

Kennington House Group
Southwark

?: Well I went through Trafalgar Square and there was a lot of music and dancing you know it was really lovely, very friendly.

R: Did you go near Buckingham Palace?

?: I went to the Mall and it was cheering and cheering it was great.

R: Do you remember V E Day?

?: Well not really my husband came home on leave after three years just before VE Day so I was at home celebrating.

Do you remember VE Day?

?: Not really I think I was down at my sisters every thing was so confusing you know I really don't remember a lot of VE Day, all I remember is we celebrate V Day and we couldn't find a pub with any beer they had all run out.

?: There was a load of street parties.

R: Did you go along to any of those?

?: Well they were for the children really, I helped and that.

R: Where did you get the food from?

?: I don't know it came from somewhere, it was after the war you know there was still food about and still people managed to get it.

R: At the end of the war there was the election and Churchill was defeated and a labour government was voted in, do any of you remember that?

?: No, I don't remember anything particular about it, I thought surprised really that Winston never got in, but then again I can understand why he didn't when you get lots of people together like the services they talked about their experiences, I suppose they were upset about some things.

R: Did you feel that Churchill was the right hand after the war?

?: I don't really know, I got a feeling it was the only time I ever voted conservative.

R: At the end of the war?

?: Yes, cause I thought he was the man for it, but I have never voted conservative since.

R: So you did the honourable thing, but the rest of population never?

?: A lot of people voted for him because he was at war.

R: So that was what helped deal with the opposition?

?: It was. There was a breakthrough after the war with the National Health Service there was a lot going for the public after the war.

R: Did it make a lot of difference in ???? do you think?

?: No I was christened young so we didn't need it really, need it bit more now we are older.

R: What do you remember about the air raid during the war?

?: Oh my God they were dreadful, I mean I worked on the petrol station day raids and all we had was a tin hat and we had to ????? the rest of it.

R: You worked in a petrol station?

?: Yes.

R: That was a dangerous place to work?

?: Well it was but you don't think of it when you are young you just don't think.

R: Was that the kind of job you had because of the war?

?: Oh yes.

R: What was you doing before that?

?: Well I worked in a factory and when I came out of there I wanted to do office work, a bit different to a petrol station but I did the books at the petrol station and I throually enjoyed it.

R: Where you told to go there?

?: No I actually chose it I new they woman on the petrol station and I loved it, I really loved it, you know the drivers were wonderful, well it was just a good time.

R: ??????????????????????

?: Oh no, no, no, no, but I enjoyed it while I did it.

R: Did you hear at the end of the war saying you couldn't carry on?

?: Yes, but I went back to office work and I loved that.

R: You did ????? ??????

?: Oh yes I pumped up petrol, in them days it was turning a handle you know no electricity just turning a handle and whining it up until, just before I left I think they brought something a bit different in but at the time I was whining it up, the old fashioned way people don't know about, but it was lovely.

R: Can I ask what you were doing during the war?

?: Well I was at home, I had a child you see, yes and we lived at Bolton for about two years you know away from the war.

R: Evacuated?

?: Yes, we evacuated ourselves, we went to my brothers relations in the war and we stayed up there in Bolton, so really I don't know a lot about it.

R: When did you come back?

?: Oh that it a good question, when they started putting flats up.

R: After the war?

?: After the war.

?: But you were bombed out though weren't you?

?: Oh yes, well we did live at the bottom of Boddington Grove, we lived with my mother and my brothers there, I was married with a little girl and we all got buried in the shelter in Boddington Grove in the back garden that was the same day they dropped the bomb in Kennington Park, you know where all those people got buried, just that particular night, don't ask me why, I think we had so much of running around to the park that we said we would go in the shelter.

R: Normally you would have been in the park?

?: Yes every night we use to go, one night we never went.

R: You went into the shelter in your back garden?

?: Yes that is right.

R: And your house got bombed?

?: Oh yes, all the back of the house was bombed, everything was down, and of course with that I think we were all so shattered that was when we went up to Bolton.

R: Where any of your ??????????

?: No dear, got buried in there with all the debris and they had to come and get us out.

R: How long did that take?

