

## Tony Perkins interview



*Forge Sound*

Interviewer: So, Tony Perkins, Forge Sound. Yes, Tony, so we spoke. Perhaps you can say when you came to East Meon.

Tony Perkins: I came here to the village in 1988.

Interviewer: You came from...?

Tony Perkins: Interesting question. I suppose, yes, Yorkshire.

Interviewer: Right, but having previously been-

Tony Perkins: I had been all over the place, yes. (Laughter)

Interviewer: Originally in East Africa?

Tony Perkins: Originally Kenya.

Interviewer: Right, and you were born in Kenya.

Tony Perkins: I was born in Kenya in 1936.

Interviewer: Right, and you came to East Meon...?

Tony Perkins: I came to East Meon in 1988.

Interviewer: Why did you choose East Meon?

Tony Perkins: Because my mother-in-law lived in Petersfield and Judy's family came from Buriton. They used to own Weston and had a farm there. Yes, it seemed like the logical place. The children had grown up and we had might just as well go down south while we still could, so we did.

Interviewer: You had been farming in Yorkshire?

Tony Perkins: No. When I was in Yorkshire, I was with a textile firm selling machinery. Carding machinery, if you know what that is.

Interviewer: Yes, that is to get rid of the wool and- Yes.

Tony Perkins: (Laughter) But of course, being cotton machinery, you could not sell it into Lancashire. You had to sell it abroad, because Lancashire would not listen to any new form of technology, whatever. So, my job, I was sent out to Cairo to set up an office for the Middle East, which I did. I covered the whole country from to start with Egypt right across to Bangladesh. I used to travel around there regularly.

Then I was- Promoted is the wrong word, I think. They were short of people. I was given Africa as well. So, I just had Africa as well as... (Laughter) I used to travel around, which I found most exciting. I knew most of Africa anyway.

Interviewer: Gosh, okay, yes. Why did you choose East Meon rather than Petersfield say?

Tony Perkins: Basically because we are country people. We did not want to be in a town. Certainly did not like the noise and the bustle of towns.

Interviewer: Yes, and were you retiring here or still working?

Tony Perkins: I retired here.

Interviewer: Right, but you did not retire, did you?

Tony Perkins: I did not retire, no. (Laughter) I don't think one ever does. I started gardening for friends and ended up gardening for friends 10 years later. More than that, yes.

Interviewer: Yes, and did quite a few of the gardens, I think.

Tony Perkins: Yes, I did a lot of gardens, including some for the parish council. But mostly just for friends.

Interviewer: Yes. You did the garden of the Tudor house as well, I think.

Tony Perkins: Yes. At that time, there were I think three houses for sale in East Meon and we had been renting around, looking for a house for some time. These three came up on the same day that we sold our house up in Yorkshire. So, it was a question of pick and choose. Judy did the choosing and she was absolutely right. My only criterion was I should be able to stand up under the central beam, which I could with a half an inch to spare. (Laughter)

Interviewer: Okay. It is quite close.

Tony Perkins: It is very close.

Interviewer: Yes, and close to the pub. Was that part of the requirement?

Tony Perkins: No, that had nothing to do with it. I suppose we just liked the whole thing. It is a lovely old house. It is the oldest house. I have got lovely old furniture and it just appealed. It fitted together very nicely. It was the right size.

Interviewer: How did you find the farming community? Was it a community like the ones you had known in Africa?

Tony Perkins: Oh, completely different. I deliberately kept out of anything to do with farming, because I know perfectly well the farming I was trained to and the farming which is going on now are two worlds apart. I could no more talk modern farming than they could talk coffee farming. (Laughter)

Interviewer: Indeed.

Tony Perkins: When we were in Africa, it was a case of you grew whatever you thought would be successful. Because nobody knew, of course. Coffee was an option. Maize was obviously an option. But because of the altitude, because of the soil. We came here so we could grow certain things that other people could not grow. Like pyrethrum, which is a...

Interviewer: A fibre, yes.

