

## Oral History Interview with Sue Zirps

### By Sue Zirps, 2014 Transcribed UK Transcriptions



*Susan and David Hull outside Bottle Cottage*

**Sue Zirps:** So this is an interview with Susan Hull, interviewed by Sue Zirps. Susan, I wonder if we could start by having a little recap on your life before you moved to East Meon? Where were you born and when, and a little bit about your school days maybe?

**Susan Hull:** Well, as a child, I lived at Middleton-on-Sea, near Bognor. I went off to boarding school, The Royal School for Daughters of Officers of the Army, which was actually in Bath. Because it was still the wartime then, we were evacuated to Longleat. So I spent the first few years of boarding school in the country at Longleat, which is wonderful. You go back now and you think, "Oh, yes. In that great big room, we had a whole house of 20 little school beds there".

**Sue Zirps:** Oh, that sounds lovely.

**Susan Hull:** So it was good, that. Then, I was back in Bath when I was older and wanted to go down the town. So that worked very well indeed.

Then, when I left school, I became a nurse, an SRN. I went to Barts Hospital for that. Then, a typical thing, I married a medical student and we moved down eventually. First of all, we were in Cheshunt, in Herefordshire. One girl was born before then, and two others were born at Cheshunt. Then, we moved down to practice in Lindford, Headley, Bordon, that area.

So I was married to him for 25 years. We had the three girls, Janet, Sally Anne and Helen. Janet and Helen both live in Alton

with their families, really left home now. Sally Anne is in Switzerland with her three.

Then, when Alan and I split up, I was on my own in small house at Kingsley, near Bordon, an old house. I extended that considerably. I then met David and we decided that we wanted to make a new house between us.

We were looking, and we drew an irregular line on the map that was near his work. He made trailers. He was in charge of, well, it was his firm, making trailers at Alresford, trailers of all sorts. I wanted to be near-ish my mother, and near-ish my work at Alton, because I had gone back to nursing part time at Treloar's.

I wanted an old house. David did not mind. He was quite happy with a new house, but he said, "Alright, if you want a new house that is okay, but it has got to be convenient." All the old houses we had looked at, he considered were not convenient. You had to go downstairs and through the kitchen to get to the loo, for instance, which was not his cup of tea at all, nor mine really. Others were dark. Anyway, we eventually found this one and it suited us both.

### **Bottle Cottage**

**Sue Zirps:**

So it was more the house that you came for than the village, to start with, was it?

**Susan Hull:**

Yes, yes, yes. I had only been to East Meon once before. Although I had not lived very far away, because we used to live at Headley.

We thought, "Well, yes, this is just about right for us." So we put in a bid for it, and then the owners, Dick and Ann Hutchings, said, "Oh, well, actually somebody else has just put a bid in, but we are not sure they can raise the money." So we kept our fingers crossed and they could not. They dropped out and then we got it.

**Sue Zirps:** Oh, so –

**Susan Hull:** So that was lovely, and we have extended it quite a bit since then.

**Sue Zirps:** What year was that, that you moved to the village?

**Susan Hull:** In December 1984.

**Sue Zirps:** Right. What sort of condition was the house in when you first came here?

**Susan Hull:** Well, the house was in a reasonable condition. We have extended it, but it was quite a good condition. Dick Hutchings, the previous owner, had got these two condemned cottages, when he bought it 16 years beforehand, and converted them into one, and added on the outhouses, which he used old timber for, old oak timber taken from a building in Petersfield actually, which was being demolished, and old tiles. So it all ties in well together.

The garden was not as it is now, very definitely. The bottom part was just an orchard, and all the trees had canker, so we cannot grow apple trees. We could have plum and other things. We have got lots of soft fruits but not apples.



*Bottle Cottage before conversion*



*Bottle Cottage and garden, before conversion*

**Sue Zirps:** When you first came, did you concentrate on the house or the garden, or a bit of both?

**Susan Hull:** Yes, I suppose it was really the garden, because the house was liveable in, but then we extended it. We put a bathroom in the – because when Sally Anne came over from Switzerland with her three, with one bathroom in the house, it really was a bit pushed. So we put another one in, which made our room ensuite, which took out some of the attic space above the outhouses.

Then, later on still, we put a little garden room on in the corner of the house. One of the garages I have since made into a study or an extra room. So we have gradually done that, but the garden we changed a lot.

**Sue Zirps:** Did the garden have many plants in when you arrived?

**Susan Hull:** No, very little, very little. It was just a narrow bed around the top of the drive, and a narrow border. No, there was not much in it, and as I say, no vegetable garden at all.

