

**Supplementary Material 1: Edited transcript of interview with Noni Fallows and John Webster conducted at Bourn Hall on 19 May 2014.**

Approved for publication by NF and JW on 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> July 2014.

Speaker key

KE Kay Elder  
NF Noni Fallows  
MJ Martin Johnson  
JW John Webster

MJ It's the 19<sup>th</sup> May, 2014. We're recording with Noni Fallows, who's not yet arrived, and John Webster, and it's Kay Elder and myself, Martin Johnson, and we're at Bourn Hall. And you have read and understood the consent form and so on, have you, John?

JW I have, yes.

MJ So can you tell us a little bit about your start in life, how you got interested in medicine and so on?

JW Well, it was an idea I always had from an early age, actually. My father was a butcher and although he was relatively uneducated, he realised how important education was, and he often suggested that maybe I should consider being an engineer. He thought that was a good idea, or even a banker, but neither of these really appealed to me. I was always interested in medicine, and at school, of course, I was more interested in the science subjects rather than in the arts. So after leaving Cowley School in St Helens I went to Liverpool University and did Medicine and qualified in 1960. In those days, it was mandatory for all newly qualified doctors to do six months medicine and six months' surgery, before becoming a fully registered doctor with the General Medical Council. And after doing medicine and surgery I gained further experience in paediatrics, casualty, orthopaedics and radiotherapy. I then got a job in obstetrics and gynaecology with Patrick Steptoe in Oldham back in... that would be 1962, 1963 when he was pioneering laparoscopy. Even in those days he had a great interest in infertility. Of course at that time there wasn't very much we could do for women who were not ovulating as there were no drugs such as Clomiphene... I don't think Clomiphene had come on the stage at that time. There were however many patients who had damaged fallopian tubes so he did quite a lot of tubal surgery. Of course, in a lot of cases it was a pointless exercise because their tubes were so badly damaged. After me working for him for a year, he wanted me to stay on as a Registrar and although I thoroughly enjoyed the work I wasn't quite sure what to do and I drifted into General Practice, but because of the working conditions in the UK, I subsequently went to Canada after being encouraged to do so by one of Patrick's previous registrars who had already emigrated there.

MJ When was that? What year was that?

JW Back in... that would be back in 1964. I went over to Canada and worked in general practice, which I enjoyed very much because I could continue to do more or less everything that I'd learned to do ... it's a bit different to general practice here in that you had the facilities to do whatever you'd been trained to do, so I did a little bit of everything which I thoroughly enjoyed and generally it was a good life, but I always wanted my children educated back here. So in 1974 we came back to England and I decided to specialise because I felt that general practice was getting... it was difficult to keep abreast of things and I thought it would be easier to get into a specialty. It was then I met up with Patrick again. That would be back in 1974, Of course he'd already met up with Bob at that stage. And I can still remember him first talking to me about IVF, which I'd never heard of, as many other people hadn't, and that's how I became involved.

MJ So when did you first meet Bob, shortly afterwards or...?

JW It would have been at Kershaw's in 1974, yes. But that was... it was not strange, but an unusual arrangement in that the clinical work, was done at rather unsocial hours, either very early in the morning or late at night, occasionally at lunch time, and of course in between we were looking after a busy Obstetrical and Gynaecological Unit, so there wasn't a lot of time for me to get to know Bob ... just to chat to him. We dashed out to Kershaw's, did the surgery, then back to work at Oldham and District General Hospital. And then in the evening we'd put embryos back. So there wasn't much time to hang around... when the work was done I just left because I also had family commitments and was also studying for my MRCOG exam. Patrick obviously socialised with Bob much more in those days.

MJ And when did you first meet Jean [Purdy]?

JW I think that would be... I think Jean was working with Bob in 1974, if I'm not mistaken. I can't be absolutely sure of that.

KE Yes, she was. She was, yes.

JW She was, yes.

MJ So you met her at the same time. Did you see more of her than Bob?

JW Not really. No, they were always working together whenever I saw them. They had accommodation at Kershaw's, and they got on with the scientific work there.

MJ So you would divide your time between Oldham General and then Kershaw's at the antisocial hours?

JW That's right.

MJ Yes. And what were you doing with Patrick at Kershaw's then?

JW I was assisting him with the laparoscopies.

MJ Right. So the egg collection?

JW Egg collections, yes.

MJ Transfers?

JW No. I didn't do any transfers then. He did all the transfers, but I was interested in seeing the embryos under the microscope and to observe what was going on

MJ Right. So, what was working like at Kershaw's in those days? Was it difficult working on the two sites...?

JW No. Kershaw's isn't very far away from Oldham and District General Hospital. It was about a five-minute drive by car. Muriel Harris, who was the Theatre Superintendent at Oldham, took on the responsibility to arrange a team of nurses at the drop of a hat to go out. Usually we were given quite a bit of notice as to when we had to do egg collections, but sometimes Bob arranged them quite urgently and Muriel could always get a team together, a team of nurses, to go out there. Kershaw's, named after an Oldham doctor, was a cottage hospital, a nice setup, ... in very pleasant surroundings. There was a small theatre, which Patrick equipped himself, at his own expense, and it was fun to go out there.

MJ And was there only IVF work going on there or other... nothing else?

JW When the research was going on there were only patients having IVF in the hospital.

MJ Everyone there, they were in for IVF?

JW Yes. It was during the Cambridge vacations when Patrick arranged for anywhere between 8 to 16 patients to come along in the summer holidays, Easter holidays, Christmas holidays, and then Bob and Jean would come up and we'd get on with the work. The rest of the time the hospital was used by GP's with people being admitted for problems such as chest infections, postoperative convalescence and respite care. There was no other surgery going on there.

MJ So the use at Kershaw's was episodic then, was it?

JW Yes. And, before Kershaw's, before we got the facility at Kershaw's, the egg recoveries went on in Boundary Park, but ... I'm not sure how long that went on for.

MJ So Boundary Park is where?

JW Oldham and District General Hospital.

MJ Oh, that is Oldham and District?

JW That's right. Yes.

MJ So you don't know when the move to Kershaw's...?

JW I don't know. It had already taken place when I got there. Noni will probably be able to tell you about that.

MJ Okay.

KE We know from what I've looked at and from Grace [McDonald] and everything, that Patrick did preliminary laparoscopies on some of the patients.

[interruption when Noni Fallows arrived; start timing anew from now]

MJ Okay. So, now Noni Fallows has joined us, and she's also signed the consent form. She understands the terms of the interview and so on. And Kay was asking John a question, weren't you?

KE Yes. We know that Patrick did preliminary laparoscopies on some of the patients at least. So those were presumably done as part of your routine workload at the big hospital?

JW They were. Yes. The reason for doing the preliminary laparoscopies was that originally IVF was... the idea behind IVF was to help women with damaged tubes, damaged or blocked tubes. Treating couples with... where the fault lay with the man with oligospermia, came as a later spinoff from the original idea. Of course many of the patients who came through for treatment had had laparotomies in order to try to repair their tubes or to remove adhesions in the pelvis. One of the problems with such operations is that adhesions can redevelop and hide the ovaries so making it difficult or even impossible to visualise them laparoscopically.....so that was why preliminary laparoscopies were done on many patients and occasionally a further laparotomy to isolate the ovaries.

KE Yes. Make the ovaries accessible. Yes. We used to do them here when I started.

JW Yes we did. That's right, yes. And as I said earlier, one of the problems with any procedure is that adhesions can reform, so before getting a patient in for treatment it was important to look to see whether or not we could get to the ovaries.....recovery of eggs by ultrasound was not available then

KE Yes. I believe Lesley and Grace both had other procedures done. Yes.

JW They did, yes.

KE Did he do it on the majority of patients, do you think, or did anybody... did any of them get through without a prelim?

JW I would..... well, in the early days at Bourn Hall we did preliminary laparoscopies on the majority of patients.

KE Yes. I know.

JW And where the tubes were hopelessly damaged, we used to seal the cornual ends.

KE We used to clip them. Yes. I remember that.

JW Really because of Patient 38 in the days in Oldham, who had had an ectopic pregnancy following embryo replacement. She'd had both tubes removed previously, but had a little knob of tube remaining on either side, and unfortunately the embryo gravitated into the cornua.

KE Into the cornua, yes.

MJ Okay. So we'll just go back and cover the same ground we covered with you with Noni, and then all the other questions, I think, are more general, so that's fine. So, Noni, welcome back to Bourn Hall.

NF Thank you.

MJ Can you tell us how you got into nursing originally?

