Interview in the 1980s with Curator Ann Lineen

It was a fire grate with hobs on...black leaded...(Seneh) used to do her cooking in there...and there was a fire and they’d got some, I don’t know what they call them, they used to put in front of the fire to cook the bacon and what not...they didn’t have microwaves and things like they’ve got now...

When John was here, there was the outside door, there was the fire grate...and they had a new sink put in there, John did, and water was in...When his parents were there the water was outside...now what was here, she had like a table there, they had their meals in there you see...John did and his wife...the table was there...that’s all I think was in there...the floor was a dark brown lino, that’s all I know then.

[Can you remember what this room was like when Joseph Bradley lived there?]
There were the three places just the same...but the windows in this part, were much smaller windows, I don’t know why, and smaller panes...and the dip...now they say there is a dip don’t they, one side lower than the other...that was caused by mining subsidence...because my cottage at Number 25 before I was born and my father lived where I live, was shored up because of the mining subsidence...

Old fashioned sideboard and corner cupboard...they had this old fashioned open fire and black leaded grate and the bars down, you know...what they called the hob...on that side...it left a bit of space there...where they used to have an old fashioned chair there and under the window they had an old fashioned sofa. The table was in the middle of the room and they lived in that room there, they did, the old people did...and this then was what she called a little shop but there was no shop window nothing at all...the food was kept on a, like, from the length of that from there to there on a big...she’d got, oh what is it called...I can see it now, she’d got the red quarried on the top...about so high...I don’t know what you call it...and all stuff was kept on there all wrapped up little bits of groceries...red tiles, you know what I mean, about 9” square and it was all sort of covered over...all people went you know and she sold bits of sweets you know, and the children loved it...it went right across the back wall...and that was her so called, I don’t’ know what you would call it.

[Can you remember when she started her shop?]
Long time before the war....it was there in 1920 I remember that...she’d got it when I was 21...a long time ago...(I was born in 1903)...well it is at least that time as I know I was a child and she used to sell sweets and toffee...because I used to pop up there for a slab of toffee...So, I should say she started her shop...now Rose is older than I am...Rose is 88 but she wasn’t born there...she was born next door to where I lived. I was born in Number 25. (Rose was born in) 25A...then they moved up to this house when they sold it you see...
[Did Joseph own the house?]
Oh they owned the house. Yes (Number 12) they bought it off another man…after Rose was born

[Can you remember what Joseph Bradley’s job was?]
I don’t know what it was called…something to do with drainage or something I think…mines drainage…it wasn’t a dirty job and he used to go round from place to place…that is what I would say, something to do with drainage in the mines…

[Was he inspecting them?]  
..Yes something like that - he wasn’t a miner. 
Seneh was my father’s sister

[Did you go round to the house quite often? Number 12?] 
Oh yes when I was working I used to come home every Saturday afternoon I used to pop in for a cup of tea…lunchtime you know…I had my cup of tea on the sofa under the window.

[Did Seneh have a sideboard?] 
Yes…it was a very old fashioned one almost a red wood with a mirror at the back. She kept a lot of her dry grocery stuff in the sideboard and she kept her small change for the shop in the corner cupboard.

[Did Seneh do much sewing or needlework?]  
Not in her own home but I understand that before she was married, I think, she did dress making with her two sisters in Stoke on Trent…how they got there I don’t know…but I know she was there and then she married Mr Bradley…

Every year they always had two pigs and that is why they had this great big hook in there (in the Brew’us)…They stored the meat when it was killed, they stored it in here…and they must have made room for it on this slab…because they had to salt it and turn it over…I mean I know that…because Dad used to have half their pig, because we had a cellar and he used to put it on a slab in the cellar and he used to do it down there you see…they did their salting of the pig on this slab so they must have cleaned it off of all the grocery stuff then put it back on again…

When the meat was salted and what not it was cut up into joints, hams…and it was hung up and our bacon when Dad had done it we always used to keep it down the cellar because we were all nice and dry you see.
[Did they grow a lot of vegetables can you remember?]
Yes. Huge garden. The flowers and what not were in the front part here. Well they’d got a very, very nice pig sty and they’d also like got a shed next door where they had to keep their coal...it was partitioned off, divided off, where on one side they kept the coal and they kept their vegetables on shelves, stored...

[If you wanted to store potatoes for a long time how did they do it?]
Well they used to store (potatoes) …my Dad had of course got a cellar…and he had some special things made and he put the potatoes in and had to go down periodically and turn them over to see that they hadn’t gone...as long as you’d got some air coming in…well they’d got a window in the shed you see…and we’d got a cellar window which we could open to get some air to get into it you see… They would put them in nice bundles on probably some brown paper on the floor and periodically go and turn them over and check they were alright…and the very, very little tiny ones they didn’t waste them, they boiled them in that boiler to feed the pigs…the potatoes were perfect except they were small...and when they were boiled my aunt used to get a big wooden, what you call it, ladle thing and smashed them all up and put, what you call it, pea flour I think…and put it in a special bucket and carry it to the pig sty and there was a big trough and you should hear the pigs grunt, grunt, grunt...The pigs were clean as clean, not how they are now, absolutely lovely.

