

NB: The start of this tape is very indistinct. The names and dates are unclear:

R: Can you introduce yourselves, say your name and where you were born.

?:(Very muffled)...I lived in Spar Road Bermondsey. Born in 1919.

A: My name's Holyhead, Arthur. Born in Falling Street (?) Bermondsey, just off Grange Walk ..(?). I was born in 1917.

?: My name is Brooks. Formerly Downey.

R: Formerly Bowden?

?: Formerly ...(?) Born in Bermondsey Square. Born in 1916 in Bermondsey Square.

R: Could you tell me any memories you have got of that day the war started?

?: I remember the man on the bike with a rattle warning of gas. That Saturday morning, do you remember? War was declared on a Sunday morning and a man came round on a bike with a gas mask and things doing a rattle (?) because they thought it was going to start immediately.

R: So what did you do?

?: We all went in the Anderson shelter.

(all talk, muffled)

?: We all went under the arch in the flats and funnily enough we took our gas masks out and put them on. It was panic really.

R: You were generally scared that there was going to be an attack?

?: You were given gas masks. Everybody thought so didn't they? There was a time when you all realised that...

A: The only thing I can tell you about that was, my mother used to go hop picking with all the children. We were down there on a Sunday morning and over the radio it came that the war had started at eleven o'clock. About ten minutes later, we were at East Otley in Kent which was about four miles from Maidstone. Where the nearest siren was I don't know, but about ten past eleven the siren went. But nothing happened. That was that. Over for the time being.

R: Didn't you do anything when the siren went?

A: No. didn't have shelters or anything like that. You were just in hopping huts. If you stand in one of those you may as well stand out in the open. So we had no shelters, you just stayed where you were on the common, we used to call it, where you used to do your cooking, out in the open.

R: You were all about twenty when the war broke out.

A: Yes. I was 22, 21 then.

?: Yes. All ready for the call-up, we were.

R: Did any of you have children at the time?

?: ...(?) I got married during the war.

A: No. Mine was born in 41 but by then I was in the RAF and I was stationed at Uxbridge where I joined up. I managed to find a couple of rooms down there, borrowed a lorry off the RAF, came to London and the officer in charge of transport said "Take Larkin with you. He'll give you a hand." Borrowed this lorry, came to London, moved the furniture, and took it down to Uxbridge and moved in there. And she stayed there for the rest of the war. So I used to come home before that, when the war was on and she hadn't moved down, but when it was getting really bad in 40, beginning of 41, that's when the bombing got bad, and as they came over you could ...(?).....

R: What was that particular place?

A: John Bull Arch? That's the Archway across Southwark Park Road here. On Sunday morning. I went to the front door and all the people were walking down from Southwark Park Road(?). I could tell you a story that you will not think ...(?)

R: Tell us it anyway.

A: The first flying bomb to drop on London dropped in Stratford, on a railway line. It was on a Sunday morning and I was home on weekend leave. At that time I was home, I think for my father's funeral. He got knocked down the stairs at Central Hall by a bomb blast and he was in St Olive's Hospital. Anyway, I had the radio on, Sunday morning, at this time when this raid happened. The announcer said a pilotless aircraft - they couldn't find the pilot - had crashed on a railway station in Stratford. That was the first one they sent as far as I know. I was in the RAF so I was interested in this kind of thing. I thought "That's strange ...(?) It's the first one. Its a guided missile. What more do they want?" At that time I was on an RAF parachute packing course in Hereford. When I got back there we had the class - all WAFs and men in this class ..(?) and there was a flight lieutenant giving us a lecture. Then they started on about "Keep your mouth shut. Be like Dad. Keep Mum". Don't start shouting about anything you shouldn't. He kept on about it so much you might as well say "Us at the top know what we're talking about, it's you we've got to be careful of". It made me annoyed and it took me some time to stand up. "Excuse me, sir." I said "I think you'd better start at the top before you come to the bottom with people". And I gave him the story of the BBC giving out that news at nine o'clock on a Sunday morning when it dropped early Sunday morning. He walked out of this basement as red as a beetroot and he never had us on (?) again. That was really bad. Because if you for instance had wanted to pinpoint anything "Okay, I'll put one there and see what happens". "Oh it's only five miles from the centre of London." "Oh. They know where we are now".

