

Trans 36

REF. GRDONNSW

Donn Swann

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Marie Forbes-Pointer Interviewing Don Swann

M: Hello Don can you tell me where and when you were born please?

Don Swann: 6 June 1933 in George's in the East Hospital Wopping. If you try to work it out that makes it 62.

M: So you were

D: I was 6 when war broke out and I lived in Raleigh House Watergate Street Raleigh House is the bottom of Watergate Street and is a council flat.

M: Which is just in Deptford is it?

D: Just in Greenwich actually Watergate Street is in Greenwich just. And the earliest recollection of the war is what you already asked me for. Right Rob Wilton I remember the day that war broke out and that ages me, Rob Wilton I mean. I remember the day the war broke out because I was in a little park behind the flats where we lived and its still there this little park and I was playing with some friends and the air raid warden I think the air raid siren went, I seem to remember that. Anyway someone shouted that we ought to go home so we all rushed home and I actually remember, although I did not realise the importance of it, I remember the speech that Nevil Chamberlain said, you know wars broke out and I remember people crying except some of the men were saying good job we can get on with it now. So that's my earliest recollection as to were of the day that broke out. I actually remember the day war broke out. I remember on the other side of the road to where Watergate Street Rowley House was there was a large wall which presumably behind it was a factory but the balloons used to go up from there and you used to see them rise up and over the wall and up they come and when the ? as well. Other recollections of the war were the going down to the river which was at the bottom wall wedged in down some steps a little alleyway and actually seeing planes flying up the Thames and summer of 39 49 was a good summer you know terrific weather if my memory serves me correctly which it does. So I remembered that and I remember the planes swerving around over the Thames or up and down the Thames as it were.

M: Were these our planes or

D: Both, was it. I don't think the first air raid started in 39, no couldn't have been it was the first air raid was 1940 if my memory serves me correctly. Anyway so I remembered that I remember the air raid starting I remember being as frightened as hell as a little kid hiding in my mother's cloak running up Deptford High Street what was Burton the Tailors where the big air raid shelter was and we went down there and sending up people to book you a beds and your room, so I remembered those I remember one Sunday being out with one of sisters who, and an air raid going on and bombs dropping and guns were flying all over the place and running into the middle of the flats where these concrete shelters, not underground shelters, but just concrete, and running into those and getting told off when I got home for staying out watching these bombs coming down and not being so frightened during the day but at night time being frightened. I also remember the, at the top of Deptford High Street there was a barber's shop still there actually. I had my first haircut there and just out of the barber's shop were large flats which had been rebuilt but they got hit once and so you actually walking up and actually looking into what was people's houses all sorts of beds and furniture half hanging and half hanging out and getting clipped round the ear or getting told off at least by a policeman for picking one of the annuals and reading it I literally was reading it or pretending to read it, and getting told off because you know I was stealing or looting

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and I was helping the enemy or that sort of thing, and dropping it and running because I was more scarred of him than I was of the houses that seem to be tipping down on top of us. So they are my early memories. I remember going into which I didn't repeat last time, but I remember going swimming with some friends who were much older than I were and going into Greenwich Baths and a chap saying to me "can you swim?" and I said "of course I can" and he looked at me, remember I was a tot, and said "how old are you" and I told him it was none of his business but you know, because I was cheeky always have been, and he said "where did you learn to swim" and I said "in the bath at home" and of course I couldn't swim and I nearly drown and he had to pull me out and send me home. So no those, I remember the whole of the summer apart from the air raids and being frightened was a glorious summer. 1940 was a glorious summer and you weren't really as a kid noticing any shortages any thing wrong rationing didn't affect you because you still got fed anyway you know.

M: You weren't short of food?

D: I'm not aware of being short of food but there must have been but then mum's always managed you know.

M: Tell us about your family, you haven't said

D: Pass (laughs)

M: Whose in the family?

