

## Charles Springs Interview

Interviewer: Hello, Charles. Perhaps we can start with you telling me when you were born?

Charles Springs: On 27 April 1928.

Interviewer: Which makes you?

Charles Springs: Makes me 91, or 92 next month.

Interviewer: Right. Where were you born?

Charles Springs: At Aldershot at my parents' house.

Interviewer: Was your father in the army then?

Charles Springs: Father was in the army for about 25 years, and then worked for the army, a Royal Engineer in work service as a clerk of works.

Interviewer: Right.

Charles Springs: And for a short time during the war, a garrison engineer.

Interviewer: So where did you go to school?

Charles Springs: I went to school in Aldershot and then Farnborough Grammar School.

Interviewer: Oh, God. That's kind of ironic. My son went there eventually.

Charles Springs: Most amusing thing was that we were bussed- there was strict segregation then. We were bussed in double-decker buses to Farnborough, and then the same buses collected the Farnborough girls and took them all back to Aldershot, so we shouldn't mix. And I can remember, the prefects would put you on detention if you were seen talking to a grammar school girl in Aldershot. We always used to say, "That was my sister".

Interviewer: When did you leave school?

Charles Springs: At the age of 16, which was during the war. And I went into a traineeship at the Royal Engineer work service at Farnborough.

Interviewer: Right, okay. So you were still living in Aldershot then?

Charles Springs: Yes, with my parents.

Interviewer: Right, okay fine. So what, did you get a professional qualification out of that?

Charles Springs: Higher national, things like that. Not a full professional one, no. I never managed that. Part of the traineeship was you had to go to night school three nights a week, but we used to skive and do the drawing in the drawing office during the day. Can I go off on a tangent?

Interviewer: Yes, of course you can.

Charles Springs: Just about the head draughtsman. He was a Yorkshireman, and the meanest man I've ever come across. He ruled with a rod of iron, but he was so tight fisted that he used to buy a box of Swan Extra the cigarettes, to light his self-rolled cigarettes, and split them in half with a penknife through the head.

He saw me watching him one day and he made me- every time he got this new box of Swan Extra, I had to sit in the drawing office and split a load of 50 to make it 100.

Interviewer: Okay. What did you do after that? You ended up with a job, obviously?

Charles Springs: After that, at 17-and-three-quarters, I was called up into the army.

Interviewer: Which regiment did you join?

Charles Springs: I did my infantry training with the Norfolks and Dorsets at Norwich, Britannia Barracks. And then went to Scotland to train as a Sapper in the Royal Engineers.

Interviewer: So what was the dates on that?

Charles Springs: I would have said from just before 18. I had my eighteenth birthday at Norwich. And I did three years, because it's before National Service. It was age and service, and I had no age and no service, but you scored points. I was 73 group, blokes who fought in the war are sort of the twenties and thirties groups.

But I did get a demob suit which makes me superior to anyone who only did National Service. We hated them. They came in and went out, and we were still soldiering on.

Interviewer: What year did you then leave the army then? After the war?

Charles Springs: Well, yes. The war had finished just when I was called up. The war finished when I was 17-and-a-half. And the Japanese gave in then, because they knew I was coming. The fact that the Americans dropped a couple of atomic bombs had nothing to do with it.

Interviewer: What did you do when you left the army?

Charles Springs: I got reinstated and went back into the War Office, and then I got promoted and I went and worked for the Director of Fortifications and Works at Chessington. Still with the War Office. And I got fed up with the travelling after three years and became an architectural assistant at Farnborough Council.

Interviewer: Which eventually became Rushmoor, presumably?

Charles Springs: Yes. Yes.

Interviewer: So where were you living at that time?

Charles Springs: Whilst I was at Farnborough, I got married to a girl I'd known, and bought a lodge from the council. I bought a lodge at a space in Farnborough Park, which they had requisitioned. It wasn't very salubrious. Do you want me to say it?

Interviewer: Was it the lodge where the school is?

Charles Springs: No, no, it's Farnborough Park. In the Crescent. Tree goals.

Interviewer: Let's move on. What was your first memory of Langrish?

Charles Springs: First memory would have been, during the war when there was petrol rationing, and eventually there was no petrol except if you were on essential work. But my father being a clerk of works still had a petrol ration and maintained his own car. And he used to visit all the army building sites, and I used to scrounge a lift. I was allowed to sit in the back provided I kept quiet.

Interviewer: So that brought you to this area?

Charles Springs: Through here, yes. I can vaguely remember what we thought were boy scouts, elderly boy scouts at the close, which were in fact New Zealanders with their boy scout hats. I've been thinking about this. I can remember open fronted workshop sheds down in The Close that processed timber.

Interviewer: They had a sawmill there, yes?

Charles Springs: Yes, a sawmill. And this overhead ropeway, which fascinated my father. And they hauled the timber down from the hanger to the close.

Interviewer: In the field behind the houses in The Close, there is actually a trackway as well.