NF I started in... I started nursing as a cadet on 1<sup>st</sup> August, 1967 at Oldham and District. My first encounter with PCS [Step toe] was in Outpatient's Department when I was sixteen and a half. That was an eye-opener, coming from a very small family, not knowing very much about the world. Then later I went into theatre. In training it would be about 1969, late 1969 or 1970.

MJ You say it was an eye-opener. In what way?

NF It was an eye-opener. He was very charismatic, very flamboyant, in a way. Gynae-wise I'd never seen so many patients. They certainly didn't have as many on the other consultants' outpatients [lists], but it was very fast, very rapid, and there were the extremes, you know, I mean, of it. 1<sup>st</sup> August, 1967, that was just before the Abortion Act came in, so they were changing times. A lot of them were obviously tumours and what's up, but he was just starting to do... well, he'd started to do laparoscopic sterilisations and we'd got a lot of referrals from doctors [NOTE added by NF: compared with the other gynaecologists, many more patients came for infertility investigations]. Of course I don't think anybody else was doing laparoscopic sterilisations. They were all abdominal.

JW No.

NF So his workload was heavy and it was obvious to us, compared with the other gynae consultants, blatantly obvious. And he had the Senior Registrar. That was Paul Whitely at the time. Do you remember Paul Whitely?

JW Well, no. He was in between me being on in 1963 and me coming back in 1974.

NF Yes. So, you know, it was a very lively clinic, to say the least. And then obviously I went into training 1969, went into theatre possibly 1969 to... it was late 1969. And the gossip before that was all about a test tube baby. I mean the hospital gossip was rife. And, your mind, then, it went on overdrive if you were interested in anything. You know, how the hell are they doing this? Couldn't wait to get in theatres, couldn't wait, and went in theatres and stood back and watched Patrick with his laparoscope, aspirating some of these eggs, and then watched him go through into the back, the back of theatre. They didn't have a lab. They went through the sluice and they were in the laundry room, which really wasn't right, in the laundry room. And I thought, my God, this could work. This could actually work.

MJ Was this at Oldham and General?

NF Oldham and District. Yes. And it was very early days. And it just dawned on me this could work, and I was hooked, literally hooked. I felt like a fish on the end of a fishing line. I was hooked.

MJ What hooked you?

NF The fact that, number one, you could overcome all this infertility because patients were coming in for laparoscopy and hydrotubation. Now, if you can... if you have to go through expensive treatments and what, investigations, and you haven't got an outcome, you know, what are you going to do? If you've got blocked tubes and you haven't got an outcome... the only thing was reconstructive surgery. And at the time there was a television programme, and I can remember them making this television programme. I was there. And Horizon came in to film Steppy aspirating eggs, and the way the programme was edited gave the impression that there was a competition between Steptoe and Winston, because Professor [now Lord Robert] Winston, who was Mr Winston then, was doing reconstructive surgery and they portrayed it as if it was a race, who was going to get the live birth first. This is how it came across to the public.

MJ On Panorama... on the Horizon programme?

NF That's right. On the Horizon programme.

MJ So when would that have been, in sixty...?

NF It would be in the 1960s. 1969, possibly.

MJ Yes. Okay.

NF Around about then. But before then, I think what got the public frightened was the fact that when the news first broke that we were going to try these test tube babies, the media coverage was very negative. And I don't know whether I've dreamt it, thought it up - nobody could think this up - I honestly saw this in the news. And what they'd done is they'd taken the photographs of Cambridge University and the punts and photographs of Bob, and then all of a sudden they wheel out 9 or 10 thalidomide children in a trailer. Well, the public was frightened to death. You know, they thought we're going to get monsters, didn't they?

JW Well, there was always that. There was always that worry that, you know, it was a new technique and no-one was sure that the outcome would be the delivery of healthy babies.

NF No! But to instil that picture into the public's mind.

JW Well, there was always that picture in the... whenever there was a newspaper article on IVF in the early days there was invariably a picture of a test tube with a little baby trying to crawl out of it. Yes.

NF That's right. Yes. And, you know, these were the times - my family... I was brought up very Victorian and my grandmother... I mean sex wasn't mentioned in the house. It was a dirty word. And anybody who'd had an hysterectomy would have had it all taken away down below. Those, you know, God, drive me mad. Women had periods and that's all they knew. That was it. End of story. There were a lot... coming from Oldham, there were a lot like that and, you know... no. I'm afraid all it did with me is make me more intrigued.

MJ So you were fascinated by the whole idea and particularly the potential for treating these women who were desperate, probably?

NF Yes. They had desperation in their eyes, didn't they, John?

JW Well, they were. They were. And it was nice seeing them all get together at Kershaw's, actually. They... it was like a little club. Everybody was in the same boat and everybody is striving for the same end, and they were very supportive of one another.

NF Yes.

MJ So when did they move to Kershaw's? Do you know? Can you remember the year?

NF 1971 to...

JW Well, they were certainly there when I re-joined Patrick in 1974.

MJ Yes. So it was quite early on, then?

NF So between 1970, 1971, they moved into Kershaw's.

KE Yes. Well, that ties in with that list that we found.

NF Because when I was in training it was obvious I was hooked, obvious, you know, when I'd come to the end of my theatre time in training.

KE But were some of the cases still done at the Oldham? They weren't all done at Kershaw's, were they? [NOTE added by NF: Not sure if eggs were harvested at Oldham and District General Hospital at this time.]

NF They'd come to us [at Oldham General] for laparoscopy, hydrotubation or for the investigations.

JW That's right, yes, investigations. That's right. Yes.

NF Yes. They'd come to us for investigation and...

JW Preliminary laparoscopies... yes.

NF Yes.

MJ Were all the IVF... all the egg recoveries were done at Kershaw's?

NF Kershaw's. Yes. And I... obviously I went onto the wards then, went on with my training, but he said to me at the end of my theatre, he said, we're going to have a little theatre set up away from here, Noni, and away from the hospital, somewhere secret, and we'll need good nurses in theatres. And I thought, I didn't think I was any good, really, but there you go.

JW But he always had that dream of establishing a clinic for infertility, purely and simply for treating infertility. Had... he had that idea back in the 1960s.

MJ So you would go and work there in the early morning or the evening, would you, and then do your usual shift in Oldham General, District and General?

NF When I came back into theatres, when I went about 1973, I think it was reopened in 1973, they had had a break because didn't Bob do politics or something? And I came back in and Muriel said, oh, we're opening Kershaw's up again. Then went up, got it all ready. And we were using the drugs then, weren't we, 1973, 1974?



JW Oh, yes, but it was only the pergonal that was used.

NF We were using the drug. So it wasn't bad, actually, because the use of the drugs... we could our daily work and then go up to Kershaw's at five, half past five, and carry on. It was great. That was easy.

JW We weren't sure about the timing, though, then, Noni. Occasionally there were...

NF Lunch time ones

JW There were panic calls, weren't there?

NF Yes.

JW As I explained, how Muriel got a team together at the drop of a hat, really, to go out and do an egg collection.

NF That's right. Yes.

MJ So it was a whole band of you, were there, who were committed... as committed as you or...?

NF Well, it boiled down to the three of us, really, didn't it - Sandra, Muriel and myself?

JW Yes. You were the linchpins.

NF Yes. We were the linchpins. We were there the majority of the time. Obviously, one of us might have been poorly and somebody had to step in, either Sandra, myself or Muriel, but Muriel used to drive all the way from Pendlebury every time.

MJ When did you first meet Bob?

NF 1969.

MJ What... how was the first meeting? What was your impression of him?

NF I've... I... a shock. [laughter] I'd read about people like Bob in books, a mad professor, you know.

MJ So he came and fulfilled all your expectations, did he?

NF He did. Yes, he did. But I got used to him. Like, you know, he was just... Bob was just Bob. [NOTE added by NF: I can remember one night Bob said to me just

imagine Noni if we could solve all the problems of organ donation, wouldn't that be good!] And, I mean, Patrick and Bob were chalk and cheese, weren't they? You know, they were literally chalk and cheese. Two o'clock in the morning Patrick would come in and he looked as if he'd walked out of Burton's Tailors, didn't he, suited and booted and that immaculate? Bob, you'd be lucky he'd got a pair of socks... you know, he didn't have socks on. Shoes... well, he'd just have a pair of trainers on, T-shirt back to front, didn't you?

MJ And Jean?

NF Jean? We were talking about Jean yesterday, haven't we? Jean was so quiet she reminded me of a little mouse, you know, little and always looked pale. Certainly I was always boisterous, banged the doors open, singing, whistling, laughing, you know. I was happy, jolly, and she was always very quiet, very petite. She reminded me of a little mouse. And when we stopped using the drugs she'd always greet me with, have you got your 'magic magnet', Noni? Oh, it's here in my pocket, Jean. Don't worry about it. [NOTE added by NF: this was a joke between Jean and myself when we stopped using the hormones]

MJ What was that about?