**Sue Zirps:** It is all your design now?

**Susan Hull:** Yes.



*Bottle Cottage from garden*



*Bottle Cottage from Workhouse Lane*



*Roses at Bottle Cottage*



*Flower bed at Bottle Cottage*

**Sue Zirps:** You did not have help with –

**Susan Hull:** No, no, no, did not have any help. There was an old, ancient hawthorn hedge that came down from the top. It still is at the very top. It came all the way down to the gate here. Dick, the Hutchings, had taken out part of the actual garden that was left in what was the orchard next door. So we had to pull this hedge out and –

**Sue Zirps:** Gosh. I bet that was a job?

**Susan Hull:** Well, David got a winch and did it that way, and then we put in all the soft fruits and the vegetables. I have made the vegetable garden smaller now, but it is still there, and put a greenhouse up, yes.

**Sue Zirps:** Well, I think your garden is very well known now in East Meon, isn't it? Always open for the Gardens Open and –

**Susan Hull:** Gardens Open, yes, yes. I think I have had it open almost every time since they first started way back in –

**Sue Zirps:** I think it is a favourite with all the people who visit the village as well.



*Visitors to Bottle Cottage at Gardens Open*



*Susan Hull at Gardens Open*

## Garden Club

What about your involvement with the Garden Club then?

Because talking about gardens, I know you have been involved with the Garden Club for a long time.

**Susan Hull:**

Yes, I have. I joined the Garden Club really as soon as I got here. I had belonged at Headley, to their one, and I knew that I wanted to belong to that, so I did. I very soon got on the committee. Well, I have been on and off the committee ever since, I suppose. So, yes, I have been quite involved with that. I was secretary at one time, or was I chairman? I cannot remember. I think I was chairman actually, yes.



*Garden club cups, L to R Keith Kitcher, April Richards, Monique Aldridge, Susan Hull*



*Garden Club urns 1992, Back row, Peter Street, Jackie Wilson, front row Adrian Pelly, Susan Hull, Monique Aldridge*

**Sue Zirps:** Yes, yes. So you have been very involved in the Gardens Open and in the August show?

**Susan Hull:** Yes, yes. Well, Adrian Pelly started the Gardens Open. He started it just one year and we had, I think, a lot of gardens that day and that time. It was in August, but it was not a good month to have them open because there is not so much. Everything is going over there to a certain extent.

So we then changed it having one in April when we have got the daffodils, and hopefully the daffodils in the churchyard. Then, one in June, when hopefully we get the roses, and the delphiniums, and things like that, but that has been changed again now. So everything changes, quite rightly.

**Sue Zirps:** Yes. What about people in the village that you perhaps were on the Garden Committee with, and older people that perhaps are not here anymore? Can you tell us anything about some of the people that have lived in the village a long time?

**Susan Hull:** Yes. Well, not much. The Fisher sisters, who lived in Temple Brow, they were a lovely old couple. I knew them. They were very knowledgeable, or certainly Clara was.

Well, Adrian Pelly, he had a lot to do with the Garden Club, as did Peter Street, all being chairman in their time, and being very helpful, and always having their gardens open and so on, and...

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**Sue Zirps:** Other people in the village, Susan, that you knew, what sort of memories have you got?

**Susan:** Richard Burley was the chairman of the Parish Council when I first joined it. He lived at Hockley Cottage with his wife Jill, they moved to Emsworth.

Other people may come to mind, but I cannot think of any for the moment.

**Sue Zirps:** Okay. You were involved with the Parish Council for quite a long time, I believe.

**Susan:** Yes. I was on the Parish Council for two four-year stints.

**Sue Zirps:** Can you remember what year you went onto the Council?



*Opening of children's play area, 1996. L to R, Jean Rockett, Joan Haines, Brigadier John Simpson (Chair, Village Hall Committee, Monique Aldridge, Wilson Atkinson (Chair, Parish Council), Freddie Standfield, Bert Perry, Rev Peter Wadsworth, adult on swing: Susan Hull.*

**Susan:** No I can't. Moderately soon after I got here; perhaps three or four years after I got here I suppose. When I was on the Parish Council, Wilson Atkinson was Chairman for a lot of the time, and then Michael Atkinson. When Wilson was Chairman we built the new playground by the Village Hall, and I was more or less in charge of that.



**Sue Zirps:** Oh right, yes.

**Susan Hull:** And we did the one down on the Recreation Ground as well. I enjoyed being on the Parish Council, but it is always a frustrating thing because you have no real power; you can only give suggestions to the Council.

**Sue Zirps:** Did you have a particular responsibility when you were on the Council?

**Susan Hull:** Just these playgrounds, that was the main one.

**Sue Zirps:** Okay.

**Susan Hull:** It was nice to be really involved like that.

### **Village Womble**

**Sue Zirps:** When did you become the 'Village Womble'?

**Susan Hull:** When I gave up the – I think at the last Parish Council meeting I was at, they wanted a new 'Village Womble', a 'picker upper of litter' but I think 'Womble' is a much nicer name.