Charles Springs: I haven't seen it, but according to Phil there's great concrete foundations.

Interviewer: Yes, there's a foundation going all the way up and down.

Charles Springs: That was an upright and the logs were pulled, dragged, they were lifted.

Interviewer: Lifted one end and then dragged down?

Charles Springs: Yes and dragged down and then converted in the sawmill.

Interviewer: The bottom of the trackway was dug up by the people who built our house, and it was used in the foundations. Phil was happy because it took some of the concrete out of his field for him.

Okay, so you also talked about remembering, before that, remembering the Italian prisons of war?

Charles Springs: Yes. The prison camp was opposite the Seven Stars in the field there.

Interviewer: Where the tin hut used to be?

Charles Springs: Yes, the tin hut was their dining room.

Interviewer: I see. Okay.

Charles Springs: It was left over from that. The rest were Nissen huts and they've been demolished and long gone, although Mrs Snow says that some of the foundations of the Nissen huts are still in that field where the sheep are.

Because there was no petrol, everyone cycled, and I become a keen cyclist and a member of the cycling club in Farnham. We used to cycle through here. The big highlight was afternoon tea at a pub, and the Isaac Walton was one of the centres. Twenty or thirty of us at a time would descend on that.

Interviewer: It wasn't called the Isaac Walton then, though, was it?

Charles Springs: I can't remember. The New Inn?

Interviewer: Yes, the New Inn. We've got photographs of it.

Charles Springs: Yes. And other clubs there used it. You'd get as many as sixty, seventy bikes outside, like supermarket trollies.

Interviewer: Lovely.

Charles Springs: But cycling through here, the Italian prisoners of war were goodies, and they worked on the farms. And you'd see them walking about in Stroud, and they wore army battle dresses with a huge triangle cut out the back and replaced with dark brown triangles. Diamonds. Dark brown diamonds. No hats.

We thought they were real poofs, because they had lovely, long hair, and we used to wolf-whistle if we went past them. I'm sure it was rude, the reply from the Italians. But the girls thought they were lovely, you know, we had all short haircuts.

Interviewer: Presumably some of them stayed and married in the area, did they? That's what normally happens, isn't it?

Charles Springs: Yes.

Interviewer: So when did you come to live in Langrish?

Charles Springs: Twenty-five years ago, when we bought this Yew Tree farmhouse.

Interviewer: Was it a building like that? Was it like this, was it all one building?

Charles Springs: Yes, yes, yes. We've only improved it. A chap, Keegan, did most of the alterations and he sold it to us.

Interviewer: It wasn't a farmhouse then? It wasn't a farm anymore, just a farmhouse?

Charles Springs: No, no. Further back.

Interviewer: Do you know when it ceased to be a farmhouse and people farming the land at the back?

Charles Springs: No. Dosh would know this, or Roger. Roger would know better than me. I think it's when the estate broke up. Five farms, they were offered to the tenant farmers at the going rate and the chap who lived here, who had eight or ten cows and did the milk round by bicycle for the village, he got fed up with it. So he said he'd keep the house, didn't want the land, and the land was eventually purchased by Lambert's.

Interviewer: Is that Manor Farm?

Charles Springs: Yes.

Interviewer: Right. So it became park of Manor Farm?

Charles Springs: Yes.

Interviewer: And still is?

Charles Springs: And still is. They used to drive the cows across the road, but because of the traffic, they neatly divided the farm, livestock north of the A272, and their winter feed to the south of it. So they grow the winter feed and grass and barley, etc, which they've got their own mill up there to feed. And they've now changed from milk to beef cattle.

Interviewer: Yes, there's no one else left milking in this area. There's one farm in Foxton still milks. I think that's all that's left. Because Phil still goes there.

Charles Springs: They've all gone to beef except Snows opposite the-

Interviewer: Seven Stars.

Charles Springs: Seven Stars, which do sheep.

Interviewer: Yes. Andrew's got 2,500 sheep.

Charles Springs: All over. On the top there, yes?

Interviewer: Yes, everywhere you look there's a sheep.

So when you came here, you and Jane, your second wife Jane, you ran this as a B&B, yes?

Charles Springs: Yes.

Interviewer: How many years did you do that for?

Charles Springs: Ten years.

Interviewer: Right, you've stopped now?

Charles Springs: Yes. Ten years ago, 12 years.

Interviewer: Was it a reasonable business to be in at the time?

Charles Springs: Very time consuming. Hard work.

Interviewer: But you-

Charles Springs: I can tell you some hairy stories.

Interviewer: You were retired, so presumably you had the time.

Charles Springs: Yes.

Interviewer: So the other main thing I want to ask you about is your- because when I came to Langrish 12 years ago, you and Jane were the church wardens, and you've done that-

Charles Springs: We got conned into that.

Interviewer: You volunteered, you mean.



Charles Springs: Dave Farmer, who was- he retired to the New Forest with his horse, and he rounded me up as a replacement, or he volunteered me as a replacement. I did 18 years, and then Jane did 17 years, actually. She became church warden the year after me.