R: Do other people remember those bombings?

?: Yes. There was landmines. Down the bottom there was a land mine. Down the church....(?) the houses.

R: did you see that?

?: Yeah. We were here. It was about twenty past ten in the morning. They've got the time on there.

?: I thought it was in the night time.

?: Twenty past ten in the night then. Must have been the night. and it was on the 18th September. They hit the police station, the church and a row of houses. It was a land mine.

?: My sister's husband got killed by that. She was evacuated. There was just me and my father at home in Bermondsey. I had three other sisters and the other sisters were evacuated.

R: How did she cope?

?: Not very well at the beginning? But like everything in life - At least she had a little girl, so you are forced to go on...(?) .. She stayed home then but her daughter was evacuated to someone who they knew in Marlow so the girl was kept in Marlow and my sister moved back home. It was just me and my father and then my sister came back when her husband had been killed. Actually he was an ARP warden at that time. The church was their headquarters so that's where he was killed.

R: Did you usually go down the shelters?

?: Yes. At that time when we lived in the flats, they had them semi-ground ones. I was there with my father. He was....(?)...

R: In the shelter?

?: Yes. So we knew it was something pretty near.

R: I'm told you had to lie down in the shelters, not sit up?

?: Yes, because it was mostly of a nighttime. You were sleeping down there. Everybody had their own positions. When you went you took your bedclothes with you and wherever you laid when it first started, that was your place to lay.

R: Was it a small shelter?

?: It was half above ground and half below. Some had only just been done. They didn't look like shelters.

(Muffled)

A: They were sturdy. Concrete slab roof. They'd be about 16 foot by about 12 foot, if that, 10 foot inside. Though I never used any of those you had your own place each night and that's where you kipped for the rest of the night.

?: It was mostly for the people in flats. If you had a house you had the Anderson shelter out there. We were in the flats at the time.

R: So they were for four people?

?: No. More than that.

A: You'd get about 30 people in there.

R: It must have been pretty squashed?

A: You were. I never slept in one but you could see the amount of people going in or coming out.

?: Not everyone in the flats went there. Some went to the railway. At one time I went to my eldest sister to where she worked at ...(?) so everybody went to where they thought they were best off.

?: some of them stayed in because they felt safer indoors. Underneath the tables.

A: I moved from here. We lived in ...(?), our mother's place, two rooms upstairs. We got married in 1940, 16th March. I used to work for the Dutch Boy Laundry in Peckham, which was a bag wash firm. I used to drive there and pick up and deliver bag washes. I got on well with the governor. They had about six vehicles and I asked them one day if I could have two of his rooms at the top of the corner house. They used the bottom floor for offices. He said "Yes" so we moved from there to there. While I was home before I was posted away abroad, before I even moved down to Uxbridge, I used to come home with the wife, pick her up from her mother's here in Alma Road and we'd go down to Peckham where we lived. Then when it came to going home at night to catch a tube, we'd walk along Old Kent Road, get to Pages Walk, she'd walk down to Pages Walk and I'd carry on walking towards Covent Garden tube station because you couldn't use Elephant and Castle because the gates were shut under the river. We used to do that quite a lot. I saw a bus coming one time when I was home, a number 63 bus in Peckham Hill Street and I forgot I was living in this corner house. It had about five stone steps coming down but a little stone bit at the side of it. I saw this bus and without thinking - I must have been half asleep - at six o'clock in the morning - I dashed across to catch this bus and fell off this wall and sprained my ankle.

