

## Jane Morgan

Jane Morgan was interviewed by Marion Evans on 30<sup>th</sup> July 2022. The interview was recorded and transcribed by John Mears, who added a few notes in square brackets.

ME: This recording is for the Fitzharry's Manor Estate website project. We are carrying out oral history and reminiscence work with some of our residents. Today is the 30<sup>th</sup> July 2022. I'm Marion Evans (one of the committee members of the residents' association), and I'm here with John Mears who is supervising the recording, and we're talking today with Jane Morgan. Hello Jane.

JM: Hello.

ME: Would you like to say when you arrived on the estate here?

JM: We came here, and came to live in Nuneham Square in 1956.

ME: That's amazing isn't it. What were your first impressions when you came?

JM: Well, it was the first proper home that we'd had, and our first impressions were that our landlords were extremely...cooperative, shall we say - your rent was taken off your pay so you didn't have to have any arguments about that, and we had an estate office on Letcombe Avenue, where there was a book, and you could go and write down anything from a light bulb upwards, and they would replace it. You put down your address and your request and they dealt with it. The other thing was that the whole place was immaculately kept. The lawns were laid out in such a manner that they could mow right across the whole lot at the front, and they were all done together, so it always had a very uniform appearance. And all the alleyways that you can go down and interconnect different parts of the estate were lined with the most beautifully trimmed privet hedges, and it kept the whole place looking extremely neat for anyone who should walk through.

ME: I remember when I spoke with you before that you talked about people who used to come just to look at the privet hedges and walk through the alley ways.

JM: Well, so I was told. I don't think that any of my friends did but I gather that was one of the things that people would do with their visitors – walk them around the estate and show it off.

ME: And did you or your husband [JM: Arthur Morgan] work at Harwell?

JM: My husband worked at Harwell.

ME: What was his role there?

JM: He worked in health physics on different topics, later he was working in inhalation toxicology.

ME: When you first arrived, regarding Abingdon townfolk, did you feel welcomed as people who had come from afar into their community?

JM: I don't think I particularly observed anything very much, but I did hear somebody say you know they call us the atom folk and we glow in the dark. Because, there was a great deal of misunderstanding that Harwell was all to do with nuclear projects, and they expected us to glow in the dark, and we didn't, which was very disappointing.

ME: For you, what's been the best things about living here on the estate?

JM: It's changed over the years. Certainly, initially it was very much like-minded people here and we were all very glad to be on this estate – we felt we were very lucky to get here. Everybody was extremely friendly.

ME: You yourself were very highly educated as well...when you lived here, some of the time you worked, some of the time primarily for the family?

JM: Yes. We came here to make a home and my husband had a job which he expected to stay in all his life. In those days that's what you expected to do – you didn't swap jobs. It's quite different nowadays.

ME: When you were here with your family – your children grew up here?

JM: They did.

ME: Can you describe what life was like on the estate for them?

JM: It was very free and easy. Living in Nuneham Square when our children were small – we subsequently moved because we were in one of the smaller houses then – and we could afford a four-bedroom house, and I think the rent was about four pounds eighteen shillings at that time which is totally incomprehensible nowadays, it doesn't mean a thing – they were very happy there. We had a large number of children in their very early years on Nuneham Square and they often played together on the square and one very snowy year they built an igloo. There was all that kind of thing went on, and they'd take little tents out there if they'd got them or rig up something, sort of a tent, and play games there. And, our doors were always open. Children used to pop in and out of each other's houses. There was no fear of burglary or anything at that time, it was very free and easy.

ME: What sort of age would children go out to play, unsupervised by adults?

JM: Well, it was a special case, Nuneham Square, because there was only one entrance where the cars come in now, and the other two entries or exits, which were down alley ways had great big iron gates on them, and we could hear if anyone went out, and the children couldn't use them anyway, the little children, so they were quite safe out on the green. And if you had a small there you just kept an eye on them. I know one of mine **was** found actually playing with her dolly pram outside John Mason school, in the middle of the road, so it did happen.

ME: What was life like for the women here? The men were off on the bus or in their cars off to Harwell, and women primarily here for the home and the children. What was life like?