NF We just... we had to get there on time and on target. At the beginning when we stopped using the drugs we weren't too... it was a bit of a mess, but then we got into a routine and we got it every time, got the egg every time. So we were proud of that. It was a race.

MJ So you've... we've talked about the three main characters of Jean and Bob and Patrick. What were their relative roles?

NF Oh, Patrick was the egg collector, really, wasn't he? He was a surgeon.

JW He was the clinician and Bob was the scientist. That's right. Yes. And Jean... we assumed Jean just helped with the preparation of media because you couldn't buy the media already made-up in those days - it was all measured by volume and in grams and whatever - and sterilising dishes, sterilising the equipment that they'd use in the lab. I don't recall Jean doing any... actually identifying of the eggs under the microscope when the follicular fluid was taken into the lab. Bob always did that. What her role was after that, whether she inseminated the oocytes or not, I'm not sure.

MJ Did she mainly work with Bob or did she interact with Patrick at all?

JW No. Always stuck with Bob. Yes.

MJ So it was Bob and Patrick who interacted together?

JW Yes.

MJ How was their interaction?

JW It was fine. They had an intercom in the theatre.

NF Oh, yes.

JW So Bob could tell Patrick when he'd identified an egg... because he worked in a little side room next to the theatre, and it wasn't easy to converse between the two, so they set up this intercom and Patrick would... would number the follicles one, two, three etc. and Bob might say, would you go back to number three? I've got the egg from one and two.

KE We've got photos that showed Jean holding the wee suction device, so presumably she... is that what she did in the laparoscopy? She would have been with Patrick, no?

JW Jean, I don't... no, it'd be... that'd be Muriel or Noni, one of them. Yes.

KE Oh, okay. So that...

JW I mean, she may have had... she may have been involved, but I don't recall.

MJ Jean was qualified as a nurse, wasn't she?

NF No.

MJ She didn't work in theatre at all?

JW No.

NF No. That was Muriel's domain and...

KE I always thought... because of that particular photo, I always thought that she did work in the theatre.

JW No.

NF No.

KE Yes. Okay. So that was just... I'll show you the photo.

MJ So would you say the working relationship between Patrick and Bob was a good one or were there any rough spots in it or...?

JW Well, I think on occasion there was some tension between them. I don't know what actually happened. I can't remember when it was. I remember Patrick saying

something about Bob being a bit upset about things. He sounded to me as though he was thinking about taking his bat and ball home, you know. Do you remember there was a bit of a glitch? It was over and done with in next to no time.

NF Yes, and...

JW I think Patrick was... he was concerned for quite a while that Bob was going to stop working.

MJ Yes. Do you know when that was. That would be... after 1974, wouldn't it?

JW Oh, it would be after 1974, between 1974 and 1978.

MJ Yes. Okay.

KE [produces photo] So your husband probably took that photo specifically for them?

JW I think it... oh, that's posed.

NF Yes its posed.

JW Yes. Because the nurse didn't stand there. The nurse was up here.

KE Oh, okay.

NF Yes. This is posed.

KE Yes. I used to do that in theatre here.

JW Yes. So you know.

KE Yes. Bottom end, we called it.

JW That's right.

KE Yes. Bottom end. I used to do bottom end for you.

NF Jean... no, it was Muriel's nursing staff. And what went on in theatres, Muriel was the boss.

MJ Muriel was in charge.

NF Oh, definitely.

MJ Yes.

NF There was a few rumpuses between Muriel and Patrick sometimes, wasn't there? But it was soon sorted.

JW There was some friction between the... in the setup. I remember we were talking about that last night. Getting back to when the work was done at Oldham and District General Hospital, whenever Patrick was operating, and of course the few oocyte recoveries done then were fitted in with the list ... around 11 o'clock he would stop in between cases and his secretary, would come over to him with his... the mail and he'd go through it... have a coffee and go through the mail. This happened routinely around 11 o'clock, you know. He was there for ten minutes, quarter of an hour, and then back, operating again. At that time Jean and Bob had set up the lab, in what had been used as a laundry room...

NF The laundry room at the back...

JW Muriel told the story of how Jean came out and said to her, oh, Doctor Edwards is ready for his coffee now. And of course at that particular time the theatres were going full tilt..... no one had time to bring coffee for Bob. Evidently this riled Bob a bit, that Patrick got this attention and he didn't. And it wasn't intentional at all. It was just routine for Steppy to do that. Yes.

MJ So who was in charge, do you think, Steppy in Oldham and Kershaw's?

JW Of course Patrick was in charge of the clinical side and what went on at Kershaw's, but he realised how important Bob was to him. I don't know whether Bob felt the same way about Patrick, if he did he didn't show it. Bob, as I found out later at Bourn when I really got to know him, could be obstinate and dogmatic and on occasions I know Patrick found him difficult to deal with. Bob must have appreciated Patrick's skills... I mean Patrick was .... he'd pioneered laparoscopy in this country, running a busy obstetrical and gynaecological unit in a district general hospital, not in a university setting, and on top of this he was involved in pioneering IVF I don't know of anybody else who was... well, there was no one else doing egg collections laparoscopically.

NF No.

JW There was a fellow down in London – I was trying to remember his name – who went off the scene altogether. And he used to do egg recoveries by doing a mini laparotomy. Did you find out who he was? I remember talking about...

MJ Yes. I think...

JW Was it... not Armstrong? No, it's not Armstrong.

MJ I can't remember now. It was someone at King's, I think...

JW Yes.

MJ ... who did something. But I've got... if I go back into my data I may be able to find something on that [Ferguson see later].

JW Yes. But he used to collect eggs doing a mini laparotomy.

MJ So maybe we could just look briefly at the funding of the work. So the setting up at Kershaw's was all done by private money, was it? Or how did that work?

NF You're not going to believe this one because I didn't believe it. Back in 1969 £250 was a lot of money and that's how much Patrick gave Muriel to set Kershaw's up.

MJ £250?

NF Yes. And I'm sure it was £250. It certainly wasn't £500. And it certainly wasn't in the thousands. It was £250 because I nearly fell off my chair when Muriel told me.

JW What did she buy with that?

NF Well, this is where Fred Baxter [the hospital senior administrator] comes in. Fred Baxter had some old equipment in storage, not too old, usable, but we didn't use it in main theatres. Excuse me. And, so, he had lights and a few trolleys, and patients' trolleys, but Muriel was on something called the National Association of Theatre Nurses, and she was Chairperson of it. So all she had to do was get her feelers out and said, right, girls, I need a theatre table, and she bought one from Bolton. The theatre table came from Bolton.

JW I remember him buying the theatre table, yes.

NF And she had it serviced. Cracking. Just what we needed. And other bits and bobs used to surreptitiously find their way up to Kershaw's. She got the joiner in to put the shelves in. But there was a small theatre at Kershaw's anyway, and I think the GPs used it for minor ops, didn't they?

JW I would imagine so, on occasion, but usually Kershaws was mainly used for respite care, wasn't it, and people who were not seriously ill... bad chests and maybe just needed a bit of rest.

NF But there was a room there, all tiled, ready to go. All we needed is all the equipment. And that's what's happened.

JW I think she bought the... got the anaesthetic machine as well, didn't she?

NF Yes. She bought the anaesthetic machine. Where that came from, I don't know, but Muriel sorted all that out.

MJ So that was the setting up for £250?

NF That's right.

MJ And then the running costs? I mean how were you paid and so on?

NF We weren't paid.

MJ You weren't paid?

NF No.

MJ You did it all voluntarily?

NF Yes.

MJ All of you?

NF All... yes.

MJ And you as well?

JW Promises, but no money.

MJ No. Very good.

NF We did... I can remember when we were... we'd started...

JW I think you used to get a fiver now and again, didn't you?

NF Well, that's what I'm just coming to. When we started doing egg collections without the drugs, without the hormones, it was lunacy. And, anyway, as per usual Saturday morning with Muriel, Sandra and myself, and we finished the magic egg collection, I mean we'd been at it all week, two and three cases a day, but, you know yourself it comes up 11 o'clock at night, two o'clock in the morning. We had to be back at work for eight o'clock in the morning, so we could have finished Kershaw's at two in the morning and we were back on duty again at eight in the morning. It was lunacy, but we enjoyed it. And this particular Saturday morning Muriel comes up to me and gives me £10. And I said, what's that for? She said, oh, Father [Steptoe] just given it me for you. I said, what for? She said, the work. I said, there's no money. She... I said, give it to him back. She said, I can't give it to him back. I... there's no money. She said, I can't give it to him. Take it. For God's sake, take it. Yes. Right. Okay. So every now and then on a Saturday morning we had £10.