R: That's quite a long walk. Was that to take shelter in Covent Garden? Is that why you went?

A: No. That was to catch a tube back to Uxbridge when I was home for the weekend. You couldn't get one nearer.

R: Were you ever out in the street when there was an air raid?

?: Yes but you didn't really take a lot of notice of it. You put a spurt on to get home.

?: We had a torch. If your torch went out you were lost.

?: I was lost in the square once. Wandering round there. After a time....(?) When you're young.

?: I think there was a lot of courage from the mothers who slogged it every day. Performing miracles with the rations, queuing up. They were everyday people and I think they were grand. I can never understand how we got up to go to work. It's amazing how we did it.

R: A lot of people didn't go in the shelters for that reason, did they?

?: I didn't like the shelters.

?: No I didn't like it. I felt safer indoors. And there was always that smell. That underground smell.

?: I was scared of being buried.

R: What did it smell of?

?: A musty smell. When you come to think of it there was no windows.

?: If you think about it, it was better to be killed than to be buried.

R: What about toilets.

?: You went before you went. You didn't go until you came out.

?: When we had the Anderson we used to hop out to the outdoor toilet.

A: I used to stand outside this Anderson shelter when we lived across the road there, make sure her mother and her were in the shelter, watch the first bomb coming down and dive into the shelter. Going back one day, walking towards the Elephant when we lived in Peckham,

during the night there'd been a really heavy raid, bombs were dropping all round. I walked along towards the New Kent Road, along Old Kent Road there and suddenly something went past my ear and just clipped it. It was a piece of shrapnel from a shell. I only had a torch. I found it and I put it in a bin. I turned the corner after leaving her to go down New Kent Road, Bricklayers Arms there, and there is two buses, one with its front up against the wall and the other one was on its side. There was wardens and ambulances. The ambulances they used weren't like today's ambulances, they were just vans with a sheet over them. One was just pulling them down, others were loading up people. The one that was just pulling away, a fella there had got another body he wanted to put on, he said "Another one here Charlie". He said "Sorry. Full up. Be back in a minute". I carried on walking down towards the Elephant. You just took it in your stride. It was happening so much all around you that you took it as a natural thing almost.

?: They used to sell this book, "Bermondsey at War". Its all about the Town Hall in Spar Road when it was bombed.

R: Do you remember seeing things when you were out on the streets during or after raids?

?: The majority were nighttime raids. There was when they burned Surrey Docks. I remember that because I was in my sister's shelter when that was going on, a daytime raid. It was really big. Everybody just carried on as usual.

A: The sky at night was moonlight. We got bombed. And you see them...(?). ...They just had to drop their bombs. As far as being out in it, no. They were mainly at night. We were in the shelter or indoors. We dived down the shelter. You weren't wandering around the streets like you would today.

?: Sometimes in the nighttime you've got to have a cup of tea when there's no water or the pipes are ..(?). Very often.

?: We didn't make any fuss though, did we?

?: No. We'd be up all night, and come in and you've got to have a cup of tea and no water and you'd have to go to work.

R: Were you still in the clothes that you'd worn all night.

?: I used to change into a siren suit at nighttime.

R: What was that?

?: It was like the things they wear now, all in one. Siren suit.

R: were they supplied to you or what?

?: No you bought them. If you were handy with a needle you could make yourself smart. We used to make things out of parachutes. Dresses and underwear.

R: Where would you get the parachute silk?

?: Dunno. I bought one once for five shillings.

?: I made a nice cover for it with my initials on it. You couldn't undo it, it was all sewn up.

A: That was my job in the war, packing parachutes.

?: We had this cardboard gas mask box that we had to carry everywhere. So I made a nice black cover for it and a shoulder strap and my initials on it. It looked like a shoulder bag. It

had a little pocket on it for your bits and pieces and that was for your gas mask. I was carrying my gas mask but we never needed it in them days. But if I'd needed it I would have had it.

