my father put in and the tiny little chemical ridden darkroom for developing and printing. That was not for me, I could think of more interesting things to do.

Can you tell us about your time living in Hythe, school, jobs and interests?

When we moved down, I was just 11 and I was told it wasn't worth me going to primary school because I only had about 3 weeks left, which initially having lived in London up to then, it was marvellous, you know, beach and being able to go down and spend time on the beach and so on. I knew nobody when I went to secondary

school. Everyone else had groups from their primary school. Dad had arranged for a fifth former to take me to school, and so I went downstairs, stand on the pavement for this guy, who didn't want a sprog tagging along with him. So, I just had to keep an eye on him. We had bus passes which would take us into Bouverie Square.

So, my time in living in Hythe. A lot of cycling over the marsh, I saw my first lamb being born. I didn't know what was happening. I stopped and I watched as this thing was appearing all slimy, slippery, and so on. When we got a dog which, just by coincidence was a border collie, I would go for long walks up in the country.

School was the Harvey.

Break in recording.

John's career as a science teacher- Peckham

It was a tough split site school. Years one, two and three in one building and half a mile away the upper school. There were about three or four children in the sixth form in Peckham. I was asked if I would be in a video. One of the TV companies was making a day in the life of a series of different people. My Head knew that I wasn't very well off and I had two young children. I was selected because I was going to get paid for it, and so they made this twenty- minute documentary of 'the day in the life of a teacher' which was fun. But what they didn't film was the rougher elements and the kids, of which some had come straight from a Rural West Indian Island. Some of them had never worn shoes before and no surprise that they found it difficult to adapt.

We had some really nice kids who were at the bottom of the pile. There were loads of new comprehensives in South London opening . We had a cookery place in one primary school and a good workshop, in the other direction.

You could leave school at fourteen in those days and I had the fourth-year class. With Last two lessons on Friday afternoon. They would come to me in the lower school and they had to go pass Peckham market and most of them probably worked in Peckham market as well. So, I was having a really difficult time. The old Deputy suggested that I should make it more interesting to science with various things, which I did with a dissection. In those days, we ordered in the rats and then put them into the gas chamber and then used them nice and fresh, but we kept them for a few lessons. You have to do dissections in order, because if you don't do it like that, then you could cut through something that you want to dissect later on.

I took the football team, swimming club and science club, which was two or three times in the term. We would go to interesting places. In fact, we came to Dungeness Power station. I wanted to take them down the mines, but they wouldn't let girls go down. So, I said "I'm sorry, but I can't just bring the boys. It's got to be everyone, or no one." Because, when I was at Harvey, I went down. I can't remember which mine it was, but it was the deepest mine in the country and incredibly hot. Is it Betteshanger - probably the deepest?

I was there for much longer, as normally teachers in their first teaching job spend two years with general mistakes out of the way and then they move on. I was there for eight or nine years, because I enjoyed it. It was hard and it got progressively more aggressive. I was on duty one break time and a group of kids came up (at the time I was head of year) "Sir, you know that new teacher." "Which one?" (A lot of teachers will never stay very long) "He is over there." I said "Yeah, he won't be here after Christmas." I said, "What do you mean?" "He won't be, we don't like him."

He wasn't there after Christmas; they just made his life so miserable that he left.

Where did you go after teaching in Peckham?

I then went down to Eastleigh in Hampshire, as not quite a deputy, but just above the normal teacher role. I then moved to a new school that opened in Eastleigh. I can't remember the village. It was a new secondary school, very innovative design. I was deputy head there after three years or something like that. I then became the manager of a schools' consortium of 13 schools, which were put together all over the country. They were put into consortium and would have a professional to lead the way under the guidance of a group of heads of schools. It was aimed at encouraging schools to pick up technology. A lot of schools in those days if they had a computer, that was it. I did a lot of 'in service' training with the staff. I had a five-year contract, but it wasn't a teacher's contract, it was a professional business one. So, I had like six weeks holiday or something like that, but maybe four weeks holiday. Towards the end of my time there, and I was beginning to say myself, "What am I going to be doing next?" Pfizer at Sandwich had just got a new post called Academic Liaison Manager, which was to link the company with local schools, with the view, not necessarily of recruiting their kids, but encouraging them to take science.

Gradually when I took it over, it was only six formers that they allowed on site. I got to having five years old coming round the site. Not necessarily to teach them science or anything like that, but to give them an idea of what work is.

They were all divided up into groups of five with two adults - one from the school and one from the company. The teacher was very innovative. That was my idea to get them to go around various things. There was a footbridge over the road linking two sides of the site and the kids had a little job. They had to do tally of the cars going underneath. How many red ones? How many green ones? And you have to do that and then they would take that back to school. Also work on the shapes of the various buildings, triangles, squares & flat roofs.

So, A you need an innovative teacher, Art teachers, you think? Will they be? I had advertised in all the secondary schools. An opportunity for them to bring an art group to spend time just drawing or painting something they found interesting. This didn't get picked up by one, which I found really disappointing.

What years were you there between?

Well, I retired 1993? I think maybe a bit later than that and I went there, I think in about 1988?

(if John retired at 65, the year would have been 2008)

Yes, I decided I would take it. They were looking for people to take early retirement and I was sixty-five, something like that. And the programme I had was quite innovative. Not many companies were doing that and I was one of the few. I don't know of another major company having five years old (children) coming around their site. Sixth formers would come in chemistry groups which was arranged with the chemistry department, that they could make a compound at school, then bring it in and have it analysed, under the powerful machines they had then they would get the results back. Well done 100%. End result or about half and half.

Did you have any contact with Portex during that time?