MJ So do you think that would happen nowadays?

NF Nobody'd do it nowadays, not that.

JW Well, I think with the morale at the NHS you'd find it very difficult to... and the... I think there's a sort of a big divide between the medical and surgical staff, probably created by the... medical and...

NF Nursing staff.

JW ... sorry, nursing not surgical staff, probably which has been created by the government, so it would be very difficult to get a setup like that again.

MJ So the main expense was then... was on drugs, was it, or...?

JW Well, I think the Pergonal... I think Serono provided the Pergonal.

MJ Did they?

JW I think they did. I'm not absolutely sure of that.

MJ Because I think originally we thought it... they got Pergonal from...

JW From the pharmacy?

MJ From a drug company, not from Serono. When did Serono start producing it?

JW Did... weren't Serono in charge of...? I think Serono were... had Pergonal.

MJ Before, I think Searle provided it initially, didn't it?

JW Searle.

KE Was it Searle?

JW Searle. You may be right. Yes.

MJ Yes. I think they... because we got some... we found some invoices and some suggestion in the papers that Searle was the sources of the drug. The Clomid I'm not sure about, where that came from.

JW I don't know who made Clomid. Was it Merrell?

MJ I think it was Merrell. I think we found a reference to Merrell. Yes, that's right. And then, so, all those would have to have been purchased off some grant or other, would they, or would GPs...?

JW Well, I don't know whether they came via the pharmacy or not.[NOTE added by NF: All the anaesthetic drugs including resuscitation drugs were brought in from the main ODGH Theatres]



MJ Also, do you know where the bloods and the urines went? Did they... were they done in-house or did they go...?

JW No. The urinary assays were carried out at Boundary park... they urines were collected over 24 hours by patients and brought to Kershaws each morning. That was one of the jobs I supervised..... collecting the urines, measuring the volumes, and then samples were sent off to Boundary park

MJ And that applied right through to 1978, did it?

JW Right through to 1978... I think it did, actually. There were no rapid assays readily available then.

MJ Yes. And when the Hi-Govanis came in, that was done locally? That was done in...?

JW That was 1977, wasn't it? 1977...

KE 1977, November.

MJ That was all done at Kershaw's, I think? Yes.

JW That was done at Kershaw's, yes.

MJ That was the only one...?

JW But the total oestrogens were done at Boundary Park. I don't know what the... who was the boss of Pathology?

NF Geoff Garrett.

JW Geoff Garrett. I think Geoff Garrett had agreed to... they would be done.

MJ He did the total oestrogen and at Oldham General? Yes.

JW Yes..... not himself, one of his lab staff.

MJ Throughout? That's the blood oestrogens?

JW No... urinary. There were no quick assays readily available... occasionally Bob used to send bloods off to Searle, but there was at least a 24 hour delay in getting the results.

MJ So we got some invoices for Searle for early on for those, but we didn't know how long it went on. So you think it went to Boundary Park, the labs there, later?

JW No I don't think so, they mainly took the... relied on the total urinary oestrogens.

MJ Yes.

KE But there are lab reports from Oldham in 1975.

MJ Okay.

JW The total oestrogens went on, ...even here at Bourn in the early days...

MJ Okay. So what would be the main expenses, then?

JW Well, there weren't any, really, were there? The use of Kershaws had been agreed by the local Hospital Authority and there was no charge for this.... or for the personnel involved.

NF No. Everybody just did it. [NOTE added by NF: I had a conversation with John Battye, head of Haematology in the 1960s and 70s, who said "there was no funding; we just carried out tests as routine requests".

MJ Okay.

KE All the material for the media and the tissue culture stuff, that would have come from Bob's lab?

MJ That would have come from Cambridge. Yes.

KE From Cambridge? Yes.

JW Yes.

MJ And the patients didn't pay anything, did they?

JW No. I think they were trying to encourage donations... I think some... there was a fund set up. I don't know how... what amount was in that fund at all.

MJ That still goes actually – there wasn't a lot in it, I think.

JW No. I'm sure there wouldn't be.

MJ And Bob and Patrick used to put money in which they got from honoraria and so on. And I think some patients donated to it as well.

JW Yes.

MJ So the whole thing was done on a shoestring?

JW It certainly was.

NF There was an American lady that donated a lot of money, wasn't there?

MJ Yes. We know about her.

JW Yes.

MJ Good. Any question you want to ask on funding [to Kay]?

KE No

MJ So, the patients, how were they recruited?

JW Via... through Oldham and District, through the Infertility Clinic in Oldham and District General Hospital. He already had a list of infertility patients had there and after he'd met up with Bob and realised there was a chance of this working, he kept a list of patients whom he considered suitable for treatment and whenever Bob decided he would come up to Oldham, usually in the vacations, Patricks secretary would pull out these patients notes. He'd go through them and she would contact those whom he'd selected. Some of course wanted to come through.....others had given up any idea of becoming pregnant and I suppose some of them had become too old. So that's how they were recruited

MJ So they generally tended to be local or were they...?

JW Oh, not at all. No. He used to get people coming from all over.

MJ So they would write to Patrick and he'd put them on the waiting list at Oldham General, would he?

JW Yes. After he'd seen... these are patients he'd seen before. They didn't just come on the waiting list to have IVF. They were patients he'd personally looked after.

MJ Okay. So he saw them initially and would evaluate them for whether they'd be suitable for the programme? And then when they came on the programme, who would... would anybody else see them then?

JW Apart from Patrick and myself, nobody else. No. In terms of what, are you thinking of?

MJ Well, in... talking to them and explaining the issues and...

JW Well, I'm sure Patrick had done that. I mean, I think there was very little said, really, apart from that was an experimental project and we didn't know... there were no successes. It was sort of, you know, take your chance.

MJ Yes. Okay. And how was... when things went wrong and they didn't get pregnant, how was that handled?

JW I don't think it was handled particularly well, when you look at what happens today in terms of ongoing support and counseling. After patients had treatment and if they'd been successful in having an embryo replacement, a pregnancy test would be arranged and there was just a telephone call.....but there was no counseling set up as such, not that I'm aware of.

NF No.

KE And a number of them came for repeated cycles. Was that...?

JW I was surprised about Patient 38, who was the lady who had the ectopic.

NF I know.

JW I didn't realise she had... how many more cycles?

KE She had ten cycles.

JW Ten cycles altogether?

MJ Ten cycles.

NF Good grief!

KE Yes. And there was another lady who had nine and one lady who had eight and then... I've got all the figures, but a number of patients had multiple cycles. Do you have any idea how that happened? It... would it have been their...the patients themselves volunteering, wanted to have another go?

JW I would.... I would probably think so. Yes.

NF Yes.

MJ And, Noni, you were there in 1969 and 1970, 1971, the early days before they started putting them back?

NF No. I was there 1969, 1970-ish, in training and then I had to go off on the wards, so when I came back in 1973 then we were the... I was a permanent ...

MJ By then were there most of them being put back?

NF I can't remember a lot of them being put back because I think Jean and Patrick and Bob did it without us, the put-backs.

JW Without anybody.

NF But then I don't know what happened. [Only later] we had to go and do the put-backs and do the transfers.

MJ When would that be?

NF That was when we'd stopped the hormones [stimulations].

MJ Right. So that was towards 1977, 1978?

NF That's right. We'd... so we had to be there to do that recovery and we had to be there for the transfer. I think there might have been something between Muriel and Jean because all the equipment... we only had three lots of transfer trays. The equipment, the trays, everything, had to be wrapped up and brought back to Oldham [General Hospital] for us to clean, sterilise and repack. We had no central sterilising place at the time, so we had to do it.

KE So that limited how many cases could be done, of course.

NF That's right. But I think there was only three or four beds he could use anyway, wasn't there? How many beds did we have? I think there was only three or four beds?

JW In Kershaw's?

NF Yes.

JW Oh, there was that big ward. I remember on occasion that being full where there'd be six or... were there eight patients in there. Certainly six...

NF Towards the end...?

JW The far end.

NF Far end... yes.

JW Yes.

NF So we... yes, you know, we had to recycle this stuff and get it put back. So Jean couldn't be involved.

JW This is just for egg recoveries? It's not for replacements now?

NF I'm talking about egg replacements and recovery.

JW Yes. Oh, no, there wouldn't be so many.

NF No. There wouldn't, would there?

JW No. Only two or three on occasional days.