R: Right through the war did you carry it with you?

?: Yeah. Like a shoulder bag.

A: You had to.

?: When it came to them doodle bugs, they were the things.

A: The flying bombs, yeah.

?: If we were indoors we would lay in the passage when we heard something, and in that cupboard in there, and wait for it to stop.

?: You get a kind of courage.

A: When I was living in Peckham on the top floor of this three storey house on the corner, there was a raid on and I heard this bomb coming, you could hear them, the ordinary bombs. so I jumped up ...(?) and we both stood under the arch of the door. And as this bomb went over the ceiling flaked off. The next second Smash! It dropped about fifty foot away in the canal. The ceiling flaked off with the vibration, the speed of the bomb coming through the air, the vibration caused it. It must have missed us by about five or six feet.

?: Whenever it was near enough all your windows went. When we had that landmine all our windows went. You were always putting things up.

R: What did you put up?

?: sheets. Blankets sometimes. They got workmen coming round putting bits of wood up.

?: They put the windows back.

?: After a time but not the day after it happened.

?: Do you remember when the church was done.

?: The church, the convent and our school the whole lot. There was a big hole, I saw it, and the Civil Defence men hung upside down, because there were three priests (?) killed and he got thrown up like that (?). That was the only time I cried in the war.

R: Were you crying because they were killed?

?: Because it was our church and our convent, the whole lot. One of them was saved but he was terribly scarred. This man who hung up was so courageous. He hung upside down and somebody held him and he dragged him out and he got the George medal.

?: When the bombs dropped, like when my brother in law died, people were all standing there while they were trying to get the people out, not that I stood there myself. He was buried there for quite a few days before they got the body out.

R: Did you have to change your job?

?: Yes. I volunteered for the Land Army. They said "Yes Dear. You can go in the Land Army". And I was going in the Land Army. Then when your notice come, you always go somewhere different to what they say you can go. They wanted me to go to this place at Wraysbury, Buckinghamshire. I had to go and go to this little employment place in Wraysbury and when I

had to get there I had to go to Staines and then get another train to go to this place. It was a beautiful place in the country. I went there and then I had to go in digs. They sent me to this beautiful house with a drive and when I knocked at the door and went in, the lady said to me "I liked you as soon as I saw you coming down my drive and I'm going to count this as my war work. I'm not going to charge you any money. I'm going to give you a nice home for the duration of the war". She said "The only thing I ask you, if you go out with any Yanks, get me some stockings!" So that was that. She introduced me to her neighbours, someone in the Civil Service. She had one little girl and I had a lovely home there and it was nice. I went to this job. It was supposed to be making postal records for the troops and we had to go in a little room, put on long white overalls and we had to ..(?) and put ...(?) on these records. I was listening to the news when I went home to the house and it was "Bombing on Bermondsey" and I thought "I've got to go home". Alf my husband said I was mad. I went home and I used to go back and forth every day. Every morning I used to leave home about a quarter to six, half past five, get the first bus up there, go to Waterloo station, get the train to Staines, get off the train at Staines and get another train and go to Wrybury in Buckingham. I used to do that every morning and every night. I fell down a coal hole once. Do you remember when there used to be houses up there and they were bombed? I was sheltering from the warning, at six o'clock in the morning and the bus was coming, it was dark, and I ran down the steps and one leg went right in the coal hole. When I phoned up and told them they wouldn't believe me. I said "I fell down a coal hole".

R: Why did they not? Did they explain?

?: They did explain. My husband volunteered for the navy, for the Royal Artillery. He got out of that and he volunteered for the Marines. He went to America. It was all very well to say "You can go in there."

?: I never went in because I didn't have a mother... (?) I had to ... (?) what they call a court referees to see if my situation was good enough to keep me from going away. And also the place where I worked, which was Martins in Grange Road, they did war work. I was doing Air Pilots clothes and things like that. They used to come in to be cleaned and flame proofed. We used to have to do it with this stuff. So I was exempt.