Tony Perkins: Yes, and there were a few farms which would do that and we had a very successful business actually. Drying these flowers and extracting the fibre and throwing the rest away. (Laughter)

Interviewer: So, when you moved here, did you get sucked into many things? I have got sucked into 101 things since I arrived.

Tony Perkins: Everything, yes. From an East Meon point of view, it is a very vibrant village. There is always something and, yes, the garden club was the most important, I suppose. I was a bit too old for most of the sports clubs that existed. (Laughter)

Interviewer: Right, yes. Were you a bell ringer before you came here?

Tony Perkins: Yes, I was.

Interviewer: Okay. But you had not bell rung in Africa.

Tony Perkins: Oh, Lord, no. As far as I know, there was only one church in Kenya which had bells and that was a place called Kilifi. It was out on the coast. They had four bells. (Laughter)

Interviewer: Right, so how did you get sucked into bell ringing?

Tony Perkins: I suppose the pleasure of making a noise. (Laughter) Pure and simple. Nice people. Very friendly, very welcoming and anxious to teach. It is a long-term thing. You do not just pick it up. You work at it for many years and might end up some good at the end of it. Yes, some people can do it and some people cannot.

Interviewer: No, I struggle.

Tony Perkins: I am one of those who cannot really be trained to do much.

Interviewer: But they are quite a mix, the bell ringers, aren't they? Socially, and East Meon and outside, all of that.

Tony Perkins: That is the good thing about it. They are a mixed bunch and nice people to know.

Interviewer: Yes, and did you get drawn into activities in the church as well?

Tony Perkins: Yes, I was church warden for Peter... No, for Terry Lowden when he first came. Judy, she was also church warden and she was before me. Because her mother, funnily enough, was the first lady church warden of Petersfield. They had never had one before. (Laughter) So, I think Judy felt that she could do just as well and she did. (Laughter) She was a great flower arranger and a great...

Interviewer: Harvest Festival doer.

Tony Perkins: Yes. She did a lot and she was very good at it.

Interviewer: The church was reasonably lively then?

Tony Perkins: Very lively. So, that was when Terry Lowden first came. Who was the man before that? Peter Wadsworth, who was also a very live wire. He wasn't a church man by profession. He came out of civil service, I think.

Interviewer: Goodness, okay, yes.

Tony Perkins: At some point, he did some parachuting, I think. I do not quite know why. (Laughter) Anyway, he took us on pilgrimage to the Holy Land, which was a great success. That was all people from local...

Interviewer: From the village.

Tony Perkins: Village people and from Langrish. We had a really good pilgrimage. We [got around] and saw everything.

Interviewer: The place of the church in the village, was it fairly active?

Tony Perkins: Oh, very. It is interesting, because Dennis Ryder who you did not know, made a series of videos of the village in 2000. Every single one of them without fail features the church. Not because it set out to be part of the church, but it just happened that everything that we did in the village had a church... We were busy building the church hall and everything was going on. People were doing things left, right and centre. So, it was a great labour of love and I think it brought people into the village who otherwise would not have been particularly interested.

When I was church warden, I always used to go to everybody and say, "Welcome to East Meon. Nice to see you. We do this here. Now, what do you do? Can you come up with something which we do not do? (Laughter) In which case, we will organise it. We will help you get established." A lot of people did that and it was nice to get to know people as they came in. In those days, it was a welcome which we could all do and most people did it.

Interviewer: The church warden job was demanding, or...?

Tony Perkins: It was demanding, yes. Because at that time, it was Interregnum so it was a question of finding- before Terry came, finding something for every Sunday service and making sure [everybody turned up]. (Laughter) Make sure everybody knew what they were supposed to be doing, who was coming, who was going, who was sidesman, who was reading the lesson. [It was a huge number of things]. Because you would be amazed at how often people forget what they are supposed to be doing. (Laughter)

Interviewer: Oh, indeed. Well, I am one of them. I am one of them definitely. The choir was fairly active?