D: Whose in the family, well mine's a peculiar family in the sense that my father died when I was 9 months old and in Watergate Street and Rowley House I actually lived with my maternal grandparents, my brothers and sisters were put into homes. My elder brothers and sisters..

M: How many of them were there?

D: Umm Eileen and Ellen Kathy Florrie Bobbie and Johnny - so there was 8 of us

M: All older than you?

D: Eileen wasn't but then she lived with my mother who didn't live in Rowley House with us she lived over in Wopping and Stepney where we came from. Don't ask me why that was I just don't know. Umm and then in 1939 she married my stepfather who was in Merchant Navy and although I never met him he had a family of his own from a previous marriage and in, she must have married earlier in 1939 because when war broke out, just after the war broke out, she came to live with us and my youngest brother, not my youngest brother, a younger brother was born and they had, I had two further brothers and a sister from the second marriage of each as it were. So there was a ? of families. So then my brothers and sisters about this time when my mother came to live with us my brothers and sisters were brought out of the home and came to live in Watergate Street except for my eldest sister Florrie who was in service and then Florrie was about 19-20 and she got, she was in service but then she got married to Harry ? and off he went to war and she lived over in the East End somewhere, I saw her occasionally. So that's my family.

M: So you lived with your Grandma just on your own or with your youngest sister?

D: No, no, no my youngest sister Eileen was living with my mother who was in Stepney and I lived with my grandfather. But there's a story behind that but you want the war onwards, so not beforehand.

M: Yes

D: There's a story why I ended up with my Grandfather and Grandmother. I remember going out, there's a pub at the end of Watergate Street called the Harp? of Erin. I remember walking up there with my

Grandmother with her cloth cap and sack cloth and getting beer in a jug and coming back with it. That was a great Sunday treat as well. Drinking the beer I meant! So that's the, you know the games we played with the normal games with kids. I remember being in St Alfrege's Hospital for a time with mumps or chickenpox and apart from the appendicitis which I had when I was 13 months that's the only time I was in hospital all during war, and as I say the war was an interlude between family events and I think most youngsters looked upon the war as an interlude and providing no one in their family got hurt or no one in their acquaintances got hurt they still went to school or they didn't go to school as the case maybe. I for a time must have gone to St. Joseph's in Deptford High Street because I remember my brother, one of my brothers, coming to collect me on one occasion and going into Manses Pie Shop and having dinner and ever since then I loved to have a pie and mash. And on another occasion remembering when for some reason there must have been a big fight going on or somewhere because there was always fights in and around Deptford but on one occasion my two brothers and one of my sisters were involved in a great big punch up at the top of Watergate Street. Why it was I don't know. All I remember is standing around cheering on everyone and then we were evacuated to well I and some of my sisters were evacuated to umm Daventry? in Northamptonshire, and that was a great time, great time.

M: Can you tell us anything specially happened that's of interest?

D: What in Daventry?

M: Yes

D: Yes I actually still go back to Daventry and the niece of the people to whom with whom I was in digs Uncle Jim and Aunt Rose I actually go back and see Mary in fact I rang her today to ask her how she was because it was her daughters wedding anniversary today. And I class Mary as a sister we have been brought up, I met, because of the years we were there I actually know Mary, or knew Mary better than I knew my sisters.

M: How long were you in Daventry for?

D: Must have been two and a half three years because now this is where things start to get hazy but I remember it with great affection. I remember the first week I was evacuated to.. let me go back a bit. I remember going, we actually were sent up to Weedon in Northampton which was a large army cavalry barracks in a large army cavalry town and I remember the long, which must have been the horse schooling or riding school area where they were all ?? you're going to Daventry you're going to Weedon you're going to Buckleigh and all this sort of thing to the kids. And I ended up in Daventry and the people I was first evacuated to for some reason it didn't hit off. I don't know why and I remember the billeting lady taking me around to the Regal Cinema where Uncle Jim was and he was a sort of manager, there was two cinema's in Daventry, the Regal and the Rex, and he was the manager of both of them as it were, and he also worked at the radio station, Empire Radio Station which was in Daventry, and him saying "do you want to come and live with us" and I said "what you got" and he said "well I've got a large garden with some cockerels and some hens you can look at" and I said "fine that'll do me" and they were great.