**Sue Zirps:** It is.

**Susan Hull:** We were talking about who they could ask, which young person would do it, and I said, "Oh for goodness' sake, I'm giving up here, I'll do it," and that was the beginning of it.

**Sue Zirps:** Yes. You did that for years, didn't you?

**Susan Hull:** I did, for about nine or ten years, something like that. Actually I thoroughly enjoyed it because a) I enjoyed making the village look a bit neater, and b) you walked along and you saw things, and you met people, friends and so on. It was quite a good job actually, because I could do it in my own time when I wanted to, so I could do it all on a Monday if I wanted to, or I could do a little bit each day.

**Sue Zirps:** Were there any areas of the village that were worse than others for litter?

**Susan Hull:** Yes, the car park up on Coombe Corner, always. Basically I did the part in the centre of the village from the shop, well even from our house up to the church and up into the village, that one I tried to do several times a week because that is where it shows most and where a lot of the rubbish was.

Outside the school wasn't too bad, but no, it was all over I had to do it, and I did all the paths.

### Tree Warden

**Sue Zirps:** Because you have been involved with the footpath as well, haven't you? No, Tree Warden, sorry, I was getting that wrong. It is the Tree Warden you have been involved with.

**Susan Hull:** Yes, when the Tree Warden venture started, Peter Street and I were Tree Wardens, and then he gave up and Rosemary Ryder took over. Rosemary and I have been Tree Wardens for a very long time.

One of the first things we all did was to plant trees around the roads that come into the village. Now looking at those trees twenty odd years on, it's really fantastic because they are proper trees and they don't need any maintenance. Beforehand, we put them in when we had two very dry summers, and although we put a mulch of old carpets on top it was impossible to keep them watered when they were way out of the village like that, and quite a few died so we had to replant them. Eventually they got going.

**Sue Zirps:** Whereabouts were these? On the main road going out of the village?

**Susan Hull:** On the main roads; on the road from Petersfield just inside the hedges, and then on Coombe Road, on the road side of the hedges,

and then down the West Meon Road just inside the farmer's field. Mostly on the south side, though.

Particularly looking at the ones on Coombe Road and along the Petersfield Road on the north side, they are really good trees. They were all Lime, Cherry or Beech.

**Sue Zirps:** Did you get involved in planting around the cricket pitch at all, the Recreation Ground?



*Planting Memorial Oak, Cricket field,  
Frank Wheeler, Anella Parker Martin,  
Rosemary Ryder, Susan Hull*

**Susan Hull** There are not many trees there. We replanted a few because we were given them, etc, and we planted the Millennium Oak and things like that, but it was the hedge there that we laid. Between Frogmore Lane and the Recreation Ground, that hedge had been allowed to go and it was all straggly and too tall, and I had been with a friend of mine to Devon; we learned how to lay hedges, and we came back and got some volunteers from the village, and we laid that hedge. I think we made a jolly good job of it.

**Sue Zirps:** That's fantastic, yes it's lovely.

**Susan Hull:** It still has been cut a little bit on the long side, but anyhow it is better than it was. When it first was done we were really proud of it.

**Sue Zirps:** Gosh, very clever.

**Susan Hull:** We learned to put all the sleeves in and put plaiting round the top and so on. It looked good. So that was quite good to do. We did it over one winter.

**Sue Zirps:** And the May Fair Susan, obviously you have been involved in that for many, many years and I know particularly you are named the 'Queen of Bric-a-brac' in the village.

**Susan Hull:** Yes, well-

**Sue Zirps:** How did that come about?

## WI

**Susan Hull:** I think Jean Cook and I have done a lot of jumble sales one way or another for the church or the sewing group, particularly the WI. The WI is in Stroud, but quite a few people from East Meon go there. Jean and I seem to do the jumble sale for that, and then I got involved with – they wanted someone to do the Bric-a-brac at the May Fair and so I took that on and I have done that for quite a few years. It raises a good lot of money, actually. I have actually given it up this year.

**Sue Zirps:** Handing over the reins to Jane.

**Susan Hull:** Yes, I'm handing over the reins, but I still help anyhow. We always sort out that one, sort it out beforehand by pricing things beforehand because if you leave it to the day you never know, and you get better prices if you put it on beforehand. So yes, that what I will mostly be doing for the May Fair. And I distributed pamphlets in Petersfield or Horndean as well.

## Village

**Sue Zirps:** Excellent. What memories have you got of the village? How has it changed in the time since you first came, to now? Obviously shops

have changed a lot, what could you comment on in terms of change over the last 30 years?

**Susan Hull:**

Unfortunately a lot of people want the village to stay as it was, but it is not in a time warp; it has got to grow and some of the houses, and the way houses have been built are not according to what most people think the village should have. But it has happened and there is not much we can do about it because, as I say, the Parish Council has no power. Hopefully this Village Plan will produce a bit more power for what the village wants.