R: What exactly did you do?

?: They was all done on these big machines. We had this stuff on brushes. When they came in, we used to have to go through the pockets and take anything out that was there. Then they had big machines to wash them. And we used to have this certain stuff and we put it on with the brushes to go all over the suits.

?: Where was it? Did it burn down?

?: In Pages Walk. Martins. They had a small place in Pages Walk which done fur coats and things like that. That's where they did the flame proofing of the airmen's suits.

?: I went on Pathe news. You know you used to have newsreels. They came round this place where I was. This place used to be a night club and they had made into a space (?). I had this machine and polythene and all black stuff come out and you put the record on the thing and it was supposed to be messages that they gave to each other, the troops and the officers and whatever. On this Pathe visit they came round to take some pictures and I was on Pathe visit. It said "Postal records for the troops". Someone said to me "Your snood came out nice" because we had to get a snood.

R: What's a snood?

?: It's a thing you had to have for air raid (?).

R: I didn't quite understand what this record was?

?: They were zinc, and they were in a big stand. We all had some. We all worked seperately. It was very dark and secret. You had to take oone of these zinc records, just like a 78 record, and you put it on the machine and you pulled a thing and this black stuff came down and whirled round and round and this black stuff covered it, and then you turned it over and you did the other one. Then you took it out and put it in a stand and you got paid piecework. It was supposed to be, it said "Postal records for the troops". I think they usedthem for messages, the powers that be.

R: This wasn't the work you were doing at Wraysbury?

?: Yes.

R: They never really explained to you how it was?

?: No. Whatever it was, it was like a record. Postal records for the tropps. About ten of us worked there in that place. They were all well to do women that had been recruited. It was a very nice job. In our break I used to sit by the river and the swans were going by. It was nice but I came home every night. And every morning I went back again, just because I wanted to be in Bermondsey. It's funny isn't it?

?: There were soldiers came home and they were glad to go back sometimes. Soldiers came home on leave and they were glad to go back.

?: There was more going on in Bermondsey than where they were stationed, lots of times.

A: I'd say that as well. going back to RAF stations after coming home here for a weekend or a week's leave, you were glad to get back really. I was driving a van, a small coach and I'd already picked some air crew up from Kings Cross station. We were going back to RAF Uxbridge. I think they'd been shot down in a raid. We were passing Great Portland Street in Marylebone Road. and just as we were passing the top of this turning, this bomb hit. The blast just caught the back of the ambulance and pushed it over a bit as we went past the next building, just caught the rear end, didn't do any damage. We felt the pull over as the blast from the bomb hit it. We carried on.

R: What were you doing for most of the war?

A: I went in as a driver. Drivers were few and far between in those days and I'd been driving for some years for the Dutch Boy laundry. I went in as a driver. I'd been in there about three years, maybe four...(?)...promoted....detailing transport.....

...(very muffled).....?)....Nothing to do with raids on London...take them off the air crews.....(?).....we'd stick together..... They'd take it off you and they had to sign for it..... Nobody ever got one back. I made the most of it...A sight for sore eyes.

R: Food and rations.

A: When I was stationed at RAF as a driver, I used to have to take the rations across to West Drayton, to the WAF's quarters. Corned beef. Don't forget...(?). Tin of jam...(Muffled)... I was ...my gas mask on...(?) Walk past the guard room...."Alright Bob". "All right mate. Waht have you got tonight?" "You'll be surprised"....(?)

?: There used to be a black market. For material and things....(?)

A: I used to walk down Camberwell Road...(?)...a Jewish fella....(?)

R: did you have anything to do with the black market?

?: Used to get material, stockings....a few coupons less.

R: How did it work?

?: It was stolen I suppose because they didn't ask for coupons. They were called Spivs.

?: I suppose if people were in business, they would have a lot of things they wanted to get rid of.