NF Yes. So, to get the equipment recycled, we had to be involved in the transfers for there, and that was the same with the... when we aspirated the eggs. We had... you know, we had to deal with all the equipment, take it back with us, clean it up, repack it and get it ready for the next.

MJ So that changeover to you doing more of the transfers occurred with the higher throughput in 1977 and 1978?

NF Oh, it was mad.

MJ Yes. Because up until then I think there were very rarely more than two or three transfers a day, were there?

JW We did... I can't remember doing more than maybe... at a time we wouldn't do more than a couple of egg recoveries at a time.

NF I think that's when we got involved.

JW JW There might have been an occasional day when we may have done three, something like that, but we certainly didn't have the number of recoveries done nowadays.

KE They weren't as many as six in a day.

JW Not at all.

NF No. We'd do about three. I can remember doing three at a time.

MJ Was that towards the end now? Yes. Because I think earlier on there were relatively rarely more than two a day, weren't there, till 1976, 1977, 1978? Okay. So, generally speaking, do you think there were any problem patients? Do you recall any patients who'd you regard as problem patients, difficult patients?

JW In terms of... well, I certainly wasn't involved in seeing any of those having problems... Patrick would probably bear the brunt of any problems, which arose. He certainly never spoke to me of any problem. I think people realised that it was just... the chap was just trying his best and they were grateful to be involved in the programme. I'm sure he explained that, you know, it was... the outcome was probably going to be poor in the majority of cases. And he had no figures to give them, of course, did he?

NF No.

MJ What do you think, Noni? Do you know... do you remember any difficult patients?

NF No. They were all just glad to be there, glad that we were there trying to help them. In actual fact, when we were here at Louise Brown's 25<sup>th</sup> birthday, Grace [MacDonald]... and I can remember, actually for some reason, her coming to theatres, Alistair's mum, ....and Grace come running up to me, wrapped her arms around me, giving me a big kiss. Said, Noni, I've wanted to do that for 25 years! And I thought, you don't need money when you get that, do you? No. And she said, I wanted to do it for 25 years. And I said, well, that was a fateful night we did you. She said, two o'clock Saturday morning. I said, yes, about right, that, about right.

MJ She kept a very detailed diary because we interviewed her.

NF She did. She's a lovely lady. But there weren't any problem patients.

MJ Were there any serious morbidities or anything? Anything go wrong with any of the patients on the transfers or the recoveries or anything like that, do you recall?

JW I can't recall any problems. We'd never had any problems with hyperstimulation as far as I'm aware. Were there any recorded?

MJ No. They were very cautious on the stimulation.

JW That was right. Yes, it was an unknown territory because, you know, up to that time HMG had only been used in anovulatory patients, not in patients who'd been ovulating, so we didn't really know where we were in terms of dosage.

MJ Any more on that?

KE No. Certainly there was no indication in any of the material that I've looked through that there were any problems, any...

JW Well, the only problems were in the outcomes and the vast majority being negative, and then Patient 38, the first lady who became pregnant having the ectopic, and then there were... were there two or three miscarriages after that?

KE Well, there were definitely two miscarriages in 1978.

JW There was one in... one woman was in Sheffield. I remember being called about her. And the other...

KE But...there's also a cluster of patients in 1976 where there's an indication that they thought they might be pregnant, but they were giving a lot of heavy luteal support at the time.

JW Yes. They might have had HCG.

KE Yes. And progesterone and...

JW Yes.

KE So there's a total of 11 where Bob has scribbled across, or Patrick has scribbled across, query.

JW Queries? Yes.

KE Early pregnancy loss. Were you aware of any of those?

JW No. The first pregnancy I was aware of was Patient 38.

KE Patient 38. Yes. And then, apart from this cluster of queries in 1976, the next one was Lesley in 1977.

MJ In Lesley's book she says that she wasn't aware that it was experimental until near the time Louise was going to be born and then... it was then she realised that she was going to be the first. And Grace more or less said the same, didn't she? She didn't realise that there weren't...

JW I'm surprised.

MJ I mean, certainly in Lesley's book, she also says that subsequent to that when nursing staff and other doctors had told her that the chances of this happening were very slim, she hadn't taken it on board, so.

JW Well, I'm not surprised because... I mean, I'm not being unkind to Lesley. She was a quite a stoical character and not really the brightest lady, I didn't think. And Patrick could have said something to her that she just didn't take on board. Grace was a different kettle of fish.

KE Yes. She is.

NF A lovely lady.

JW No, Lesley was a nice lady, but she was... you know, sometimes you were talking to her and you wondered whether it was all going in.

MJ Yes. What about the press intrusions? Were they a constant feature or did they just peak around the time that Lesley was...?

JW They certainly peaked at the... well, the time that Lesley was taken into hospital. She went into hospital at around 36 weeks... was it 35, 36 weeks.

KE In April of 1978, yes, she went into hospital.



JW So how long was she in for?

KE She was... well, as far as we can tell she was in from April until Louise was born, so that was several months.

JW I can't remember her being in for so long.

NF Didn't she stay with Patrick for some time? [NOTE added by NF: I remember Muriel telling me that Lesley stayed at the Steptoe's home (in Rochdale) for a while]

JW Good question. I think she may well have done I mean, towards the end I remember seeing her every day but didn't think it was for three months I saw her, so she may well have spent time at the Steptoes. One of the reasons for her coming in was to keep the press away from her home in Bristol to give her a bit of peace and quiet, but she did, you know ... her blood pressure went up a little and she was having some swelling of her ankles, so we were worried about toxæmia developing and possibly getting worse. That's the other reason why she was in. I remember she would have... Patrick phoned me up a few days before Lesley gave birth and asked me to examine her vaginally. The baby's head was well down in the pelvis and the cervix was nice and thin and I think she would have probably had a normal delivery if she'd been allowed to.. but of course there was... there were two reasons, two main reasons, for doing the Caesarean section. One was to avoid any devastating intrapartum problem and the second one was to show the whole world that she had no tubes because after repairing the uterus Patrick delivered the uterus out of the wound to show that there were no Fallopian tubes. The whole procedure had been filmed by the Central Government Investigation Office.

MJ But it was also, I thought, to ensure it was done when the press weren't aware that it was being done?

JW Well, that's right. It was planned for Saturday the 26th of July but Patrick decided that he'd do it the previous evening.

KE Just before midnight on 25<sup>th</sup>.

JW 25th it was, but it was arranged for 26th so that Muriel could be there She was down in... that's another story altogether.... Muriel was down in... at her cottage down in Cornwall when Patrick suddenly decided that he was going to do the Caesarean on the Friday night. His procedure for weeks, after he'd seen private patients at rooms, was for him to come to see Lesley in the late afternoon, early evening, and then go home. In those days he had a white Merc[edes], so the press had, you know, clocked this, and on the Friday ... after we'd got theatre arranged, he came down about six o'clock and went into Maternity and came out several minutes later and drove home. Of course the press thought that was it and that nothing else would be happening that day. He came back later that night..... the op was scheduled for 11 o'clock.

MJ So Muriel wasn't there for the delivery?

JW Muriel was on her way back. She was on her... but, as I said, that's another story that Noni might like... want to...

NF No. She was driving through Manchester. She heard it on the radio.

MJ Oh dear.

NF Yes.

MJ Were you involved in the delivery?

NF No, thank goodness. I had enough as for working on it. I could not have taken the pressure from all the press; I always shun publicity.

JW I think Edith took the table, didn't she?

NF Yes, Edith, Edith Astall [theatre scrub sister.] I'll email her phone number to... for you, if you want?

MJ Yes. Okay. That'll be great.

NF Edith Astall and Sandra Corbett, that was the other girl that kept running backwards and forwards to Kershaw's. I'll email the phone numbers. I haven't got them with me, but...

MJ Okay. That'll be great, if you would.

NF Yes. I'm actually glad I wasn't there because at least the pressure of telling the tale has been divided between a lot more people, you know. And I think if it was just Muriel, Sandra and myself again on the night, it's too much.

MJ So, but prior to that there weren't... there wasn't too much press intrusion at all?

NF It got to me a bit.

JW No it didn't bother me apart from the fact that the Manchester Evening Newspaper always seemed to be well informed about what was going on as regards Lesley's pregnancy. I'm sure there was a mole in the hospital who was privy to information which he or she should have kept to themselves.....never found who it was.

MJ Yes. But I mean before Lesley was pregnant you don't recall any problems with the press?

JW No.

NF Didn't we...?

JW Not that we... not around the hospital.