JM: A lot of things were very easy, we had a fishmonger, a greengrocer and an egg man who came round, and my older daughter and a friend used to always jump on the van with the egg man and they disappeared for some hours one day, and we raised the alarm and tried to look for them and they'd stayed on this van and they'd gone to a neighbouring estate and had no idea where they were. Anyway, it all came to a happy end. We didn't worry about them so much in those days, because it was almost always resolved very quickly and easily. We had a lot of like-minded people around, it was very easy to make friends, and the children were in and out of each other's houses. In the early days we didn't have a television – a lot of people didn't. We were obliged to buy one because our elder daughter who was always watching somebody else's television did it several times too often, so we were obliged to buy one.

ME: And I understand there was a babysitting circle here at one point.

JM: Yes, there was. Initially we didn't bother with anything – again, our early years in Nuneham Square – if you were in somebody else's house and there were maybe three couples there, we just would leave home when the children were sound asleep, and every quarter of an hour or so one of the dads would go round and listen through the letter boxes and if all was quiet, he'd come back again. Then we got to the point that we felt we ought to babysit for each other, we thought this was all a bit irresponsible, as indeed it was, anything could have happened, it was just so casual. So we started babysitting, and then one day somebody saw a letter in the Times, I think it was, explaining somewhere else in the country where they ran a babysitting club and this was picked up and put into practice here. You were issued with 20 hours of tickets and there were certain rules like you were obliged to leave a tray of coffee and so forth and double time after midnight. Various rules like that, and it ran extremely well. When you'd been out a lot on the tiles and run out of tickets you were obliged to go and do some babysitting. So that worked very well.

ME: Can you remember any key events? I know recently we've had the Platinum Jubilee event, I wonder, were there previous jubilees you remember here or events where the estate came together?

JM: I don't remember the estate coming together. Small groups of people who lived near each other might well have done. I think the main thing was bun throwing, on special occasions, and of course that's what the children wanted to go to and one had to do it. We rather gave it up when we were finding that people were going with umbrellas turned up the other way to catch a lot of buns and our children couldn't get any – they were very sad about that. We rather gave up doing it then.

ME: Thinking of your house here [JM: in Fitzharrys Road] or the one in Nuneham Square, other people have found these houses quite adaptable over the years, was that something that suited you and your family?

JM: Yes, but we were so pleased with them and they were so well built and designed that they worked very well as they were, and most of us didn't have much cash behind us, so we wouldn't even have contemplated changing them, we couldn't have afforded to. I don't remember anyone changing their houses at all, structurally, in the early days. Of course, nowadays it's quite the thing to do, the minute you move into a house you rip out the bathroom and kitchen regardless, it seems to me, because everyone wants everything new.

ME: You've kept all your cupboards here I can see.

JM: Not quite – those used to be cupboards, at one point, which went straight through to the kitchen, which meant you had to be careful not to push things right through to the other side.

ME: You have the hatch haven't you between the kitchen and the dining room?

JM: Yes. I wouldn't part with it. I think I'm too lazy to rethink it. We built on a room for my mother-in-law, and my mother, in their later years, they came and lived with us, one for just a few months in the end. My mother came during the winters, as soon as the children were back at school, I used to go and fetch her, and she stayed here from September to Easter and lived with us during the winter, which was difficult for her. So we built that room on for them really, and it's been very handy for visitors.

ME: You talked about the early days on the estate when people rented the houses from the Atomic Energy Authority, then I believe during the sixties there was transition to ownership of the properties. Have you memories of that time, of that transition?

JM: Yes, it was quite amusing actually. They let us know that we could put our names down to move – it was usually to get into a bigger house, and that was what we wanted, so the girls could have a bedroom each, I think that's what we in modern Britain think is necessary – or most of us. When your turn came, you were offered a house. You didn't choose one. They told us for example there was this house which we subsequently took and another one to look at on Clifton Drive. And for reasons...the one on Clifton Drive, its partner, the semi, had suffered from subsidence and Harwell had had to underpin it and it cost a thousand pounds. That was a king's ransom in those days. And my husband said, right,

we're not looking at that one. So we came to this one. He was probably quite right. But they had a lot of problems at that time, which Harwell put right. They said they wouldn't do it if we bought the house, on our own heads be it, so we came to this one.