M: How old were you when he asked this?

D: Umm well it was 40/41 so I probably coming up 8 about 8.

M: And were you happy with the cockerels?

D: Fantastic. Fantastic family fantastic. They had no children of their own and they actually wanted to adopt me but didn't work out. I wished they had had done but sorry I shouldn't say that should I. But it was great because you should never look back, but it was great.

M: Tell us about the things that you did when you were in Daventry.

D: Got in fights as all evacuees did.

M: Can you think of anything in particular?

D: What in fighting - you got in fights because it was evacuees. Where you never evacuated? You ask evacuees what was the big thing they remember about them and the townies and it was always especially they were also, which didn't happen to me because I didn't practice Catholicism but if they were sort of religious ??? my wife she went to the Catholic School or to Catholic part of the school and they were always in fights because the vacuees against the townies oh yes. They talk about racial intolerance and religious intolerance its been on for years. But no one called it intolerance you know if you were bigger than them you punched them up in the air they agreed with agreed with you in the end. But it wasn't intolerance you know I get actually as ?? I actually sometimes get annoyed with the so called do goodie groups who try to tell us - you've got to be racially aware, you got to be minority aware, and I say you can do too much. If you treat people as people and human beings (there comes tea) you get on alot better. So those things went on and you just accepted them and you made friends eventually and you became accepted and you go on to the burr of the local I mean

M: Any particular friends that you can tell us about?

D: Oh yes, one I still got a character called Derek Beech. Now we don't see each other all that often poor Derek is crippled with arthritis and things like that and he's beginning to suffer from Alzheimer's but um we don't see each other all that often but when he was OK I mean before Alzheimer's came in every time I went up to see Mary in Daventry which was twice a year, and I still go twice a year umm I call round to see him and its though you never actually been away and its come in and sit down and catch up. So Derek and I were friends from St. James' Street School its St. James' Street it wasn't a Church School its just called St. James' Street School, from the day we were there and I don't know why we hit if off but the Beech's and I were great friends in fact Derek's brother came Mary Daventry and again as aside at one stage I was umm tempted to stand for parliament and one of the places that I was short listed at was Daventry. I actually went back there and got short listed and it was only on my way back that I started to think and I decided not to go through with it. But I was actually short listed for a seat in Daventry. Anyway that's going on. But it just shows you Daventry has played a lot of time in my life. I remember we used to go around and all the country pursuits all the scrumping and apples and getting chased and clearing snow and getting paid for it of f the steps. Going school I always remember when you used to walk up the school there was a pub its not that I drink I don't drink but I remember pubs called the Red Lion and the owner of that pub kept a fox and that got a very pungent distinctive smell foxes, and even to this day if I go out in the garden or in the street I know when there's a fox been around and that relates back to the day that I eh days that I used to go past it when I went to school there was this fox kept in this pub yard. It wouldn't be allowed now of course but then, and then we used to go rabbiting together and I remember going rabbiting with Derek and some of the elder Beech's brothers and sisters and fathers who they had a couple of guns. All the country pursuits were great and I used to have, and when go round reaping the harvest and chasing and killing the rats and the mice you know from the sheeps all these things, all the natural things that boys did, Derek and I did all the way through the 2 and a half to 3 years up there. It was a great time.

M: How did you terminate them.

D: What the rats? Hit them with a stick.

M: Oh fair cop!

D: Smack you usually, they used to do the sheaf's up and you'd see them running and shattering and quite a lot of them, it was just Derek and I cause all the kids were there, it was great fun you know, farmer Giles is going "lets get up there and have some fun".

M: Was there anything to do?