NF No, not round the hospital. We got some negative stories in the press when Landrum Shettles had his clinic disbanded and then we... it bounced back on the team, saying, oh, what are they doing. And the Americans didn't take to it very well, did they? And then we got it bounced back. The press gave us a lot of negative press, which upset me. [NOTE added by NF: PCS noticed this and told me "not to let it upset me as at least we had each other. Bob and Jean are on their own in Cambridge"].

MJ But they weren't coming up to the hospital?

NF No. Not then. It was when we got Lesley admitted. Then we got a lot of press. I walked into Kershaw's one night, half past one in the morning, to do a case, and Bob was on the floor with two press people. Yes. You don't remember? He was on the floor. This lady and man press had walked into Kershaw's pretending they were a couple and he'd found them in the office going through notes. So Sandra and myself walked in, and he'd got them on the corridor, and by this time I think he got them on the floor, he said, Noni, get them, they're press. I found them in my office.

JW I've never heard this story.

NF And they were all terrible. Now, when Eamonn [Matthews, producer of the Channel 4 Baby Makers programme] interviewed us, I told Eamonn about it, and Eamonn went back to Bob, and he says, Bob doesn't remember. And I thought, well, he's had that much going on in his life, you wouldn't expect him to remember everything [NOTE added by NF: Sandra Corbett remembers this incident].

JW I would have thought he'd have remembered a scuffle.

NF But yes, it was a right scuffle.

JW In the very early days at Bourn Hall..... we hadn't been open long at all ..... I remember having coffee with Patrick in the Portacabin, which housed the theatre and embryology lab when a junior doctor, a Palestinian, brought a newspaper in to show us.... it had been sent by his parents. Of course we couldn't read it as it was in Arabic but he explained that Bob Winston had been out somewhere in the Middle East and that the article more or less quoted him as saying that he thought that IVF was a con.

NF Yes. That's right. I remember that. Yes, I remember that.

MJ When?

JW This was in the early days. This would be in 1980.

MJ 1980?

JW Or early 1981.

NF I remember that. Yes.

JW I said, what does it say? And he repeated it... he'd brought it in specially to show us. And Winston, you know...

MJ This is when you were at Bourn Hall?

JW Here. Yes. In the first few months.

MJ Yes. Anything more...?

KE What did you do between 1978 and 1980, John?

JW I went down into Manchester.

KE Okay. So we've got the very first notebook, when they started here.

JW The very...?

KE The very first notebook when they started here [Bourn Hall] in October, 1980.

JW That's right. We came... when did we...? I think it was 28<sup>th</sup> October.

KE 28<sup>th</sup> September.

JW Yes. And we had six patients in. They came in for preliminary laparoscopies, and when I came to see them preoperatively the night before, I couldn't find anybody.... couldn't find anybody, so eventually... nobody knew where they'd gone. None of the nurses knew where they...

NF Patients... in the pub.

JW And I walked round to the Golden Lion at the end of the drive and they're all sat in the pub having a drink.

KE But the second transfer that they did here was pregnant. She delivered a baby girl.

JW Yes. Who was that?

KE She was a Slovenian lady from Sheffield.

JW Yes.

KE We only discovered this very recently when the last round of notes from Jenny... because we didn't know about her. Mike didn't know and she's not in our archive records, but, yes, once I found the name I googled it, and there is a daughter. There is a daughter and I think it's the same person. It's an unusual Slovenian name.

JW I was telling Noni last night or yesterday afternoon, that early on Bourn Hall was under the threat of closure. It got off to very slow start and I remember Alan Dexter, who was the Financial Director came to me one day and asked, where are all these patients that you're supposed to have because there were somewhere between 3,000 or 4,000 patients on the waiting list, they'd accumulated over the years. He said, if we don't get some more patients through pretty quick we're going to have to close this down. At that time interest rates were very high, around 17%, and obviously enough patients weren't coming through to service the debt.

After this I went to see Patrick's secretary and asked if she still had the notes of people on the waiting list. Fortunately she did have them and I told her that we would have to try to contact some of these otherwise... we'd be in danger of being shut down. And, so, when I had time she and I would each get a pile of notes out and phone around. When we phoned in the daytime invariably we couldn't get through to anybody and then it dawned on me that as they had no children they were probably both working.....so then we started phoning at night then. It was a time consuming business but we eventually started getting through to some of these people There was no PR in those days, of course, and doctors couldn't advertise, the way things were then. Of course we couldn't contact everybody we phoned but amongst those we did we found some were no longer interested, some had separated, one or two had achieved pregnancies naturally and fortunately a number were so pleased to find out where we were and .....after doing this night after night, eventually people started coming.

MJ Because quite a few people from Oldham turned up in Bourn Hall, didn't they?

JW There were people from all over the country who used to...

MJ Yes, but people who were on the Oldham... who had a go in Oldham and hadn't been successful and then came here?

JW Yes. That was about... we'd been going about four or five months... it would be about February or March when that happened. Don't forget that in August 1978 Patrick retired from the NHS and so apart from him seeing patients at his rooms in Cambridge, no actual IVF went on for two years..... that was when Bourn opened up.

MJ So, I mean, IVF is still quite a sensitive area for some people and it raises all sorts of ethical issues. Did either of you ever feel that it was unethical, what you were doing, or...?

JW I... no, I really didn't. No. ... I had no qualms about it ... I explained to patients that ethically it was no different from them having treatment say for..... appendicitis. You know, many years ago, before we were aware of diagnosing and treating appendicitis..... before there was the medical expertise, people died... we learned about removing the appendix... it cured the condition. Now we have couples who want to have a baby but can't because the woman has blocked Fallopian tubes but we have this method of collecting an egg, achieving fertilisation outside the body, which normally happens in the Fallopian tube and which can't happen in these women because their tubes aren't working, then watching the early stages of development of the embryo and putting it into the uterus, where hopefully it will attach. As far as I can see it was just a... you know, we have the technique available and there's no reason why women shouldn't conceive using it. So it has never bothered me from an ethical point of view at all.

MJ Noni?

NF Well, as I said before, I can't see the point of going through expensive investigations, taking bed space up, anaesthetics and everything else, if you can't solve the problem at the end. Surely that's unethical, you know, bringing patients in. They could be... yes, well, I thought that could be unethical. The only time I felt any pressure of that type was when we did start to divide the fallopian tubes and... but there's no turn back here. You know, we have mechanically sterilised these women. We've got to find the answer. And, if anything, it just made me go more determined at it, you know.

MJ So that was done routinely, was it?

NF It was, wasn't it, after Patient 38?

JW After Patient 38, yes. But these were hopelessly damaged tubes, which... not healthy tubes.

NF Oh, no, they were hopelessly damaged, but I felt as if we'd gone in and actually divided these tubes, so we had to... there was absolutely no chance.

JW There was no chance. That's right, yes.

NF Absolutely no chance.

JW Yes. You're quite right because, you know, you get these stories of people who assumed the tubes were blocked, who suddenly become pregnant.

NF Pregnant, yes, so...

JW It did remove that ... a slight chance of natural conception.

MJ And that was done with the patient's knowledge and consent, was it?

JW Oh, yes. Yes.

NF Yes. Oh, yes. They had to consent to it, but I thought it was a very brave decision both on Patrick's side and the patient's side, you know.

JW And I think patients were aware that we were... well, at the time we were possibly protecting them from getting an ectopic pregnancy.

NF Oh, yes, prevention, wasn't it?

MJ So how do you feel about the patients in the early days when they weren't putting the embryos back so that realistically there was no chance of them getting pregnant at all, about 100 or so patients, at least 100 who went... came in very early on in 1969, 1970, 1971?

KE Yes, but the first embryo transfer was December 1971.

NF Didn't Patrick say to patients that were on the waiting list for sterilisation, if you consent for me to take an egg, I can perhaps do you a little earlier? I'm sure we were doing... aspirating oocytes before we sterilised at one point, possibly 1969.

MJ We've got a few patients like that, but most of them weren't for sterilisation, were they?

KE No, not then. There were less than ten that were scheduled for sterilisation.

JW Occasionally at laparoscopy he would see a ripe follicle, which he aspirated.

KE I'll just look and see the numbers. Before the first embryo transfer, starting from January 1969, they had done 168 laparoscopies and it was 106 patients, I think.

NF I know I can remember a phase with him in that.

JW But that wasn't a total of 106 patients treated?

KE Treated, yes. Some of them were second cycles. Yes.

JW That's from 1969 to...?

KE By September 1971, one of the patients had had five cycles.

JW So that was a total of 106 patients in Oldham?

MJ No, that was just for that period.

KE The total number of patients who had laparoscopy was 282.

JW 282... yes.

KE But they had about 495 cycles because I showed you that table.

MJ Quite a lot of eggs.