ME: How long did the transition take between being fully rented and practically fully owner occupied? Was that over a long time?

JM: It was yes, over a few years I think, because it was only as houses came up – because we were long stayers here really on balance. Then it started that it was more usual to have a different job and to move, so houses became available. When we were offered ours, we were told – a whole batch of us came up at the same time – which in my memory might be anything from three to six. People were told, right, you are now at the top of the queue, you can have this house or that house, and the asking price is £4,850. We all threw up our hands in horror and said that is excessively expensive, and they said – suit yourselves, we are selling these in a batch, to keep down the legal costs for you, if we wait until the next batch gets done, your legal costs will go up, so we all signed on the dotted line and bought our houses. As I recall, we scraped the bottom of everybody's pocket monies and found the £850, and took out a mortgage for the £4,000. Translated into modern day terms it's not understandable.

ME: The estate has currently got a strong residents' association. Could you talk about your involvement with it and how it has changed over the years. I don't know when you were first aware of it as a residents' association.

JM: I can't remember, but I think someone asked me if I would go onto the committee, and I said yes why not, and I found that it was quite interesting, I learnt a lot more about the estate in all sorts of general terms, and I enjoyed meeting the people who were on the committee. That was good. And I think it was that sort of thing that made us more of a cohesive entity, this estate, if that's the correct way to put it. Because I think everyone is very much aware of it being an estate, in way that I haven't seen on other estates.

ME: There was a period when the residents' association lapsed and was rediscovered again, or re-needed again, I don't know if you have memories of that time. We're talking 1970s...

JM: I remember that it lapsed, I think it was because it had done probably as much as it could at that time, and until people came onto the committee with new ideas and people were receptive to new ideas, that it sparked up again.

ME: And then you became Chair.

JM: Was I? Do you know, I had forgotten that.

ME: ...in the 2000s you were Chair...

JM: Maybe I was, my memory is getting very odd for things like that.

ME: We remember Jane, we remember.

JM: Our current Chair is absolutely excellent, may I say, and he has stimulated the togetherness of the residents' association. I think one of the most useful things of course is this sending round on email, things you want to swap, give away or sell or whatever. That's been made good use of.

ME: What was life like here on the estate during the Covid pandemic?

JM: Well, selfishly speaking, it didn't make much difference, because at my age, living on my own, my life didn't change a great deal to be honest. I'm content with my own company, I'm lucky in that respect, I think if you can't stand your own company, it must have been extremely hard.

ME: Was there any increase in neighbourliness that you detected or initiatives that the estate took?

JM: Oh yes. Certainly. I had three separate letters from people on the committee who were obviously contacting many people – not just me – saying here's my phone number, here's my mobile number, if there's anything at all you need, get in contact. That was very good, I was impressed with that. I haven't needed to use it because I am fairly independent and managed, so that's been OK.

ME: Have you any other stories or thoughts for us about how things on the estate have changed in the time since you first came here until now?

JM: Well, it was very closed circuit almost, with everybody working at Harwell. And gradually other things came in, people working at the Rutherford and people working at Culham and so on, and, it was a very scientific based community round here. And I think things have changed in the sense that people on this estate have completely different jobs now – and that's possibly a good thing, because we're getting different ideas coming in

ME: Do you see any physical changes on the estate compared with how it was?

JM: Quite a lot of building on as you know people have done that. I think the planning committee seem to have dealt with it very well, in that they won't allow people to build between semis so that we then would get a continuous facade. You're allowed to build on, I believe, if you're at the end of the road, and that does happen. I think that's quite well done. As far as keeping the appearance of the estate going, no, that's changed. In the early days, the estate was really taken care of in a comprehensive manner. But that's fine, people can express their individuality in that way. The committee has been very good in encouraging tree planting, with the climate change in mind as much as anything – I think that's to be applauded.