D: No, no I actually ? mice and rats and I don't like vermin and I cringe at them but in those days I had no fear. But I don't like them. If I see a mice a mouse not a mice I see a mouse I have got to get rid of it even in the garden I don't like it, and if the cat brings them in. But in those days you didn't you know. Derek and I had a glorious three years and we met up and often met up and still do and there friendships. What was the other things we used to do that, we'd go round Saturday morning with the bread van, horse drawn bread van lovely smell of bread and getting told off by Aunt Rose once because the horse took something out of my pocket and tore my jacket from top to bottom and but it was a nice life and it stood me in good stead it was you know a great time.

M: And you were fortunate in that you were evacuated and you weren't aware that it was the war really were you.

D: No.

M: Did you not miss London?

D: No, no I didn't miss London at all.

M: What brought you back to London then?

D: Oh Jesus, what brought me back to London umm well I tell you about my step father being in the Merchant Navy and umm he was at Dunkirk and all over the place and an unlucky fellow or lucky he got torpedoed about 12 or 13 times and on the last occasion it was ??? called the Grey Ranger and it was in Dundee harbour and a submarine U boat was waiting for them and umm torpedoed it and again there was another ship so the King wrote a letter to my Dad or step-father and said do you think you could retire to allow us a chance to win this war. We are loosing too many ship. This is not true but it sounds good. Anyway..

M: Did he talk to you about the experience of being torpedoed, your step-father.

D: ...?? in conversations but I didn't particularly get on with him

M: You can't elaborate on it at all?

D: Sometimes I can but I didn't get on with him so I didn't speak to him very much umm I never really came in contact with him until we went up until I went up to Dundee, he was torpedoed in Dundee and umm that was it and he got a place. Now during the war abled bodied men who weren't in the forces were actually directed to jobs and umm he called my mother up to Dundee and the rest of the family and then they decided they wanted me up there so I went up.

M: When would this have been?

D: Umm 1943 1943 because we weren't there very long we just over the Christmas time I remember just going over the Christmas time eh I remember the trams up in Lockey Road umm I remember going out getting rolls about 6 o'clock in the morning it was great umm I remember on one occasion during the war you didn't have sugar of course this is umm of course you were aware that war was on because you always listened to the 9 o'clock news or whatever it was but what I saying is that it didn't, the family problems affected me more than the war affected me you know, and I think that's the same, I've said it once before, and I think its the same again, if it did not affect your family unit it doesn't matter, I mean the fact that there was a war on or there was this going on or that going on, it affected you because your brother in law was at Dunkirk your father was at Dunkirk but what that meant if they were all right it meant they were at Dunkirk and yes they were in a battle but they beat the living daylight out of the Germans or they didn't

you know, and the way the propaganda was there was always, a defeat was a victory in reverse wasn't it. So it didn't affect you if no one was injured in your family and rationing people are going to curse me for saying this but I was never aware of the shortage of food I was aware of queuing for food

M: Can you tell us about that?

D: Well you just queued for food you known you took your place or you know your mum sent you down to the shops and you queued for food.

M: Can you recall any particular thing?