KE But in 1969 and 1970 all the eggs that were recovered were fixed and studied. They started doing inseminations, but they didn't have... the first embryo was in November, 1969, but then they studied the embryos. They didn't start putting them back until December 1971. So these patients were presumably volunteering on the basis of.....?

JW With a view to coming and having treatment later on...?

KE Probably. I don't know.

JW Well, I don't know what happened then because I wasn't around then. And Noni wouldn't be privy to that sort of information, I don't think?

KE Do you remember these early patients?

NF No. I was only in training and was a student, you see, so I wouldn't know. Again, I wouldn't be privy to that information. The only time I can remember when we were aspirating eggs where some were sterilised afterwards, and he'd said, right, you know, if we can harvest your eggs we can possibly do you earlier. Now, there were some infertility patients as well that we were aspirating eggs. What he'd promised them, I don't know.

KE Okay.

NF I don't know.

MJ Do you know when the Ethics Committee was set up in Oldham General?  
[NOTE added by NF: PCS was always referring to the medical research council - how we had to be very careful as funding had been refused]

JW I think there was an Ethics Committee there in..... I'm sure there'd be some committee...but would it be an Ethics Committee then?

MJ I mean there... well, Ethics Committees weren't that common until the early 1970s, so.



JW No. I think it would be a matter of getting the Hospital Board together, wouldn't it, rather than an Ethics Committee? Perhaps that's what it would be.

MJ The Hospital Board would have agreed the...?

JW I'm sure they went through that. Yes. I mean Fred Baxter, the hospital secretary, would have arranged all that.

MJ Is he still alive?

JW Fred? He just died recently. Right. Is anyone alive who might be able to tell us about that?

NF June Barrow [Deputy hospital senior administrator - now too ill to be interviewed]. [NOTE added by NF: You could try Drs Moore and Campbell the Anaesthetists – no joy]

MJ Anyway, we've got some Ethics Committee's proceedings in the notes in the boxes we found, but they're a bit episodic and it does seem as though if not by around... by 1974, but there's no indication of anything before that, I think. And they did seem to have taken it very seriously. There was a layperson and so on, and this is... I mean, by 1974, I think it was, about 70% of District General Hospitals had Ethics Committees, so they were in the tail end of getting it going, but because of... the recommendation for the forming of Ethics Committees didn't happen until the late 1960s. But we're just interested in that, you know. Was there any written patient information that was given to patients or was it all done orally, do you know?

JW It was all done orally.

MJ Yes. And did patients sign consent with Oldham or...?

JW They would sign a consent form for the laparoscopy procedure, but I don't think it was detailed information as regards what would happen to... that an oocyte might not be collected or if it was, it was going to be fertilised in vitro.

MJ So they would have signed consent forms?

JW They would have signed a consent form.

MJ That was still... that was in operation then?

JW Yes.

MJ Do you know what happened to those?

JW It would be with the patients' notes.

MJ So where are the patients' notes because we can't find them anywhere? There's no record of them in Oldham or anywhere.

JW Really?

MJ They seem to have disappeared rather rapidly, actually.

NF Really?

KE There's... that box that I showed you, they're only the laparoscopy sheets, which has obviously been removed from the patients' notes and then it's not a complete set from comparing with the notebooks. It's not a complete set. So we don't know why those in particular were removed.

JW When did you make enquiries? Is this a different...?

MJ Oh, I made enquiries about three or four years ago and I rang around trying to find out from Oldham Hospital and various other places, and I went to the archivist, and they said, well, they've maybe been moved to Manchester, but they had no record of where they were. We haven't been able to locate them at all.

JW Hospital notes... wouldn't they be microfiched?

MJ Well, we know from the anaesthetist who wrote shortly after the Cottage Hospital closed, Kershaw was closed, that all the records were gone then because Bob wrote a letter to him asking to check something and he said, there's no records here, I can't find them anywhere, but I remember such and such. So that was very soon after Kershaw's was closed. I found that in the archive. So they... somehow they've...

JW Well, I don't think there'd be any... wouldn't have been any notes stored at Kershaw's.

MJ No, but they weren't at Oldham General either.

JW They would have been taken along from Oldham and District General Hospital and then taken back there.

MJ Yes. Well, he said there weren't any in Oldham or Kershaw's. Didn't know where they were.

JW And you had specific patients? Did you ask for... about specific patients?

MJ No, I don't think we did. I could go back and see whether... but they said they didn't seem to have any records. Or maybe we should ring them up again and ask them about specific patients.

KE We could ask for Grace's notes. You could ....

JW Ask for Patient 38.

KE She's still in touch with Grace. They're good buddies. [NOTE added by editors: Grace has now lost all contact with P38]

MJ But she hadn't volunteered to be interviewed by us because we've asked Grace if... because we feel constrained. We could approach patients, but we don't feel we should, really, because it's an intrusion on their privacy. So Grace is the only one we've interviewed.

JW Yes.

MJ Okay. Well, I mean, that's... anything more on that?

KE No.

MJ Is there anything you regret about your time there?

NF No.

JW No regrets whatsoever. It reshaped my career.

NF I regret it finished. It felt as if I'd lost something when they all moved, came down here. [NOTE added by NF: I have not experienced 'Team Work' such as this since]

KE But you stayed on there after they left, did you?

NF I had to. I'd got... my husband was in charge of Medical Illustration then and I'd got an invalid mother to look after, so I was well tied. But I know Patrick said to me, Noni, if you don't come you'll regret it till the day you die. Possibly. But I had to put other people first.

MJ What were the best things about having work there at that time?

JW What were the best things?

MJ Yes.

JW I think the early days. The early days here were certainly good.

MJ I'm thinking about particularly in Oldham?

JW Well, in Oldham, I explained, it was busy. We were running a busy Obstetric and Gynaecological Unit, and the IVF was done at unsociable hours, really, wasn't it? So it was always squeezing it in and there was no socialising about it, was there?

NF No.

KE You didn't have time.

JW Didn't have time.

JW The only socialising... occurred when we all crammed into that broom cupboard and started putting our theatre togs on.

NF Well, that's right, yes.

JW Everybody...

NF It was a communal changing room. Oh, golly, we were family.

KE You must have had the immense stamina of youth.

NF It was family. We're a family, you know. We're all joined at the hip. It was kick one, we all limped, wasn't it? [NOTE added by NF: We were all so 'in tune' with each other; we were almost telepathic, I think! PCS always gave us a lot of emotional support.]

JW There was a lot of enthusiasm there and...

NF But just a family...

MJ So that was a good thing?

NF Well, it was brilliant. I mean, talk about teamwork, it really was. When we were going onto the natural [cycle] regime we lived in Royton and we had an old yellow Land Rover, and as soon as the phone rang, that was it, we were off. Pick Sandra up, who also lived in Royton, so we'd get into Kershaw's first, get theatres set up. It was all ready for everybody all walking in. And we really got it all timed down to a...

JW Gosh. I remember. Yes. You did your job earlier on and we just came and did the job and went out again.

NF You did the job and went.

JW I was explaining to Martin and Kay, the reason wasn't... well, there wasn't any time for socialising, really, was there?

NF No. The socialising went on when Bob came back down here. I mean...

JW Well, we had more time then.

NF I watched an interview by John le Carrier and he was talking about the Secret Service, and it was so like us, it was untrue, you know, a small team within a larger team and you're in this bubble, and you don't discuss anything to anybody outside this bubble.

MJ This is because of the press concern, was it?

NF Well, yes, it was secret, you know. You hadn't got to discuss anything. My mother didn't know what I did. My brother didn't know what I did. When I was told that Lesley was pregnant, I didn't even discuss it with my husband, and he was the photographer. We just did not discuss it. And the only thing... the only people we discussed anything with was with John, Sandra, Muriel and perhaps Kevin, the anaesthetist, and that was it. And that was our social clique as well, you know. [NOTE added by NF: No time to socialise with the outside world. We were all in our own little 'bubble'.]

MJ So they were very happy times, in a way, weren't they?

NF Christmas, 1977, I can remember my mother's GP, George Poston... Peggy Poston, calling... ringing me up and saying, I want to discuss your mother's treatment. Yes. All right, then. I'll come down. And for 20 minutes he said, I don't know what Steppy's playing at. It's not going to work, you know. It's not going to work. Nothing's going to happen. Nothing's going to come of it. All this performance at Kershaw's. He was a local GP. And he went on for 20 minutes, and I just looked at him. I said, whatever you say, Dr Poston, that's fine. Never mentioned my mother, my mother's treatment. Whatever you think, no, that's fine. If we're wasting our time, that's fine. After 20 minutes I left and I thought, yes, but you don't know Lesley Brown's pregnant. We were told at... when she was six weeks. I just walked away with a wry smile on my face. So I thought, that was a local GP, and his partner, Neville Gilbern, was a part-time anaesthetist with us. So that's how tight the secrecy was. Nobody discussed it. Nobody talked about that.