Interviewer: Obviously the church is our only real local building.

Charles Springs: During that time, I don't know whether you want to include that Terry had ill health.

Interviewer: Terry Lowden.

Charles Springs: And- yes, a couple of times. About 18 months, two years, Jane did all the organising of the priests, etc, and I did a ferry service for stand in priests, being all over the place.

Interviewer: Really?

Charles Springs: Knocking them up on the Sunday morning, bringing them in and taking them back again.

Interviewer: I didn't know about that, no. I knew Terry had had some health problems.

Charles Springs: Yes.

Interviewer: You outlasted Terry and were still church warden when Jane Ball started, yes?

Charles Springs: Yes, she started one year behind me, but we both-

Interviewer: No, I mean vicar Jane.

Charles Springs: Yes. We saw that opportunity to change then.

Interviewer: Right, you changed at that point?

Charles Springs: Yes.

Charles Springs: So basically, Jane did all the organisation in the church, and I did the churchyard and graves and the records, compiled the record drawings, etc, and the returns, the building. Odd job man.

Interviewer: You handed that to Jane when she started?

Charles Springs: Yes.

Interviewer: So obviously the church congregation is declining as we all get older.

Charles Springs: I don't think so.

Interviewer: No?

Charles Springs: It's been steady. For 25 years, it's been steady in the teens. Except Christmas and Easter when you get a hundred.

Interviewer: From your knowledge of the building as a church warden, is it a good building still, is it a solid building?

Charles Springs: Unfortunately, it was built on a sloping site, and there is a letter somewhere that as a sort of DIY project, the farmers levelled the site. And the letter said now that the harvest is over, could their men, horse and carts come back and complete the levelling of the site so that the building contract could be let. Hence the banks you get in the churchyard, which is cut and filled. And hence the leaning pulpit. It's the only church with a leaning pulpit. As Terry used to say, I lean forward too because he used to preach from there to the congregation.

But the back of the pulpit stonework is built in the outside wall, which goes down to proper foundations on the chalk. The front of it is only on the fill. And that has sunk. But so many people have looked at it and said it's safe. But if you have communion, you kneel at the altar rail, I always look and see

how much the floor has sunk from the outside wall. And there's a line all the way round.

Interviewer: I helped Betty clean the church. I always have a look at that every time I go round.

So I'm perhaps being too pessimistic. You say the congregation has been at that level for a long time?

Charles Springs: Yes, 25 years-ish.

Interviewer: So let's finally finish on the project that the history group's being doing, which is farming. What's happened to farming since you've been here? Obviously, we talked about we don't milk anymore.

Charles Springs: That's the change, the milk situation. Only the big dairy farms can make any money out of it, because of supermarket wars and they use it as a cut price incentive for the customers. And they sell it below cost. Ridiculous.

Interviewer: So everyone went to beef and then more arable farming?

Charles Springs: Yes. Well, beef is the answer here. You get plenty of rain, plenty of grass.

Interviewer: The other thing I noticed, I was bought up in Hampshire as well, like you, and the thing- really changed the look of the area is all oilseed rape, isn't it? There was no oilseed rape when we were bought up, and now you get these fields of bright yellow. In the old days, yellow used to be mustard.

Charles Springs: Yes, exactly.

Interviewer: You don't see that anymore. We had occasionally seen linseed growing on the farms up in Foxton.

Charles Springs: I think the oilseed rape is going out of fashion. There's another one coming on.

Interviewer: Is there?

Charles Springs: Another craze, I think.

Interviewer: I've heard this last year wasn't as successful. What I hate watching is the fact that they just don't rotate the crops, they just whack the fertiliser in and, you know-

Charles Springs: And that contributes to the pressure of flooding, doesn't it?

Interviewer: Exactly. The worst soil is where oilseed rape's been. It forms that thick mat of roots.

Charles Springs: And just scarifying the top and direct seeding instead of ploughing.

Interviewer: You were telling me earlier your cellar's flooded for the first time since you lived here, yes?

Charles Springs: No, no, flooded, yes. It does become damp, but that's the oldest part of the house.

Interviewer: Right, okay fine. So this house is going to get more and more climate stress, I suppose, from global warming. But the water is difficult round here, isn't it?

Okay, is there anything else you feel you'd like to talk about?

Charles Springs: Going back to cycling, and motor cars and petrol rationing, I can remember that the roads were deserted, just the odd car that had a permit. And we had tea at the Isaac Walton and we were cycling back to Farnham and between- on a Sunday night, between Alton and Farnham, we passed one car and we all booed, because we knew that the next week there'd be lots of cars because the private petrol rationing was going to be reintroduced.

We all, you wouldn't dare do that now.

Interviewer: That's funny, because my father worked for the local council as a building inspector and he had a petrol ration.

Charles Springs: Yes. The same.

Interviewer: We could go anywhere we liked, which was good.

Okay, thanks so much, Charles. That's been interesting.  
Thank you for doing the interview.