Tony Perkins: Very active, yes.

Interviewer: But you were not part of that.

Tony Perkins: That was Chris Copley. He came back from the navy and had a job up in London. That is when he started the choir up. Very good, very keen, very enthusiastic and actually very good. I am no singer, so I would not know the good from the bad. But there was plenty of volume there and plenty of enthusiasm, which was the fun bit of it. They used to sing all sorts of things. They were excellent.

Then Terry came along and he again had been on the Isle of Wight for a long time. He had been a priest for a long time. He was very, very good. Extremely good pastoral man.

Interviewer: Do you think the village has become less leaning on the church than it used to be?

Tony Perkins: I think people probably would not admit it. If anything, I can see the difference that Jane makes. She is up there talking and she swings the whole thing. She gets around and she talks to people. It is a pastoral thing; they have a much bigger

part to play. Unfortunately, nowadays society is so here today and gone tomorrow. It has been, working up in London. A lot of people you hardly ever saw and they are a great loss. I think they are coming back again.

Interviewer: Was there much of a worry in the time you have been here about the village just being populated by people who were working and did not play a part in the village?

Tony Perkins: Yes, very much so. There was a time before they built the green... I think the whole village was seriously wondering what on earth they were going to do with it next. Because they were not going anywhere. They were not getting any bigger and people were, as I say, working up in London and back here after dark, off to work before it got light. I do not think they felt attached at all.

Interviewer: Quite difficult for young people in the village?

Tony Perkins: Quite difficult, yes.

Interviewer: In terms of jobs.

Tony Perkins: Yes. My wife used to say, "You could write books about that." The agricultural community of course has always been [clearly staying] doing its own thing. But, yes, it is the young 30, 35, 40 year olds that are not quite sure what they were aiming for. But I think that has settled down now. There are a lot of young people who are very up and at it. The cricket team is fantastic. They do a huge amount as well. Not just for the cricket team, but for the village generally.

Interviewer: Did you play cricket?

Tony Perkins: I used to play, a long time ago. I enjoy- There is nothing better than on a Sunday afternoon, I think, than going out and watching them hammering away.



Interviewer: The cricket team again presumably was quite across the village.

Tony Perkins: It was. But it was much more focused one or two families, who had always played. They were not very prepared to shift their position too much. (Laughter) “He is a wicket keeper. He has always been a wicket keeper and he is going to be staying wicket keeper.” (Laughter) But it was there as a sort of foundation early on. Now, it is great to see a whole lot of youngsters up there, who I do not even know.

Interviewer: Yes, and in terms of what makes the village work socially, gives it heart, if you understand...

Tony Perkins: Difficult to say.

Interviewer: Because it could be just a lot of people living in their houses and going off to work.

Tony Perkins: Yes, it is not that. It is the fact that [they are all here and they all talk to each other. They all have something in common. I think for the East Meoners too, we have an ongoing feud with West Meon. (Laughter) Which has been going on for centuries. I think it is just one of those things which is inbuilt. You become an East Meoner rather quicker than you do in Yorkshire, where you have to wait for about 30 years. (Laughter)

Interviewer: Yes, certainly I came to the village and expected to have to serve at least 10 years or 20 years before I would be accepted by the community as not an outsider.

Tony Perkins: Yes, quite. But I think that- Things like the May Fair, various things the village hall does, they are all good community things and they all draw people in. In some ways you think, “Well, I could wish for more,” like nursery schools and that sort of

thing. But on the other hand, you can only produce so many choices at a time. (Laughter) You cannot do it all.

Interviewer: Indeed, yes. The shops, have the shops changed? Or when you came, was there just the one shop?

Tony Perkins: No, there was... Jenny and Frank [were already] here. They kept the Post Office and then John Emptage kept the Post Office and he sold. Apart from that-

Interviewer: The Post Office was just a Post Office, or sold...?

Tony Perkins: No, it was never just a Post Office. It was the greengrocer's and all sorts.