MJ Because the patients didn't [talk about it] either, did they, other than with each other and so on?

JW I don't know... well, they were... they came from all over the UK. It wasn't as though they been to a clinic and got together... I don't think they knew one another... they wouldn't have known one another until they met up at Kershaw's for treatment ... they may well have kept in touch afterwards. I don't know.

MJ Did you ever doubt that it would work, yourself?

JW No ...not really.... once we got to the stage of replacing embryos on a regular basis, I thought it would simply be a matter of time before a pregnancy came along...but looking back I'm sure success would have come along much sooner had we had an embryo replacement catheter which had been purposely designed for the job. Embryos were put into the uterus using a Venflon catheter which was designed primarily for giving drugs and intravenous fluids and it was in the early days here when I got together with Harry Wallace, whose company made intravenous catheters, and designed a catheter specifically for replacing embryos....this was subsequently called the Edwards Wallace catheter.

MJ And Noni?

NF I think when you looked at Bob and Patrick, you knew it had to work. It was like the Big Bang of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, those two together. It had to work with the effort they put in it. Muriel said to me... when Bob decided that he was going to try and go natural, it was on a Saturday morning when Patrick asked Muriel. And we'd finished our private patients, did the usual, went in the common room to have coffee. [NOTE added by NF: Only Muriel, Sandra and myself were on duty on Saturday mornings when PCS operated. He was usually in a very relaxed mood. Sandra and myself used to sit on a buffet at his feet and try to encourage him to tell us stories of his days in the Royal Navy in WW2.]

And he [PS] sat on the edge of his chair, and he'd been really quiet, so we knew there was something cooking. And he said, Muriel... he says, Bob thinks doing without all the drugs, doing it without all the hormones, going natural, is the way to go. She just looked at him. And our faces just dropped. We all looked at him and he looked at us. Deathly silence. So I just turned round. We've got to give it a go, Boss. She just looked at me. I thought, this is it. I'm dead. Got to give it a go. So she just turned round and said to me, you do realise there's only one egg? We don't know what time it's going to be. He said, yes, I've thought of that one. She said, and where am I going to get my staff from? And I kind of looked at Father [Steptoe], and looked at Muriel, and looked at Sandra. Well, we're here, aren't we? I thought, God.

She got up to walk out in the kitchen. I said, it'll be right, Boss, don't worry. It'll be right. She said, I wish I shared your enthusiasm and your confidence. Came back, sat in the chair, and Father just looked at her. And she says, well, I suppose so. I'll tell Bob yes, then. She says, yes. Tell him yes. And he got up. He put his hand on my shoulder. I was sat on a buffet at his feet. I always used to sit at his feet. And he put his hand on my shoulder, raised himself up and said, thank you, girls, and walked off. She just looked at me and said, will it ever work, Noni? I said, it will. And we were sure at the time. This was, what, spring, 1977? It would be about spring... winter, spring, 1977 he came up with that. That'll be right, Boss. Famous last words.

JW I remember how elated Patrick was just before the delivery of Louise Brown, and there was the hype in the press We were getting changed together in theatre. We'd just finished doing an ordinary gynae list and he was very upbeat ... he said, this story's going to be bigger than the landing on the moon, and looking back ... IVF

has certainly been more beneficial for far more couples than has the landing on the moon, hasn't it?

KE Well, they both put in a lot of years towards this, haven't they?

JW Absolutely.

KE Yes.

JW Yes. And I suppose there was their enthusiasm that drove everybody along, didn't it?

NF Yes. I got... you got caught up in it.

KE Maybe it was the same when I started here. It was absolutely amazing. I really looked forward to coming to work.

JW Coming in?

KE It was so much fun. It was real. It was a real team and all the nurses and the doctors and Jon Hewitt and... it was really good fun.

JW It was.

KE It was.

JW Yes. I remember in the early days .... I used to be able to see six patients in an afternoon, new patients. I think with what you've got to talk about now, I'd find that if I could see two in an afternoon I'd be all talked out. There's much to talk about these days, isn't there?

KE I used to take the histories first, summarise the histories, before they saw Patrick.

JW Yes. That's helpful, taking the histories, but then, you know, explaining the whole procedure to people took a lot of time. I used to feel drained at the end of it. I don't know what happens now. Do they...?

KE Oh, it's all different.

JW Different?

KE It's all different, yes. And we have... the majority of our patients are NHS-funded now, and so we have a more streamlined system. They all come together. They're booked into a seminar to be given a whole load of information all in one go.

JW I see. Yes.

KE I think about 40 couples are given all the information. And then, having been given that information, then they're booked in for 20 minute appointments to see the doctor. But they've all been worked up at Level Two before they get in here. So they've had all their investigations done.

MJ Can we ask you some specific questions?

JW Sure.

MJ Because there's an IF, which stands for Ian.

JW Ian Ferguson?

MJ It is Ian Ferguson?

JW That's the guy. That's the guy... that 's the guy who I was thinking about... not Armstrong, Ferguson.

MJ So he was from London?

JW He was in London, yes. He was the one who was doing the mini laparotomies to collect eggs.

MJ Yes. Okay. And who was the other one? I've forgotten. Can you call his name up? There's another name, though, there.

KE There's another name. JS... I'll find it.

MJ Joe someone, is it? Joe Schulman, Joe S?

JW Joe...

MJ About the same time. This was in the first 6 months of 1974.

JW JS?

MJ Yes. Joe someone. They were helping with the egg recovery or some aspect of it for a period.

NF Joe...

MJ Yes. Joe someone. I wonder whether it's Joe Schulman because there was a Joe Schulman that I know Bob knew, but I don't know whether he ever came over to Oldham?

JW To Oldham? Well, we had lots of visitors in Oldham.



MJ But the people who actually...

JW Although we had lots of visitors Patrick and Bob were both reluctant for them to view any procedures, as far as I was aware none of them came into the... got involved in the research.

MJ Well, these two were on the rota. They were paid travelling expenses and overnight accommodation and so on. And the one was Ian Ferguson. And the other one was Joe S. it was early in 1974 for about six months or something. Don't recall that?

JW Doesn't ring a bell.

NF There's only Gordon Falconer that helped... that got involved, yes.

JW Gordon. For a short while, then he left. Yes.

NF Not even Grant Mitchell [a senior registrar who worked at Oldham twice on rotation from St Mary's Hospital] was allowed to go to Kershaw's.

JW No. He wasn't allowed, no.

MJ So is there anything we... you want to tell us that we haven't asked you about from those days?

NF Should have been there.

JW Yes.

MJ Well, I was down in Cambridge, of course. So what we saw was Bob disappeared often and we used to curse him every time he left because we knew when he was going up there he wasn't available to us.

JW Yes.

NF Did you wonder what was going... ever want to see what was going on in Oldham?

MJ No, because he would bring eggs back and so on. I remember a night - he came back late one night and he... I was working late till about ten o'clock at night and he came in and he said, come on through and have a look at this. And I looked down the microscope and there was a blastocyst there. And I looked at it, and I looked at him, and he said, well, what do you think? And I said, well, it's a blastocyst. It isn't a very good blastocyst. It looks rather atypical. And then it twigged he'd just come back from Oldham and it was probably a human blastocyst. And I said, it's not, is it? And he said, yes. And he smiled. I said, God, you know, you've got a blastocyst

now. And it was... and I just remember that vividly because that was... that would have been in, what, 1970?

JW I remember Patrick saying to me while he was operating one day that he'd just seen a human blastocyst . Yes.... but that must have been in 1974 or later.

MJ Because one of them went to Cambridge. I think he's actually recorded it as going to Cambridge.

KE That would have been August, 1970.

MJ 1970. Yes. But, you know, we didn't... we were... we didn't really know what was going on up there, actually, a lot of the time.

NF You didn't?

MJ No. When we knew, all we knew was it took Bob away from us, and he was our supervisor, and that... because I did my PhD with him from 1966 to 1969 and Richard [Gardner] and I used to curse him whenever he disappeared because we knew we weren't going to see him for ages.

NF He used to leave us pretty wrung out, really, you know, pretty shattered after we'd...

MJ He was... always had so much energy, didn't he?

NF The summers were the worst, the longest holidays, like 13 weeks.

MJ Okay. Well, I think then we've finished, probably, haven't we? Anything more?

JW Is there anything else you wanted to ask about? You could always phone us, anyway, if you have any queries.