D: I was going to recall one thing, a shortage of sugar oh and something else but I put that, a shortage of sugar, and I remember the chemist used to sell bottles of sweetener stuff and it was the old silver threepenny bit and sixpence, but it was sixpence this bottle of staff and I remember being sent out once for it and when I way there I discovered I hadn't got the money so I thought I must have dropped it and sort of walking back home I sort of looking on the ground and then I remembered that I'd walked in the middle of the road and I walked in the middle of the road and I found a three penny bit where a tram had run over it so I took that and pretended it was sixpence and got away with it umm to the chemist, came home you see umm and gave the bottle of this sweetener stuff and remember my father saying how did you get that - "well I got the money" I got a ruddy great punch around the ear and I do mean a punch rather than a clip and I thought what the hell was that for and "he's the sixpence you left on the table so you must have stolen the sixpence". It wasn't a question "how did you get it" but immediately "you stole" you see so of course that created a big argument if I said it again and anyway so that I remember. I remember going um on another occasion shopping for sweets and feeling peckish ate three of them and came back with 2 you know and that caused another big row. I don't them they shouldn't have sent me for sweets at my age I was too good for it. So then we moved from Dundee to Glasgow where my father went to work for umm Rolls Royce in Hillingdon and it was there that I went to our Lady Lourdes School it was there that the first Catholic School I went to Our Lady of Lourdes, no I tell a lie, I don't remember much about it but I went to a Catholic School in Dundee. That's where I saw my first Rosary Bead as well. I wasn't a very good catholic but then that's another story. Umm I went to Dundee the first real school was our Lady of Lourdes umm Cannon Fitzgerald You ask people to remember names of their MP's and their Mayors and I say this because I was Mayor of Greenwich I don't boast about it, they don't remember it, but you ask them to remember the name of their head teacher or their parish priest or their this, now I talk to my sisters who are in their 70's and I say who was your head teacher and they remember they remember their teacher and they remember Cannon Fitzgerald who was their Parish Priest but they can't remember who the MP was and who their Mayor was you know. And it actually teaches us all to bear that in mind they have a great responsibility and people have great affection for teachers. Umm so we moved to Dundee and that's where I passed my 11 plus and so this was now 1945 and umm we moved back VE soon after VE day so soon after May 1945 we moved back to Greenwich and umm we went to live in Park Vista Rest Centre because there were no houses ready for us and of course we were a large family and then we took a..

M: What happened to you house in Deptford

D: Oh someone else had moved in to that because we had given it up and it was actually in the name of my eh Grandfather and my Grandmother and she had died God rest her sole and I don't know what happened to my Grandfather I just sort of lost contact with them after I moved up to Dundee after I moved out of ????? It was just as though you closed the door and that was the end of it you know until year and years later it was actually years many years later that I met up with my Grandfather again but then that's as I say another story and not this but no it was just though a door closed and that was it you know umm but I liked him he was a rouge apparently but I liked him because again he looked after me so eh so where was we, we moved back and we went to a requisition house in Dinsdale Road where we lived for a time and at 15 I left???? and the rest is history as they say. But you did ask me to tell you the story of the school. When we moved back which was about June at the time I didn't go to school for months and school started again and I didn't bother. Remember I passed my 11 plus so I was grammar

material, says he, and umm a friend of mine called George ?? kept on to me saying you got to go to school you got to go to school. All my friends seem to be dead now God rests their soles. But Georgie said you go to go and I said why and he said "because the school board will get you". So I went OK OK umm where's the nearest Grammar School so it was John Roan Dinsdale Road which is in walking distance. So one day I took myself up there down at the heel shoes and socks around my ankles and eh short trousers and saw the lady who was obviously the school secretary as I know it now and bluffed my way through to see the head and he asked me what I wanted and I said "I want to come to your school". "Why do you want to come to our school" and I said "because you are a Grammar school and I passed my 11 plus and I need to go to school". "When did you move back" "I don't know sometime after VE Day" which was probably about June and he said "well what kept you?" I said "I didn't bother, I'm here now can I come to your school" "Where do you live" "Dinsdale Road" "Where did you live before you were evacuated?" "Watergate Street Deptford" "Ahh" says he "we have a plan that you actually go to school where you lived before you were evacuated, so that means you go to go to Addey and Stanhope which is at the top of Deptford High Street" "well where is that from here" says I. Remember I am 12 and the cheeky as sin, and he directed me to where Addey & Stanhope was, so I walked there Mum and Dad weren't ... didn't know where I was, anyway I walked to Addey & Stanhope got there in the afternoon, bluffed my way through to get to the head teacher again, how I did I don't know, but anyway I got through there "please sir can I come to your school" "why" "because I passed my 11 plus in ????" and I was evacuated and I'm back here now and I need to go to school and I am a grammar school boy" "I see what is the figure for a square root" fortunately it was the only thing I knew so I said "2" "I see he said and where do you live" "Dinsdale Road Blackheath" and where did you live before you were evacuated and I said "Watergate Street" and he said "Ahh, now we have a system" I said "I bet I can tell you what that system is" and he says words to the effect "that you're a cheeky.." I said "the system is that we go to school where we now live and not where we lived when we were evacuated" he said "thats it exactly" so I said "the school for me is John Roan" "Yes" "OK thank you very much" walked out walked home and forgot all about it and I forgot all about it for another couple of months. Georgie was always on to me you have got to go to school ????????? and I said well I went and they don't want me. He said "well come to our school" and I said where's that "that's Charlton Central" so I said "Oh". This is what sometime 46 nearly year since I had been to school. So I said "Oh OK where's Charlton Centre" so he told me and I said "Oh I'll be along there sometime" and I was out running the streets roaming the streets again and passed Charlton Central so I decided to go in, and this was about half 11 quarter to 12. Got to see the secretary "what do you want" "I want to see the headmaster" "why" "I want to come to this school" looking me up and down and "why do you want to come to school" "because I haven't been to school and I passed my 11 plus at St. Gerards and please I would like to go to school". Tap and there was Joe White, "What do you want" so told him he said "I see" and then he said a peculiar thing he said "have you had breakfast" I said "well what's that got to do with going to school" "don't get cheeky with me young man have you had breakfast" "well as a matter of fact no" he said "come with me" sat me down at his desk went out came back with a school dinner told me to get on with it and then went out. Now I became friends with him much later after I left school and I went back to see him a couple of times, he was a great head teacher was old Joe.