Interviewer: Right. Selling local produce, or...?

Tony Perkins: I think they worked extremely hard. They always said they did not do very well, but I suspect they did. (Laughter)

Interviewer: But when they retired, nobody took on the roles?

Tony Perkins: No. It is partly the Post Office's fault, I think. They did not manage the transition very well. I do not think there was anybody dashing to do the job. When Darius...

Interviewer: Darius and Janet.

Tony Perkins: Darius and Janet, they took it on more or less as an extra to what they were doing at the time. I suppose they do quite work well. I have no idea what the Post Office terms are, but the Post Office has gone from one thing to another, hasn't it? It has gone from being absolutely essential, to being a bit of a red herring around people's necks. (Laughter)

Interviewer: Indeed, and as you have got older in the village, is it more difficult to live here? The doctor's is some way away, the shops are some way away.

Tony Perkins: No, absolutely not. I think it is extraordinary how cohesive it is.

Interviewer: How do you manage that?

Tony Perkins: I don't know. People just come in. It is a very open place. You can always-

Interviewer: There are people in the village coming in and going-

Tony Perkins: Yes.

Interviewer: So, people shop for you?

Tony Perkins: Oh, yes. They would do anything for you. It could not be better. Again, I think there is probably a connection. There has not been too many of us. If there were crowds and crowds and crowds of people, it could be a bit of a bore. But actually, no, they are wonderful.

Interviewer: But a lot of modern technology has helped there in terms of Amazon and Zoom or Skype.

Tony Perkins: That has all helped. I started texting. I cannot cope with most of it and nor do I want to be. People take out their phone and telephone the back end of nowhere or find out what Google says about goodness knows what. It is way beyond me and to be honest, I am not interested. It just is not my scene.

Interviewer: But you order things on Amazon.

Tony Perkins: Well, everyone is on Amazon.

Interviewer: Yes, and you got Stay Fresh, or Keep Fresh, or whatever it is. HelloFresh.

Tony Perkins: HelloFresh, yes. I have got everything I need. As I say, people will always offer to go and get something for you if you want it. I regret not having a car anymore, because it was my decision to stop. I decided I would give it up, not only for my own safety but for the safety of everybody else on the road. (Laughter)

Interviewer: I think we all get to that stage, don't we?

Tony Perkins: Again, I thought I would miss it like fury and I do not. Not at all. (Laughter) I can live without a motor car quite easily. It is just every now and then there is a reason why you would rather like to have a car as well.

Interviewer: Do you think it is easier to live in a small village now than it was, say, 15 years ago as an older person, in terms of the home delivery, supermarkets, HelloFresh and the Amazon deliveries?

Tony Perkins: It is easier from that point of view, I think. To me, some feel it is a let-down. They have not moved with the times at all.

Interviewer: I agree.

Tony Perkins: They are busy shutting down everything and not thinking of things to do with their spaces] That is not something we do here in East Meon. There is usually some other use for a building or a whatever. If somebody says, "I am giving up so-and-so..." "Oh, I will have it. I will do something with it."

Interviewer: Did you used to eat in Petersfield much, or mostly in the pubs in the village?

Tony Perkins: The pubs in the village I think are very good. I have always found them extremely good. There is no need to go any further really. You could take a taxi into Petersfield and go and get drunk. What is the point in that? (Laughter)

Interviewer: I agree. Well, you are lucky. You have got the Izaak on your doorstep, haven't you?

Tony Perkins: Yes. (Laughter)

Interviewer: I guess one of the big events here in your time was the cottages just across the river burning down.

Tony Perkins: That was truly tremendous, yes.

Interviewer: How did you realise what was happening there?

Tony Perkins: We were actually in the pub. It was a Good Friday. The pub was heaving, as it usually is for fish and chips on a Friday. Somebody came along and said, "Do you know there is smoke coming out of the thatch?" Everybody said, "No, go on." People who were from the houses were there too. (Laughter) They could not believe it, but all of a sudden it was completely out of control.