But anyhow, yes. There are some new council houses or shared ownership houses up Duncan Road, and then there is The Green which, when it first went up, people were going, "Nyeuh, nyeuh, nyeuh." But actually they look very good across The Green now, they have mellowed in.



*The Green*

**Sue Zirps:**

Yes, they blend in quite well don't they, the way they have been designed?

- Susan Hull:** Yes they have, and they are all copies of houses in the village, different points about them. There has been a bit of infilling and adding on.
- Sue Zirps:** We get that everywhere, don't we?
- Susan Hull:** You get that everywhere
- Sue Zirps:** It's impossible really to get away from it.
- Susan Hull:** You can't leave the village exactly the same, and I think it is necessary that we do have some new houses on the odd occasion. But we don't want another big estate, that is what we don't want.
- Sue Zirps:** No, and neither do we want too much infilling I guess, it's just trying to get a bit of a balance.
- Susan Hull:** Well yes. Infilling with one house there, or three houses there, or on the edge of the village, if we've got to have them, we've got to have them; we haven't got much to choose about that.
- Sue Zirps:** But then we want to provide some affordable houses, don't we?
- Susan Hull:** Oh yes, very definitely I think so.
- Sue Zirps:** For people, to stop them moving out of the village.
- Susan Hull:** Because the old, original people from the village, they cannot afford – their offspring cannot afford to get a house in the village, and you put yourself on the housing register and unless you have got umpteen children or something like that, you cannot get anywhere near the front of the queue.
- Sue Zirps:** Also it is difficult for people to perhaps downsize isn't it, if they still want to remain in the village?

**Susan Hull:** Yes, that is difficult, although it's a shame that it isn't more easy because then these bigger houses could be had by other people, but there we are. That's-

**Sue Zirps:** Not a problem we are going to solve.

**Susan Hull:** No.

### **Shops**

**Sue Zirps:** What about shops in the village? How has that changed in the time you have been here, because I know shops have come and gone?

**Susan Hull:** There was one at the bottom of Temple Lane opposite The Isaac, which was a general shop when I first came here. I didn't use it much because with working and whatever I was in Dalton for that, and the one just down the road from here was the easier one to go to.

There was one in Glenthorne; that was actually a petrol station and a repair shop. Chris Pamphlin and Herbie Goddard had that, and then it was sold on. The shop there was used for something else and I really cannot remember what it was; it wasn't food, it was a sort of gift shop, I cannot honestly remember what it was.

The Post Office used to be opposite The George, and when the post lady gave up that – she used to sell wool as well as have the Post Office – when she gave that up, then Jenny and Frank Wheeler rented part of the house up Forge Sound.

**Sue Zirps:** Riverside?

**Susan Hull:** Riverside, yes that's Riverside, and they had a lovely little Post Office there, and general shop. It was so nice, we all went in there and it was the sort of hub, people chatting and very nice indeed. But they could not afford the rent and so they went, and now we have got the Post Office in the shop here.

East Meon Stores when I first came here, there was a butcher there. Keith Kitcher was the butcher there; he had a whole butchering department which was very nice indeed. The shelves were really full. Should I say this?

**Sue Zirps:** I think you can say what you like, actually. That's fine, this is...

**Susan Hull:** But there was no Post Office actually there because there was the other one. Now things have changed again and-

**Sue Zirps:** And let's face it, it is not a great shop.

**Susan Hull:** No, I think it could perhaps be improved. They have left it a bit late to try and improve it, that's the trouble. They have got tables inside but I have never seen anybody sit down in there.

**Sue Zirps:** No, neither have I. Unless there are the odd walkers who go in on a Sunday or something...

**Susan Hull:** Yes, maybe that is all. It is very nice to have the two pubs in the village, and the fish and chips which you can go and pick up. Much cheaper at The Isaac, but there we are.

**Susan Hull:** There is a Fish and Chip van as well, isn't there, at the school? I've never tried that.

**Susan Hull:** Yes there is, on a Wednesday I believe, I've never been there.

Sue Zirps: Alright, thank you.

**Susan Hull:** And the school, that has had different headmasters and mistresses, and I think it is on the up and coming now which is really nice.

**Sue Zirps:** Yes.

**Susan Hull:** Really nice, because it makes – the church and the two pubs and some kind of a shop with the Post Office, and a school, it is wonderful because that is what a typical village wants.



**Sue Zirps:** The hub of the community, isn't it?

**Susan Hull:** That's what everybody wants.

**Sue Zirps:** Okay, well thank you very much Susan. Is there anything else that we could cover, or do you think we have covered...? Any snippets or?

**Susan Hull:** When we stop I will maybe think of something. Pause it now and let's see if we can find something-

**Sue Zirps:** Alright then.

**Ends 15.25**