M: You obviously went to that school

D: Of yes, well he went out you see and he told me he rang the Education Authorities and said I got a bloke called Don Swann who lives at Dinsdale Road I'm keeping him here he's coming to this school you get round to telling his parents where he is because they obviously don't care and that was it and so I went to Charlton Central and peculiarly enough Charlton Central produced some best to my knowledge secondary school produces 6 Mayors for Greenwich and I think that says something for the leadership of the school that 6 people out of that school became Mayors it taught them service and dedication, I think. It gave them something anyway and ???? is still on the Council he was Mayor Frank Burton was Mayor Charlie Scales was Mayor I was Mayor ???? Mayor Jeffries I think was Mayor all came out of Charlton Central all of them. Great school great school, taught me hockey as well, gave me my first game of Hockey but this was after the war.

M: Can we go back to the war and the things that you did like as a child and perhaps you could tell me where you were as you spent quite a bit of your time through the country like the games you played and I remember you were telling me about some job that you did when you were in flats you did button polishing - can you elaborate on that?

D: Oh yes that was before we were evacuated that was before we were evacuated they walked in presumably from umm the army barracks but webbing webbing from the first world war which people were given to and to clean up and if I knew what I was going to do I the RAF later on I would never even taken to it but you scrubbed the webbing clean and the buckles which were brass were mouldy green because they had been probably stored for years but you polished them up and you got sort of a penny for every 3 that you did. But that wasn't a game but I remember people sitting outside the house in the flats chatting

M:??????????

D: Yes but you see my games were the normal games that kids played. Girls played with their dolls and the fellow played skittles and guns and cowboy hats with Tom Mix and Gene Autry and all the others umm french cricket and knocking down ginger, which was knocking in people's doors and running away like mad or tying pieces of string to two doors and knocking them and running like mad. Umm and then the wall cricket where you put up three sticks and one across and one would hide and try to knock down - all those games all kids play you know but nothing unusual you just..

M: Where you interested in the girls at all

D: Not all 6 or 7 no.

M: I'm talking about later towards the end of the war.

D: No

M: You didn't have any interest in

D: Girls were stupid silly things weren't they?

M: Can you think of any important things that happened during the war that would be of interest to us?