Well, the wind was blowing fortunately from west to east, so it blew up the river, not down. Sadly, it caught the one next door. It should not have done that really. Had they been quicker off the mark, they would have stopped it. At the time, the two rooves used to connect, you see. So, it just spread inside. It could [do anything at all]. To be honest, you realise there is absolutely nothing you can do.

They sent, it must have been a dozen fire engines. They pumped the river dry. (Laughter) Of course, the biggest problem with thatch, it will not affect you fortunately, is this wire netting they put over the top. They could not get it off.

Interviewer: So, you cannot break out the burning rushes or, yes, straw.

Tony Perkins: Exactly, yes. So, it burnt happily all that night.

Interviewer: Goodness.

Tony Perkins: It was still burning on Sunday morning.

Interviewer: Were you worried?

Tony Perkins: I was.

Interviewer: Because you are quite close.

Tony Perkins: I was very worried. Only just across the river.

Interviewer: You are what, 15m away?

Tony Perkins: Yes. But again, there was nothing you could do.

Interviewer: Did you sleep?

Tony Perkins: No. (Laughter) It was quite amusing actually, because Richard Doesford was in the pub also at the time and when this all [broke out], Richard came along and we sat in the garden here. He had his video with him and he took the video. It was actually on the BBC News, because he shipped it straight up to London. (Laughter) There we were, more or less watching the same thing while it was going along.

Interviewer: Watching it happen almost live, yes. The year 2000, were there big celebrations in the year 2000?

Tony Perkins: Yes. Oh, yes. They were terrific. They were lovely.

Interviewer: What form did they take?

Tony Perkins: That was the tables down the High Street. All the way down from the Izaak basically to the...

Interviewer: The George, more or less.

Tony Perkins: As far as the war memorial. They just laid it out and everybody came. Absolutely everybody.

Interviewer: That was in the daytime?

Tony Perkins: Daytime, yes. Of course, as the evening drew on, it developed into dancing and Bereleigh let off fireworks and goodness knows what for the top of [our hill] here. It was terrific. They had dear old [Matt] with his pork hog-roast. He was up on The Green there and everybody had a whale of a time. So, all the old folk were out there. (Laughter)

Interviewer: Singing?

Tony Perkins: Yes.

Interviewer: What were they singing?

Tony Perkins: I cannot remember that. But we had a king and queen of the day. (Laughter)

Interviewer: The children were there as well?

Tony Perkins: Oh, yes. Yes, that was a great occasion. That is the sort of thing I mean. Everybody got stuck in. I always say, "Just bring enough food for yourself." It is very much seven barley loaves, or five barley loaves and-

Interviewer: Five fishes, yes.

Tony Perkins: There is stacks of stuff left over at the end of it. (Laughter)

Interviewer: Yes.

Tony Perkins: I think from that point of view, we are very, very lucky.

Interviewer: Yes, and the garden club was mostly talks, or was it?

Tony Perkins: Talks and visits, yes. We used to do a lot of visiting in those days. When a bus was a very] cheap thing to do. You could get a busload of people [in no time at all] and pootle off down to Somerset or whatever. We even spent one weekend down in Devon. That was great too.

Interviewer: You used to do the Open Garden Scheme. Did you open your garden?

Tony Perkins: Yes. (Laughter) That was another lovely thing, because you would get people coming year after year and you would think, "Oh, I have never seen him before," and then, "How is that rose that you put in over there last year? Is it thriving or is it not?" They do actually come to learn and to figure things out. One very interesting occasion, we had a couple come around the garden and they said, "I suppose we could not look inside

the house?" We said, "Well, no, actually, we do not open it at all."

Because in those days, the house used to be open to people to come and have a poke around at the beams and things. But I said, "We do not just open it like that." He said it was a pity, because they were evacuated from Portsmouth during the war and they lived here. So, we said, "Well, in that case, come on in." (Laughter) They were going around pointing out the various things that had changed since the war. But he said "This house used to be four people. Four families lived in here."