R: Where would you find these people?

?: They used to accost you.

R: Stop you in the street?

?: You knew somebody and someone knew somebody who could get it.

?: .the mothers.(?)

?: They got meals out of the rations and food.

?: Of course noone had fridges and freezers and washing machines.

?: I think they were wonderful, they were unsung. Noone thought anything for them, they were just there.

R: Was there a British Restaurant, a canteen?

?: No.

?: When we were around here we came home, until we were bombed out. There was always a meal.

?: Most of the people who lived here worked local.

?: Yes. And their husbands came home, and the children and no one thought anything of it because they always did it, I suppose. They were the heroes really. Went to the shelters at night in the Blitz. Kept things nice, done the housework.

?: The amount of factories that Bermondsey had, and we did have them didn't we?

R: What were you doing in the war?

?: I was working in Martins doing the Air Force clothes.

?: They used to make Sam Brown belts.

R: Were you doing something different before the war? Did it change because of the war?

?: I worked at Peak Freans, the biscuit factory.

?: Most people worked ...(?) didn't they?

R: What ...(?)

?: This was a factory. There were lots of leather works.

?: Leather is known in Bermondsey, it's a big leather industry. They used to make suitcases, everything, uniforms.

?: Pre war they did all this. They had contracts with the army before the war.

A:(?) Befotre they did that they had tanneries in Bermondsey street. My brothers used to work there. It was hard work. ..cow skins....(?)

?: Divers suits they made. They made anklets for the soldiers, diving suits, sam brown belts. Before the war they did that.

R: Did you feel that you were doing different things? I know you were called up and told what to do but did you have more responsibility than you would have had otherwise?

?: Yes. You couldn't be late for a job and you had to be there and you had to have things perfect. It was important. Some people worked in factories on munitions.

?: There was a factory in Normans. I worked there. They done munitions, little carbines. You had to make so many of them.

R: What exactly was it?

?: I don't know what you call them, little things and you stack them.

?: It was freezing cold on buses and trains.

?: You didn't put a lot of importance to it then. It was just a job and you were just doing it.

?: We usedto buy the Mirror for one penny. That's a fraction of a penny now.

A: I remember when the war first started, I was driving ...(muffled ...(?))...just behind the Trocadero....at night and the van was coming the other way and you could hardly see anything....not fast....round the corner.

R: were there a lot of accidents?

?: Yeah. There was.

A:(?)

?: I don't think there were many people in Bermondsey that didn't lose somebody in an air raid. Some were very unlucky. I remember when they had that in the arch round Dock Empire (?) Walk. The bomb went into the arch sideways and wiped out a few families that day.

R: They were sheltering there? Druid Street was it?

?: Yeah.

?: When Surrey Docks was alight and they got the children over the bridge they put floss (?) over their faces, because they suffered from the flame. They put them all in Keaton Road School and it had a direct hit that night.

A:...(muffled?)...turned to a sheet of ice, just ice hanging down...(?)

?: Was that when the docks were alight?

A: Yeah. Everything was alight.

R: What did you do for fun during the war?

?: We went to the Lyceum. It was two shillings. We used to go dancing at the Lyceum in the West End.

?: And Covent Garden. I always remember Covent Garden. That's where they have the opera. But they had it open for dancing. It was this large ...(?). It was big and it used to be two shillings in the afternoon, just for the afternoon. And there was evening. And we walked home, we missed the last, we were running for the last tube, and I always think of those people who were asleep, who were lying down on the platform. I'd get the tube and walk home from the Elephant and everywhere there were searchlights going, but we seemed to just do it.

A: Walking down Southwark Park Road, there wa a raid on and they used to have mobile lorries, fire engines. I didn't hear this lorry coming. Crash! I nearly jumped out of my skin.

END OF AUDIO TAPE SIDE A

SIDE B

?: They are wearing their uniform and they look very nice and it's all happy and dancing. A lot of them married. But suppose he lived in a New York tenement or something like that. You never knew did you? You didn't take the chance. Some came home.