D: Yes, we won! (laughs). No you see when I am talking to my children I remember and things come on television I say yes I remember that and I remember this. But the important things to us were the fact that umm your step-father was at Dunkirk and you were worried about him coming home and then he come home and tell you he got drunk and charged and he got away with it because he was entertaining the troops singing, the fact that your brother in law was there and you heard that he came home. But again it wasn't jeepers isn't that lucky or you know thank God for that, it was well he was there and he came home and you know to a 6 year old or 5 year old the sight of bombs and going onto ships or ships getting didn't mean injury really its the people who were older that understood pain that understood loss but I had not lost anyone.

M: In the beginning of the tape you were telling me that you went up to Deptford High Street to book your place what did you mean by that?

D: Oh you booked a place in the shelter and a bed.

M: Can you elaborate on that?

D: No I'm sorry this is awful for you. But basically all it was you you know some members of the family went there first to as to where to say well this is our space and bedded out their space for the Swann family the Buckingham family you know, Uncle Jim Tom Cobbley.

M: Was that a regular occurrence that you went to the shelter as a family group.

D: Yes, oh yes, yes, oh yes it was until we were evacuated yes, it was a regular and that's as I say the only time I remember fear during the war because it was dark and you were running up a street and bangs were going on loud bangs and umm guns were going off you know and you saw the guns. But during the daytime when you saw that as far as I would remember you know sort of 50 years backwards you weren't frightened, you were only frightened in the dark you were only frightened if the noise was near you and if the bombs were going near you. That was the only time I was really frightened at all. I don't even remember I remember flames from across the river you know because they came up the river but that was houses burning you know so what, it sounds callous but I don't mean it to be, now if someone got hurt you understand what pain is you understand what death is you understand was injury is, you understand that the blasted bomb, I supposed I am a ????? really but you can understand why they are you know. Its the old men that make wars and the young men that have to fight and kids enjoy them you know, if kids enjoy it if it doesn't affect them.

M: Can you think of any sort of transport and things that you use like the old fashioned open top buses any experiences of that?

D: No because umm not as a youngster because you life in those days revolved around where you lived and if you could walk to school if you could walk to the shops you know and if your family was there. I was never conscious of visiting families and using public transport the trams, never conscious of it because your immediate family was there I obviously must have gone across the river sometime but umm I'm not conscious of using the transport which you didn't. I mean the first time I was ever on the train was when I went from Deptford to Daventry that was the first time I remember getting a train I remember as a youngster when I went from Rugby to Dundee and that was crowded and umm you know soldiers and sailors and forces people going up there and I shows you how silly some kids are I though well now I'm going up Scotland I'm going to tell them all about life and what you know, they don't know about guns and cinemas and things like that and these are the thoughts and things like that, and of course when you get there, and I remember DE day in our Lady of Lourdes because that was the Dons Day you know that's why it was called D Day Dons Day in 1944. I remember the sort of first day I went to school in our Lady of Lourdes and ?? coming up and asking me what football team I had supported. I thought Oh God what football team and I had only heard of one and that was the Rangers so I said "Rangers of course" and that started a bloody great fight and my life was full of fights as a kid. Started a fight and the head master came out a character called Fox and he asked me what it was all about or stop the fight they said who started it and they said "he did" and I said "I didn't start anything they just asked me what football team I supported and I told them Rangers" and he put me in and I have a scar on my hand today where he gave me the belt because I started the fight and I asked me why I started the fight he said "good catholic people don't support the Rangers" and I though how stupid. I still think how stupid umm you know as against as aside I give a lot of talks about my business selling insurance and I got alot of friends up in Scotland and I go up to Glasgow Edinburgh Aberdeen but I remember going up to Glasgow a couple of years back and giving a talk and I related this story about you know and said how stupid it is and someone took me to task the manager who was a bloke called Murphy took me to task he said you know even today you cant go into some houses and say your name is Murphy because they will tell you you are a catholic by your name and they wont buy insurance from you. Now this was 2 years ago and then you having said that I also remember that in St. Gerards in Dublin there was two streets one was called Blackburn Street and one was called Plantation Street and at the bottom of these streets there was a waste space which had been a bombed area and there was fights down there because you could not walk done one street wearing a green and white scarf he had to be a blue one. Down the other one you couldn't wear a blue one it had to be a green and white one and there was fights on there umm and that's, I hope its not going on but it still went on a long time. OK

M: Can you tell me about VE day it would be 8 May and as you know its coming up to the 50th anniversary now?