?: Oh you don't count the time you only say are we getting there yet, my mother and father, my husband and one of my brothers, and one of the brothers never came home and we were so worried about him, you know had he come home he would never come into the shelter at home there, I am not going in there, he would have got killed his bed was on the floor.

R: Really?

?: Yes it was miracle, an absolute miracle couldn't get over it for ages and ages to think he went to the pictures and of course when the siren went they wouldn't let them out so they all had to stop there because everything was so near, and he would have been killed.

R: Did you retrieve anything from the house?

?: Oh yes the front of the house wasn't too bad it was all scratched and all the debris everywhere, what we did we took all the furniture out and put it all in store every bit of it mum and dad did it and that was when we went to Bolton, and then we came back when the war was over?

R: What was it like in the big shelters in the park?

?: Oh it was fantastic down there, you all had your little places and people used to fetch down sandwiches and we used to sing and you know what I mean, we made the best of it you know what I mean, but this one particular night don't ask me why we didn't go but we never and that was when they...

R: Was there a library set up I heard that a library used to come and visit the shelters?

?: No, I can't remember that but I think you were so looking for everybody all kept together, I mean I had a little girl and she was four years old that was my concentration, whether there were libraries and that I don't know.

R: When the bomb hit the back of the house did you actually think that you had had it at some point?

?: Oh yes, we thought we would never get out of the shelter that was the feeling you know and eventually we got out.

R: Was it dark?

?: Oh yeah it was dark alright that was a terrible experience, I mean it is amazing how you forget, I mean you think you will never get over it but you do, we had to go away.

R: Where were you in London but you didn't go in the air raid shelters?

?: No we went under the stairs, and I was in the ARP.

R: But why didn't you go in the shelters?

?: You just didn't, the young man that lived in the house he cleared out all the coal and we would sit under there, I don't think my mother wanted to go just before she died she didn't want to go into a shelter so we stayed together under the stairs, and there was a bomb down the road that knocked down a row of shops and we got a certain amount of debris from that, and at that time before we had the shelter we were under the bed and all the blast came in, and we couldn't get out very easily because it was five in the morning and it was dark.

R: Didn't that terrify you?

?: No, well I was young then you see.

R: How young were you?

?: In my early twenties.

R: You were in the ARP What were you doing there?

?: A telephonist, sending out the services you know the police to rack off the area and whatever was required, the rescue, the fireman and the CWD van that collected the dead bodies, it could be rather gruesome really.

R: But you didn't physically have anything to do with that or did you?

?: Ooh no, I was a telephonist taking it all down and sending out the services.

R: Did you have to be trained to do that?

?: Yes, you had to take an exam for it yes.

R: At the end of the war did you feel deprived that you weren't doing a job like that anymore?

?: Yes I loved it I preferred it, I didn't want the war to go on for ever but the companionship among us was great.

R: And presumably the job was more responsible than what you did before?

?: Yes I suppose it was really.

R: What had you been doing?

?: I was in the printing trade, I did like the job, then when I saw ????? Town Hall that was where it was with the council, some use to come in and do voluntary duty you know not with the telephone but helping with rescue people, there was quite alot, some of it was gruesome like sending the van to collect a woman's head, completely cruel isn't it, it was awful really, it was very tragic.

R: Did someone phone in or did some one tell you that this woman's head was somewhere?

?: The police mainly they were on the scene and the rescue men ?????, but it was quite interesting but to me I was lucky we were working down below so we were safer than most I suppose.

R: What would you do for fun during the was?

?: Paint pictures as normal, I mean I use to go shopping, it was a normal life, we use to go to the other side for the films, my daughter was about seven and she had scarlet fever and of course they couldn't get her into hospital so we lived in Boril Road and we put all disinfected curtains all around and we nursed her through scarlet fever through the war, you couldn't get children into hospital then.

R: You would go to the cinema even if there was a raid on?

?: Oh yes you would come home with bombs dropping, you had no fear when you were young.

R: And you wouldn't stay in because it was blackout?

?: Oh no the blackout was a laugh we use to go out in the blackout all use to shine the torches it was just a joke we excepted it, we had to make the most of it and we did, we never lost any body if you lost somebody family it puts a different light doesn't it really but we survived it. When service men came home on leave there was always a party for them somewhere or other, there was a working mans club and that was underneath the arches and they use to have Sunday nights concerts it was really good, it was a terribly tragic time but you had to make the best of it.