?: Some had babies and the Yanks shot off.

A:...(Muffled)

R: So you didn't hitch up with any Americans?

?: We usaed to dance with them, have a drink with them and perhaps go out but I never got serious, bit frightened really. Our mums wouldn't let us.

R: Did they disapprove?

?: I don"t know. The subject never came up.

?: But we used to go dancing. Everybody went dancing then. You had to dance.

?: There were more women knocking about than men.

?: And a lot of married women whose husbands were away. They were having it off with the Yanks, weren't they? I didn't approve of that.

R: Did you finish up with boyfriends or husbands during the war?

?: I got married during the war, yes.

R: How did you meet your husband?

?: He lived in the same area as I did so it was not very far to go.

R: Was he then posted away?

?: Yes. He was at Dunkirk. I wasn't married then. Then he went away on D-Day. He was in the Infantry.

R: Do you remember the feelings when he came back from Dunkirk?

?: That was a terrible time. A lot of them was presumed dead at that time.

?: I could never enjoy - there was singing and dancing - I could never see how they could do that...(?)

?: But of course they laughed about them sort of things because I can remember with my grandchildren now, when my husband was alive, when anything came on like that he'd say "That's grandad up the front there". My grandson would say "That's grandad right up the fornt". Actually he was there quite early.

R: Jumping to VE Day...

?: We did jump for joy because it was all over.

?: No. I couldn't see the point in all that merry making, because there were so many men injured and dead. Even now I don't think they should have this jollification on VE Day.

R: This is part of a commemoration of VE Day. Not a jollification.

?: We did celebrate when it was over. In the flats, we had a party.

A: Every street almost had a party.

R: What were you doing on VE Day?

?: I walked out of my job. I really walked out. VE Day. Before the Japanese were beaten - it was VE Day wasn't it? I walked out then. I chucked the record up in the ceiling and went, I just walked out, I'd finished my war work and I came home.

R: And nobody said anything to you?

?: Nobody came after me.

?: I worked for my father in law in a shop.

R: When they came back from Dunkirk, did you feel that we were about to lose the war?

?: We were young and we didn't really...

?: We used to listen to Haw-Haw, Joyce. He used to come on the radio. We used to listen to him, my mum used to listen to him. He used to say the streets that would be bombed that night.

?: He was right some times.

?: They ..(?) him in the tower, didn't they?

R: Why did you bother to listen to him?

?: My mum used to.

R: What were your feelings when you heard him?

?: I don't remember.

A: During the war, same as today, you never got the truth. ...(?). D Day to us was the landing of the troops. That's how it struck me at the time. But the consequences of it, you never got until afterwards. You listened but it was not the truth coming through.

R: Did you realise at the time that you were not getting the truth?

A: No.

R: So if they said "This number of aircraft were knocked down, you believed them?"

A: Yes, yes. You believed it. At least I did. I'm not silly.

?: We used to listen to Churchill making his speeches. He gave us heart.

?: When you're in your twenties you're not as serious about things as you are when you get older, are you?

?: I think we were all whistling in the dark sometimes. We had all these songs, sentimental songs.

R: Did you meet your wife during the war?

A: I did, considering I was two weeks married and called up. I was called up on the 1st April and got married on the 16th March. ...(?)..I'd already been for a medical...(?).
...I got this letter to say "Report to RAF Uxbridge" a couple of days after the 1st April. When she saw it she said "It's an April Fools joke, surely?" It was no joke. A joke for six years. Yes I did miss her. Very much.

R: What about evacuation?

A: No. We had no children and she wouldn't evacuate....(?).
(Muffled)

?: The only way I knew was my sister's children...(?) My sisters weren't with their children any more.

R: What did you feel about evacuation?

?: It must have been awful for the mothers to see their kids going because some of them went to horrible places. Houses, they came back again.