Interviewer: Goodness, and how many rooms have you got in this house?

Tony Perkins: Three. Well...

Interviewer: Three bedrooms.

Tony Perkins: You have three bedrooms. (Laughter)

Interviewer: Goodness, and four families.

Tony Perkins: Four families. He said they cut it this way. It was very, very interesting to find they remembered so much.

Interviewer: Yes, but it is quite low, isn't it, the house. The door beside you is, what? It cannot-

Tony Perkins: That is just put there... They could not make it any bigger, because they would cut through that beam. In which case, the whole house might fall down.

Interviewer: So, it was not about how tall people were. It was simply about-

Tony Perkins: Absolutely no. No, all of this first floor was not here when it was first built. It was all put in afterwards. I think it is fascinating. Because obviously the timbers do not match.



Some of them are obviously originals. A lot of them, you can tell are not original. This thing going down the middle here.

Interviewer: So, when was the oldest bit of the house?

Tony Perkins: It was 1370.

Interviewer: Goodness.

Tony Perkins: Yes, that we know, because we used to have these people who come around looking at joints.

Interviewer: Doing the timbers, yes.

Tony Perkins: Yes, and they said that joint did not exist before then.  
(Laughter)

Interviewer: Right, goodness.

Tony Perkins: But this is obviously a foreign beam that was just brought in from some other application. It is not [modern art]. (Laughter)

Interviewer: Yes, I wondered what that was about. Because it is rather a strange arrangement over the fireplace.

Tony Perkins: It is a very strange way of doing it.

Interviewer: Yes, and have you found any old...? So, in my house, I found some bottles which might be witch bottles, for example.

Tony Perkins: I found some old bottles. I found an old badge in the garden. A forester's or something, which is quite interesting. Then of course the [insurance thing is on the outside]. They are quite- They are good daters. But it is unusual for any house to have two of them, which this has. Presumably, because either the left hand did not know what the right hand was doing or did not agree with what they were doing (Laughter) and wanted to show a bit of independence.

Interviewer: Well, it is a fascinating house, I have to say.

Tony Perkins: I love it. Nothing would shift me. I just find it absolutely amazing that, A, it is still standing and, B, that it is in such good nick.

Interviewer: Yes. Have you had to do much to keep it-

Tony Perkins: Oh, yes, you have to do a lot to it. You cannot just leave these things until...

Interviewer: But your timbers look all pretty good.

Tony Perkins: They are all pretty good, touch wood., they are so damn hard, you cannot stick a drawing pin into most of it.

Interviewer: No. Oak. Very hard. Your walls are mostly brick, or you have got...?

Tony Perkins: Mostly brick.

Interviewer: Right. Any wattle and daub?

Tony Perkins: There is a bit up in the top. But that is only where the louvres used to be. [The fireplace or 0:37:09] somewhere up there and just above it, there used to be a louver. That is smoke-covered. I left it there in case some nosey-parker wants to know why we destroyed history or something.

So, I have left it there deliberately. (Laughter) If you want to squeeze up there, you can go and have a look. (Laughter) As far as I know, nobody has been up since I made the bedroom into... [I] took the ceiling out and just kept it as over the top. It is a very high room, but it is lovely.

Interviewer: So, was this house originally thatched?

Tony Perkins: It must have been originally.

Interviewer: Yes, rather than tiled.

Tony Perkins: There was no option in those days.

Interviewer: No. Mine, I think, is the same.

Tony Perkins: How they managed to do the various adaptations, I don't know, but they did. We have run out, have we?

Interviewer: Brilliant, well, I think- I think we might stop there, yes, probably.

Tony Perkins: We ran out of time.

Interviewer: Yes, I think we have run out of time really. Anyway, lovely to speak and very interesting. Thank you.

Tony Perkins: Well, if there is anything else that needs filling in or clarifying, I will do my best.

Interviewer: Add a bit more. Brilliant. I will turn this off.

Tony Perkins: Very much off the cuff, that.