R: Where you romantically involved with anyone during the war?

?: Well no, if we did the fire watch at night.

R: I was wondering about boyfriend or marriage or anything like that?

?: That was just the war.

R: You were married just before the war?

?: Yes, was it, after, I am getting old ain't I.

R: Was your husband away for a long time?

?: No he couldn't do his service because he had a ???? here and they wouldn't pass him for service so he went to Hornchurch airport, he had to work for nothing doing all the post and all that sort of thing, and of course when we went up to Bolton when we were younger he just use to come up when he could.

R: Did any of you see much of the Canadians or the Americans?

?: I didn't no not welcome, when we were dancing sometimes you would, I mean that was the much younger people had this and that sort of thing.

R: More like 18?

?: Yes that is right.

R: You said you new a few of them?

?: Well I didn't know them a friend of mine her brothers lived in Southwark and there was Yanks there and when she had a pub he use to bring a couple of them down.

R: What about the Italians there was an Italian prisoner of war camp?

?: No, no I didn't know anything about that.

R: Didn't have any contacts?

?: No, no.

R: Did you have to do some afternoon work fire watching?

?: Well as I say fire watching at night time every body had to do a bit of that, yes so many nights a week.

R? Did you ever finish up having to call them?

?: No, no we were quite lucky in that respect I always wanted to go up to bed but I couldn't.

R: What about rations and food?

?: Oh well we had to make do on what we got, we all got by with our ration books don't ask me how, I mean if you were one of those fifty people you would make something, I mean it is easier to line up for about an hour for two bananas or half a pound of tomatoes to right in your book or veg, in the end you just excepted it, it was just normal life, it was in a friendly was everone was friendly during the war, a lovely atmosphere and it has changed yes.

R: When would you say it changed, so after the war or later?

?: Around the 60's, everybody started to move out and live a normal life but we never did I mean I use to live in the Old Kent Road I lived up there for 22 years.

R: When you say move out you mean out of the area?

?: Yes that is right, a lot of them came home from the war and got married and then move out they wasn't going to stop in London.

R: Do you think the war affected that?

?: Well there was so much bombing, I lived at the Elephant and Castle all through the war and I still practically live there, never change me.

?: You cannot compare the Elephant and Castle now to what it was years ago, people would never recognise it. There was five crossings no sub-ways nothing and I bet there is more accidents today than what there was then, right.

R: Knowing your neighbours did it change a lot just after the war or when do you think?

?: The neighbours never changed but they did gradually move out and new ones came in.

R: Was there a big housing problem then?

?: Oh yes, there was so many places bombed. I mean as I say we went to Bolton.

R: What did you do when you came back?

?: Ah, well there was mum and dad and my husband my little girl and me and went to every agent in London to try and get a flat and we couldn't, so they said to me did you evacuate yourself, and I replied yes, so they said to me find your own flat, and that was what I got and that is the truth.

R: ????????????

?: That is right we went on our own back evacuated ourselves, put all our own stuff in store and everything, and in the finish one agent I had a flat it was a five roomed flat in the New Kent Road and mum and dad came to live with me and we all shared the house, that was what I got first doing everything for the war, I mean all right it wasn't bad but it was not what we were use to because we left that lovely house in Doddington Grove, we had nothing.

R: Was there anycompensation?

?: No you had never heard of it, some did if they were bombed out.

R: Did any of the others have any complications with housing?

?: Well I lived with my mother and father and when they died I was on my own, and then the places were being pulled down for redevelopment and then I moved.

?: Our house was blitzed all the windows and frames, but it wasn't down but it was damaged and we had to ???took us in for about six weeks while they had yacked the windows out and and never put windows in just blackout to make it look a bit habitable, so we went back to it, but you know there was very few facilities then when there was bombing, water was off sometimes, no gas, use to light the fire to

make a cup of tea, and as for a bath well you know they were difficult all the time, I did finally get one after three months and then there was a raid.

R: Three months?

?: Three months, you use to wash down.

R: ??????????