?: I was a bit careful.

?: If I'd have had children I would have kept them home with me. Supposing you died, got killed in the war...(?)

(very muffled section)

R: At the end of the war, some people said that the atmosphere changed very quickly?

?: A lot of soldiers couldn't settle down and they had quarrels with their wives. You'd hear something, that so and so had separated and quarreling. The soldiers couldn't settle down because they'd led an adventurous life...(?) and had to come back to a humdrum. It must have been hard for them.

R: It might have been hard for women as well.

?: Of course it was but they were unsung, the women.

....(muffled)...

R: did you feel it was very different after the war, that you were going back to something?

?: I don't think things ever went back to the way they were. I think Britain got more militant after the war. They weren't "do this, do that" obedient...(?)

?: We are a lot more militant now.

(Muffled)

?:...We did things together.

R: Was it because you had been working all the time without men around that you were different?

?: You found that you were independent of men.

?: When my husband was in the army I lived with my father. We had rooms during the time we got married in Alma Grove where I live now, so it was all excitement for me. It was when he came home we were going to come to live in Alma Grove. When he came home from the war I was in with my family where I lived so it was a lot going on - I don't think I even looked back. It was all going to be more life now, wasn't it?

R: So you were just looking forward to it?

?: Yeah.

R: Did people stop doing things together in the same way after the end of the war?

?: People are always doing separate things, don't they?

R: I mean as a community?

A: Yes. There was a change.

?: No. I don't remember anything going on.

A: Look at today and the situations you are in. Go next door and knock on the door and ask to borrow a cup of sugar....(muffled)....(?) 1946 I came home....I got a job at New Cross....

R: What about the elections in 45?

?: Churchill served all through the war and when the election came they slung him out.

?: Put Labour in didn't they?

A:....(?)

?: It didn't seem fair.

R: A lot of people say that but the majority of the population voted him out, probably including the people who think that it is a pity. At the time did you want change?

?: I don't remember. I was too busy living my life.

A: Yes I did....(?) voted Labour.

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?: Dr Salter, was he about then?

?: He was about when I was a kid.

R: Do you think people were idealistic, determined that things were going to be different after the war, or not, or did they just want a better life for themselves as individual people?

?: ...what they had because as the years have gone on, people have got more.

?: I don't remember a hard time before the war, do you? I don't remember being poor?

?: When we were young we lived in Spar Road in a house which they knocked down and then we moved to the flats. When we moved to the flats, I was the youngest of four. That would have been our living accommodation, we shared this house with other people. When we moved in the flats, that was our flat. That's when our lives sort of picked up. We were getting older and more of us were going to work, so things were picking up.

?: More women went to work after the war.

?: They had to go to work.

?: And after the war they wanted to continue working.

?: It gave them independence, I suppose.

A:....(?)..We'd had bread and jam for so many nights tea as children.....(?) "Bread and jam!".

?: We were healthier in the war than at any time, they say.

?: Yeah.

R: Is there anything else?

?: We all got better off financially after the war, didn't we.

R: Do you think people became more concerned with getting things after the war?

?: Oh yeah. Definitely.

R: Were you buying things?

?: Yeah. When I first moved in to them rooms in Alma Grove we didn't have any water. We used to have to come down and get water off downstairs. ...(?) see if we could get water upstairs where we lived. So everybody was going for better things.

A...(?)

(muffled)

R: Do you think people lived their lives more separately after the war? Maybe it was to do with having to live so publicly during the war?

?: I don't remember any rows. We never rowed. There was family differences, but we were a close family. We never lived very far from each other.

R: That didn't really change after the war?

?: No.

A:...(?)

(very muffled section to end)

NB: The quality of recording of side B is very poor overall and in places inaudible.

END OF AUDIO TAPE INTERVIEW ON SIDE B (1/2 SIDE)

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Transcribed by Vanda 4/4/95