Not really, because Portex was manufacturing plastic and Pfizer was (manufacturing) drugs.

We wondered if there was ever any interaction because they were medical plastics.

Yes, not that I know of. No. But there were about seven thousand people working there and I was a very small cog in the wheel.

Where did you live when you worked at Pfizer?

I lived for a while in Sandwich, just over the bridge and then I moved to a house in Ripple, which is a tiny village not far from Dover.

We understand you worked at Mackeson's.

Oh, I did. That was one of the best summer holidays I'd had. My parents were desperate for me not to be a teacher. So, they went to a careers catalogue and found a job which used the A levels I was doing, which were physics, chemistry, zoology, and botany. I did zoology and botany because of Folkestone Tech. The old guy there said A level biology is really difficult, so we're going to do A level botany and A level zoology. A much better chance of getting a job or a pass with that. Dad arranged with being in Rotary. (It's got is uses). I was given the delightful task of moving through all the manufacturing. I can remember odd bits. The grain was in silos in the roof and then when they started a new batch, a wooden square pipe type thing. To let the grain through you pulled a wooden plaque out and counted it and then put the plaque back in. I did that for.... No, I didn't do that to start. But I watched and the guy I was with said 'I've got to go off. Can you do the next batch? I want this of that type of grain and that of that type of grain and another 10 seconds of that grain.' I couldn't remember, so they probably had a unique batch of beer from that particular section. I was seventeen the year was 1960.

All the men and I approved of this. They had an allocation of a pint of beer a day and if you had the job of digging out mash tonnes, which is where they boiled the grain up and it had a trap door in the floor of it, so you dug down and emptied that, got that open and then shovelled all the grain out really hot, really steamy. You had to drink two pints of beer before you were allowed to go on to the rest of the day. Oh, it was a tough one.

I did bump into my parents one Sunday evening. There was, just down from the shop, a solicitor's office in the High Street. Well, there was also a pub and I was invited by one of the older choristers, after Evensong, for a drink. To my horror, to that pub just down from my parents. well, my parents had been at the service, unfortunately, they stayed and had a chat with the vicar and then came on home. I thought they would be home by now. So, I said my goodbyes and I opened the door (to the pub) and stepped straight into my parents!

How long did you work at Mackeson? Was it a good experience for you?

Just the summer, yeah. It was, I mean, it was interesting and the skills of some of the guys. There was a long haul, the racking room where the barrels were filled with beer at one end. They were then spun down to the other end, must have been 30 or 40 yards and they could spin those full barrels next to the guy at the other end who might have to move it six inches then it was in place.

What was Mackeson like to work for?

I didn't really know. I was given a lovely experience of different departments, so I think probably that was my father's influence, who was hoping for me to become a brewer. Thankfully, I didn't pursue that because it was just at the beginning when a lot of breweries were merging and so if you had two breweries with a Chief Brewer, by the time you've merged, then you've only got one brewer. I would have been right at the beginning of that.

And when you were a chorister, do you have any memories of the choirmaster at St. Leonards or any of the things that went on at the church when you were in the choir?

Yeah, I can remember some. I was very good. I remember I enjoyed being a chorister. In fact, I became a chorister before we left London, before I was eleven. I was told to go and wait in the vestry or wherever to send any late comers through, but I wasn't told to go through myself and they were rehearsing music for Easter and the Hallelujah chorus. They started practising that and I desperately wanted to. I can still remember - I desperately wanted to go there, but I haven't been told that I could go back in. And then at the end, they all came out and I missed it all and I was really heartbroken. It was a piece of music that I still love and just as a 9 or 10 year old, I was really fond of that. In Hythe at St. Leonards the highlights were if we had a wedding and that was one and six pence and I think a standard Saturday night, a Sunday night would have been a shilling. We didn't have many funerals. I think I would remember one. There were some naughty behaviours going on by the older boys but I was too frightened to get involved.

Why did Jack choose Hythe?

Dad came to Hythe for the Business. I'm not quite sure, but he visited two or three businesses. One in Lincolnshire, where, apparently, they got off the train and the smell of cabbages wafted over. My mother said, "We're getting back on the next train. "They just came back home again. So, I would imagine that he went to three or four.

What do you think your highest achievement has been?

Well, I had a big reputation for my programme of things which I used to do for the kids and I was put up for an OBE or something like that.

But I think probably I've got nine grandchildren, 8 boys and the last one was a girl and they are all delightful kids, they really are. I don't see them all that often, but whenever I do, they give me a big hug or chat with me. Yeah, and two of them came down to help empty the loft as well. And so I think really the fact that they have developed into such super kids (or developing) is the responsibility of the parents, who obviously got it from their parents. They are really kids that anyone would be proud of.

When and where was your father buried/cremated?

He was cremated at Charing Crematorium. The service was at the church (St Leonard's). He was 86 or something like that.

And he heavily smoked all through his life. In the war or not long after, there was capstan full strength with no tips which suited dad down to the ground because he really liked bit of flavour. He was so upset when they were withdrawn, and even more so when, I think I don't know, can you get non tip?

Mum was a social smoker. I can remember as a little boy, so I would have been perhaps four or five, sitting in the lounge on sort of a long, padded bench and the room was full of smoke and I felt sick. I had a headache as well. Put me off smoking.

Turn the recorder off, OK? Thank you.

Due to ill health John will be moving to Winchester December 2023.



Jack Adams as a child



Jack auxillary fire service 1938-1940



Jack, father and mother silver wedding 1935



Jack and Ena Phyllis Adams (nee March)



Model planes and yacht made by Jack Adams (donated to HLHG)



Jack Adams outside his shop Hythe 153 High Street