Stored potatoes and things in wooden boxes…never put them away until they were dried out in the sun...when they dug them up they were put outside until they were absolutely dry then put in.

[Did they keep chickens?]
Yes they did. I’m just trying to think, the chicken place was part of the garden...a piece of the garden across like this. The hen house...let me think...there was a shed for vegetables, then the nice pig sty, then the hen place - a wooden shed place, like, where the hens roosted in the nests and all that, and a place where they could come out...used to have a piece of the garden they were well away...

[Did Joseph and Seneh grow any fruit?]
Oh yes...I always used to pinch those...they’d got raspberries and strawberries...Well, Rose and I and another cousin and I used to go up the garden...

Well we had some, we didn’t pay for it, there wasn’t much because left. All of it went, people wanted it you know...pear tree and blackcurrants...the strawberries would go and the raspberries go - there wasn’t any left...only, really, the apples and we used to have some and we stored ours in a spare bedroom on a nice piece of brown paper and they kept lovely.
[Joseph and Seneh lived next door to you in Number 25 before they moved to Number 12?]

That’s right it was part of number 25. This is another story that comes down from all the ages. I’ve got a book at home, from Richard Simmons, who must have been a haulier… it was his wages books and things that he bought for his waggoners. In the front of it…it is like a wallet, and yet it isn’t – it’s leather, and in the front it’s got a Almaner’s (?) Almanac dated March 1843. The rest of it is a kind of wages thing, there’s seven or eight people’s names, all Simmons - William Simmons, Joseph Simmons, Charles Simmons- I can remember all of those …and then after that what he paid - candles for the waggoners, of course in those days they had lamps in the front with candles you see, beer for the waggoners… He was a bachelor and he paid his housekeeping somebody 5 shillings a week…The house originally was a double fronted house…all these houses must have been the Earl of Dudley’s. When they started the mining all around here, the population grew around Gornal and all around here and what not… Well I’ve been wondering, I’ve been trying to get the Earl of Dudley’s archives to find out when they were built…because these cottages, as I say, there have been Simmons there to my knowledge now…before Richard Simmons there must have been some Simmons’. …that tells me… the Simmons there, there was a daughter left - well in the old days the houses used to come down to the oldest son- the sort of leasehold thing…this eldest son had the cottage, well he was married but the sister wasn’t married and so they thought, where is the sister going now, so what they did – they’d never do it now –they divided the house - took a piece of their own - made one room downstairs, a sort of a little kitchen at the back and one bedroom and she lived there – and that is how it has been since. It isn’t there now at all now. Used to call it 25A but not there now.

…1927 (Joseph ) bought the leasehold…he was selling all of his land and we had to buy ours - mother and I - because my Dad wasn’t here, so we had to buy ours then so we are freehold now.

[Can you remember what Joseph was like?]

Oh very nice…A white haired man…and he was a churchman… and he used to wear, like, a tailcoat…can you visualize a tailcoat?…He wasn’t thin…about your height I should think…he wore a hat, a bowler you know, and one of those, I always remember this, those collars…and they had a white front…if they wore a starched shirt underneath it didn’t’ show …and it had to be starched and ironed and the collar part was attached to it, it was what they called a stand-up collar…it was a straight piece up to here and the black tie came round and it was either a bow or it came down here…and he had always got his umbrella.
[What about Seneh?]

She was very tall – I think she was about 84 when she died – and you know she was straight as straight...nothing wrong with her except these very bad legs, ulcerated legs, you know...and I can only ever remember her wearing a dress and that was when Rose was married...she always wore black skirts and blouses - always high necked...and her hair was a very nice grey and she’d got a sort of auburn shade on, a bit natural...Because Rose has got a natural wave across her hair but she is white...thin and wiry you know, but very straight...Oh she was alright...they said she was like my father when she was alive so they said...

[Were they well known?]

Everybody knew everybody...he was well known in Gornal, all around Gornal....she never went out very much...she just kept to the house and enjoyed the garden and what not you know.

Rose and Jack went to Redhall School. Rose afterwards, because she is clerical – she went to the Clerk’s Training College which was in Dudley, then she worked for Sledgewood Canvas Solicitors...then left and went to Granges and Smith, the clothing wholesale manufactory - she was in the office there, but that’s all shut down.

She went to the same piano teacher that I did...

[Did John have violin lessons?]

Not to my knowledge no.

...there was a rug on the hearth there, they hadn’t got carpets then...one of those peg rugs you know...When they were there it was oil lamps...and they either had a hanging lamp or a table lamp...well we were the same - we didn’t get any electricity until 1947...They had a hanging lamp until the gas came down but it wasn’t very good - the mines were still working and when you’d got it, it was up and down, up and down you know...so we had hanging lamps until this gas...and we were so fed up with the gas, mother and I, father had gone then - he had died. When they were talking about electricity, well straight away we said, well, we wanted it and we had to wait a long time when the war was over - 1947...then Joseph had gone so Joseph never had electricity...Joseph was an old-fashioned gentleman that is what you would call him.