*Typist’s Note: The interviewer’s comments have been underlined for ease of reading*

**Mill Street Memories – Graham Curtis Interviewed by Alex Bailey**

I left school in 1949, aged 15 and I got an apprenticeship with A H Angels who were local builders and my first money was a £1 a week but they deducted 2(s) and 11(d) so I took home the princely sum of 17 and a penny after a month’s trial, I got the job and I went up to the dizzy heights of £1.50.

Angels at that time was the biggest builders in the town and there were 120 people employed. One of their principal jobs was looking after Mill Street, through Mill Street Mission which I can remember is a building painted green at the front and I can remember going down there and we used to look after all the plumbing of the Mill Street area through the Mill Street Mission. In those days all that the houses had was a sink inside, a cold water tap and an outside toilet. The ones backing onto the river if you were a bit stuck, you always put the waste out of the wall into the river.

The outside toilets when the winter came, the slightest frost, they always froze up and the pipes burst and as an apprentice, I had to go round, take off the lead pipes, put a label on them, take them back to one place and the plumber would repair the pipe, I would then refit it, we would probably do this for days on end, all round the estate and hopefully by the time we had virtually finished there would be another frost.

So we were permanently down there.

I can remember some of the houses, one in particular, the person’s husband, partner, father worked for the Town Council as a dustman and I can remember that he used to bring home old bicycles, anything he could sell and store it in the bedroom upstairs, a huge pile of junk in the bedroom. The bed consisted of a frame, a mattress that he salvaged from his rounds and some old army overcoats on the top. The only furniture in that room upstairs was an orange box that held a candle and that was quite typical.

There were quite a few places had thatch and we had to put the guttering round the house for some reason and they made special brackets and we fitted these and stood there so pleased with this guttering and then the doctor arrived, went inside and first thing he said was “I demand that all the windows are opened”, they couldn’t open the windows because our guttering ran across the windows, so we had to put the ladders up a little bit smart and take the guttering down so that they could open the windows. Mr Angel was not pleased.

One of the strange things, I can never ever remember anybody working at Angels coming from Mill Street. Not even a labourer, it would seem that a lot of people in Mill Street, worked for the brewery and places like that but they didn’t work for Angels. Whether at that time, there were houses built like that in Marie Road and Windsor Road, whether they had already started moving people from Mill Street into them and some of the people in Marie Road originally came from Mill Street I don’t know.

We continued looking after Mill Street till I left Angels in 1954 to go into the Army and Angels carried on looking after Mill Street until they pulled it down I suppose but I had moved on by then.

Did you know anything about Mill Street when you were a kid in Dorchester

No, we sort of, we didn’t have any contact with them really. It had a reputation as being a rough area and probably the kids were told to steer clear of them but I don’t remember any friends being in Mill Street. It’s strange really, almost like a separate part of the town.

Yes, an enclave.... You didn’t go down the swimming pool or that sort of area

Yes, we used to go down to the swimming pool down there and also we used to go around the river, there was another place to swim, you didn’t ask in them days where you came from. As kids you sort of took everyone on face value. Even in the Modern School, there must have been a lot from the Mill Street but you didn’t ask where you come from, you had your own little gang of local people where you lived and that was it but the town didn’t seem to mix that well, whereas now, it’s just one big town isn’t it.

I can remember my mother saying that Mill Street was a rough area, even the police would go down there in two’s that sort of thing but you didn’t go for a walk round that area, you would go round the river and come out at the bottom of town but that was it, then you would go back up the town you wouldn’t go farther on past the Ex. (Exhibition) You wouldn’t dream of doing that.

When did you come back to Dorchester

About, 1956 but then I started on my wanders, working for big firms, didn’t work locally after that.

So by 1963 when Mill Street area was pulled down and re-developed, you weren’t about?

No, not really, I was on tour, earning money. I can’t remember building the flats. When I went down there the next time, Durnover Court and all that was built. I know, my late wife worked in the flour mill in 36, I think it was. She left school and got a job in the office down there. I can remember her saying that they had this big grill across to stop rubbish and she said it had been known apparently that a baby occasionally went down there as well.

I can remember after 49, there was a barber shop in the basement of the flour mill, I know, he was working down there one day and we decided to get a haircut and we sneaked into the Barber shop and were sat there saying, “Christ, I hope the foreman doesn’t bloody see us – Eric Bartlett”, with saying that he got up from the chair and says “hello me sons, what are you doing here?”

I can’t tell you a lot more about the place but it was definitely two parts of the town.