?: In fact we never dressed sometimes, we would come home from work and there was a raid on we use to get under the cellar there.

R: Was you scared of losing your cloths?

?: No.

R: I spoke to someone this morning who was bombed out and she had nothing only the nightie she was dressed in?

?: Well my sister when we was bombed out in Boddington Grove we went to Essex in the back of someone's car in my night dress, in fact we didn't undress for about three months when the bombs started, you couldn't do any washing, we just sort of washed.

R: What are you referred to as?

?: Mrs, referred to as what, Gladys Beechey. Whinnie Tilby.

R: OK thank you ladies.

R: Would you like to fire away, during the war do you remember the start of VE Day?

?: I do.

R: What were you doing?

?: Just in the street my mother lived there, my sister we all lived in the same street.

R: Did you have a street party?

?: A great big tea party, my mum organised it.

R: What did you do?

?: Laugh, dance everything we were so happy, all the cakes.

R: Did you have a piano?

?: Yes we had a piano.

R: Did anyone sing?

?: Yes lots of people could sing, my mum could sing.

R: What were you doing during the war?

?: Well I had two babies, when I was evacuated because the bombs were dropping my husband had the shop a boot repairing shop and we had the cellar, we use to dive down the cellar, but I was so frightened with two babies that I evacuated.

R: What year did you have the babies?

?: 38 and 41.

R: So you were here for the blitz with the babies?

?: Oh yes.

R: Did you only go to the cellar then?

?: Only in the cellar but towards the end we had to go to the tube, do you know Kennington Tube?

R: Yes.

?: And of course they had the bunks down there the beds.

R: Why did you go down there?

?: Well because we would be safer because you are right down, and is wasn't bombed some of them were bombed, but it eased when they stopped the bombing my husband got home sick so we came back. He went in the army.

R: What sort of occupation did he have why wasn't he called up earlier?

?: Well he had the business, but then he was called up and mended all the officers shoes did all them army places, and I use to go visit him when I could in the army.

R: Where was he based?

?: Devon.

R: ????????????????

? No I had two children.

R: ????????????????

?: No but it was lovely, we went into a very wealthy lady had given up her home for the evacuees, and I was one of the lucky ones, they had there own bathrooms, right on where the water was Southern Barrier have you heard of that?

R: Sounds like the holiday of the year?

?: Oh what a place.

R: ?????????

?: We had to go across the ferry.

R: ?????????

?: A long time ago, my daughter goes back and visits it because she was only a little thing then.

R: You were very lucky.

?: Yes very lucky, lovely people, East Portmer that was where I was East Portmer and we use to get on ferry we was in heaven away from the bombs.

R: ?????????????

?: We had to go there for meetings, mothers and tots you know, I can tell you all about Devon.

R: How long were you there?

?: Quite along time about 6-8 months and then I got home sick.

R: The children did they get home sick as well?

?: No they were to young they loved it. We had our own gardener he use to bring all the fruit and veg into the house, there was six mothers, weren't I lucky.

R: So the food ?????????????

?: Well it was all home produce, and being Londoners they were all sorry for us we use to get bags of fruit and especially if you had little ones, I will never forget that.

R: What do you remember of the rations?

?: Well you had to queue up for bananas you never got bananas, very seldom you got them, so much butter and so much cheese.

?: When my eldest boy was a baby he bought it for mothering she said he couldn't ??? ???? ??? she said bless him he has never had a banana, so she cut it all and mashed it all with some sugar and the cream of the milk and he spat it out, she was really disappointed.

?: And I had never been back my married daughter often goes she loves it there.

R: Do you remember the blackouts?

?: All that sticky paper across your windows incase all the glass, wasn't it awful.

?: No, no you could go about in the dark anywhere in the dark and you wasn't murdered, cause now and again the police man use to stop you and ask for your identification card and you just showed it even in the taxies you showed it, and every where you went you had your gas mask.

R: So you weren't nervous?

?: No not really, well you were but occasionally where we were living at the time, what I do remember was a bomb came down and it was exactly at the bottom of our garden cause we were in the air

raid shelters and then some body came into the house, again my dad and myself was on street patrol which we had to walk up and down the street every hours and all that, but this particular night when the bombs fell the lady came in and come and help me she said it has caught my chickens, so we had to go into her place and rescue all her chickens and bring out to the house.

?: I had a sister terribly injured in the war.

R: What happened?

?: You know where the trams use to go in the City there, anyway she was only 18 with her young man and they was under this tunnel and a raid came on, direct hit and the couple they was with they never ever found them, but they got my sister and her young man, erhh I will never forget it till this day, I had to go with my mother to the hospital and her head was all blown out with the bomb and shrapnel her whole face was ????? with shrapnel and she still to this day have pieces coming from her body, and she lived she got over that, and she married the young boy they got married.

R: Did she look terrible?

?: Can you imagine, you couldn't see her eyes, and the shrapnel hit all her face and all her neck, here I am only showing you my knees nothing else, her knees here when right in, you could put that much in now, that was my sister.

R: She was lucky to live.

?: And the other two they were buried they never found them, blown to bits, the Kinsway that was where it was, where the trams use to go, oh yeah I could tell you a lot about the war.

?: My husband and I and been to the pictures in Putney and we were coming home the last bus went at ten a clock, so you had to get of the films a bit quick, we got out and we got on the bus and we had to go up stairs and I was next to the window, and as the bus stopped at the milk bar they dropped a bomb on the milk bar and all the glass cut all my face, and I don't like sitting next to the window on a bus now, it all scratched me, I didn't have any scars really but it as all in my hair, my husband was getting in aright state he was on me.

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

?: Well I got pleasure in Devon.

?: Well we use to go out to the dances and I have been to the pictures, and I said you all better go now it is getting heavy outside, so I got up and went and we carried on as normal.

R: ??????????

?: Yeah till he announced it again I think you better all go it is getting heavier, but I lived near Surrey Docks and that was the time all the docks caught fire, that was my first day, I went up to New Cross at the top of the hill and it looked as though all London was on fire, I couldn't get back so I had be in the shelter in New Cross Road near the Town Hall down below, and then all the lights went out and soon one screamed and I though ooh that has done it, then I came out and walked home it was terrible there was glass every where, and our place where I lived was hit and every thing, I was on fire watching.

R: When you went up and saw flames every where, what was you feeling at the time?

?: Well we have had it here, that is it, that is the lot, and when I walked down and saw every thing I said to my mother we will give in, and she said you can't do that, but it was terrible it use to frighten me I

know, you would be out on the street and you would get one of these fire bombs, doogle bugs and they stop and you are looking at the dame thing wondering where it is going to go next. We only had a morrison shelter and we didn't have that at the beginning, and it is like living in the cage with all that letting all up.

R: Was the morrison shelter in the house?

?: Yes, a bedroom had to go for that, somewhere underneath sometimes when it was quite I would say I am going up on the top of it sleep on the top, and my mum would say you better come in here, oh yeah alright, then they chucked them down and I was trying to get till it was all clear.

R: Did you ever go in the bigger shelters?

?: Yeah that was when the Docks was on fire, yeah at New Cross that was I couldn't get back again so it was right underneath all the paving stones and all that you know, that was bad then, but they use to frighten me when I heard the warning my stomach use to go over and I would thing oh crumbs he we go again, I use to dread having a ????at night.

?: We had a morrison cause they had a steel top, cause my kid was a baby and my mum use to say don't put him by the wall put him in the middle.

?: What about the buzz bombs?

?: Oh they were terrible bombs, they would go over and when the engine stopped you didn't know where they were going to go.

?: Well when the buzz bombs use to come over you know you new you only had a little way and then it would stop and I use to run my mums gas meter because it was confined you now, I use to get right underneath, oh it was terrible, how did we ever get through that, and we are all here to tell the tale.

?: My father had to do the fire watching and we lived in a council house opposite peoples own houses, and all the houses opposite were on fire so my father has gone out to help put the fires out and at four a clock in the morning my mother is still waiting for him to come home because the fires had all gone out, and when he did come home he was blind drunk, and my mother had never seen him like that before she was panicking, and apparently a house where he had been in and put the fire out they were so grateful they kept supplying him with his drink he was blind, my poor mother didn't know whether she was coming or going, cause my mother was a country woman she was very quite.

?: I mean I could have stayed in that shelter with my husband and my two children and never went anywhere and that shop was there all through the war it wasn't hit all around was hit, houses were hit but my husband still had his shop and it was there but I couldn't stay there I was a cow, well when you have got babies you can win it.

?: Well I use to work on the factories at first doing quilt covers for the big army lorries so we had to wear mask because we were working with arsenic, when you started working with it every body in our floor use to be sneezing because of the and our eyes were absolutely blood red and watering and then they sent away to get the analysis of what the quilt covers were and it came back that it was arsenic you see, so then all of us use to be having these masks and doing the same work all the time for the lorry covers that use to be about and it was quite heavy work, but when the warning went you had to really run down in the main part of the factory, but sometimes we use to just dive under the machines with the hope that nothing come on us, but there was two of us one day and we just run I was near the doors so we just run down the stairs to the main factory because it was all aircraft work that was being done there, so we run down there but I did get told off when we came back the foreman said you silly bugger what did you do that for, you

could have had us all in panic stations, but it was true I often think about that really you know, but anyway that was when I was 21 and you don't think of anything else do you.

?: We worked right next to a cemetery so when the bombs use to drop we use to run to the cemetery, right near Richmond Park I was, but we use to make all these plugs sparking plugs you know for the things, put them all into big cases and Michael use to get covered in all the ?????

R: Did you feel that you were some how safer in the cemetery?

?: Well it was the only place to go there was no where else to go.

R: Well they wouldn't have to bury you again?

?: Well this is it ha ha ha, until they put us up a shelter until then there was no where else to run because it was all open there you see.

?: When is the day coming and we can all go mad?

R: When is it coming?

?: Yes.

R: May 7th or 8th.

?: And we are all coming to the club in red white and blue all dressed up.

R: Do any of you remember the election at the end of the war when Churchill was voted out?

?: Vaguely.

R: Not very well, where there important issues like the National Health.

?: Yes that was important to us yes, it had been important to us right up until these last few years, I mean these last few years it is a laugh ain't it, it is ridiculous, but it was to us then I was ice scating at Richmond when that happened when the war finished.

?: I use to go there Richmond ice scating when I was about 17. And it was funny because we use to always say about when they sounded the last all clear, but I can never really remember when I did hear the last all clear can you?

?: You couldn't pin point and say the last time we heard the all clear was so and so.

?: But it was the 5th November when the siren went because I was going back to Devon and I just after the war the I joined the forces so on the 5th November when I joined up that was the sirens was going then.

R: Did they ????? at 39 at the beginning of the war?

?: No, no at the end, I was doing ammunition in a factory but when I joined the forces was after the war, and then I was stationed and I had some letters from my husband but they were pen friends for two years before I actually met him and then that was in 1947 when we got married.

R: When your husband was away for the last part of the war, how did you get on with your husbands after being away for so long?

?: I was quite lucky really because my husband didn't go out in the country because he really wasn't a good soldier he use to ?????????? ??????????/.

R: You were sounding like it was a problem?

?: Well your husband was away it was hard.

R: I meant when he came back and you had been used to being without him and he was used to being without you how did it work out?

?: Alright, kept chatting about the war and I thought oh don't keep going on about it.

?: They use to get weekend leave sometimes when I was home in London he use to come home see the children.

R: So it wasn't like he was away solid for years?

?: Oh no.

?: My husband was in India in Burma.

R: How long for?

?: Three years just over three years, and then after he had done three years service out there you could then put your name in a hat and you could be picked out to go home for so long, and a chap went up to him and told him and he said I ain't, he said you have, he flew home here and the next thing the war was finished, but he had to go all the way back again to get his ????????

R: Did you have children?

?: No.

R: It must have been quite difficult with children?

?: Well yes you see that was the thing, because my eldest boy was a baby Daddy was just something that was there sometimes, and when he did come home he use to look at him with as much to say, who are you what are you doing here, but by the time here went back he was well away, then there would be another break and I eventually we lived up in Norfolk and my mother came from Norfolk so I went up there and stayed with her sister and we saw more of him because he use to get out at nights and so he saw much more of his father then.

Mrs Doris Bailey
Doris Mahony
Jessie Yabsney

Thank you.