D: It didn't umm I knew obviously war had ended because people were happy and people were laughing you heard that Churchill on the radio and things such as that but again as a 12 year old 11 or 12 year old umm there were more important things as far as I was concerned you know family matters and things like that umm so unless you were actually in the City like London and you get up to spend VE day around London or the in big Cities and unless VE day passed for me and I remember I first got interested in politics actually in must have been I don't know why but I remember it couldn't have been in the 1945 election because that took place and I wasn't really aware of it but politics came onto the scene for me when I was about still at Charlton Central had not left school about 14 so what's that about 1947 and I remember going to listen to Ernest Bevan speak and I thought it was fantastic and I remember going to hear Hans ?? speaking he used to be a columnist and Hans ?? speaking at political meetings and I started to go to and I think it was there that I started to be aware of politics and knowing what had gone on before and I started to read if you come from the East End then you absorb things without actually realising that you absorb them and if you come from areas as I did in Deptford and Glasgow you know I had experience of Glasgow you absorb these things and I remember listening to Hans ??? and the things he's saying and I said the only way you are going change is to get involved and I suppose at 14 it just was at the back of the head if you want to do something you got to get involved and

M: What sort of things was he saying that interested you or.. did he speak with conviction?

D; Oh yes, he was you know the sort of things you know we gone through the 30's we shouldn't have had this war it wasn't our war. I don't think it was either I think it could have been avoided but then I'm not a student of war but we knew what was going on and well I want damage anyone but I think certain people were making sounds well I'm not saying we should have appeasement because I'm not in agreement with appeasement but the things that led up to it and when you saw the conditions in the East End and kids the way that they were and when the Labour party started talking about the National Health Service and agreed with nationalisation of things OK so maybe they went overboard but things were right and the Unions were right probably went on too strong, I don't know I'm not worried about that but I'm talking about 1945 where things needed to be done and needed to be changed and we needed to change things and Hans ?? ????? actually saying the only things you can change is yourself and later on when I started to become into the Church reading and as a Christian you got to change there's not point in saying well I go to church on Sunday and that's good enough. You want to change society you got to get involved and you have got to do things and you got to do them to the best of your ability at the time. There comes a time maybe when you move on there is a time when you can be active and when you can be strong and change and you go as far as you can go and then when you've gone as far as you can go you say bye that's it now I'm going to pass this sounds tripe but you are going to pass that on to someone else and you don't hand around because if you hand around you'll hang around in the 1960 and the 70's you've got to pass it on the trouble is too many of our people stay on too long they stay on too long in the Council they stay too long because they want power and they want the glory they don't want to do it and then move on. You know I was a school governor for 25 years. I had the satisfaction of people saying to me come back come back and I said no because that's it because you only go back and its only like, that's what Hans??? was saying get in get involved you know if umm you want to change someone someone else said this but if you want to change someone you don't take them out the dirty water shake them up and put them in the dirty water you change the water, and the only way you change the water is getting in there getting involved and doing to the best as you say, that's what Hans ??? was saying and this swelled round in my little brain I left home when I was 15 and I went into the forces came out and I thought that's it.

M: Where did you go when you were 15?

D: I went into digs I found myself digs. I walked out of house umm Good Friday with a pair of football shorts spare shirts half a crown and a ration book and never went back and found myself digs. When I

went in the forces at 17 came out when I was 21 22 and then I started getting involved getting involved in local politics and umm trade unions and umm tried to get a seat and then decided against getting a parliamentary seat and came home and said that's it I'm not going to try. Interesting enough when I was put on the parliamentary Labour Party panel two people were put on there with me at the same time and I like telling this story its a long time after the war and there were two people who were put onto the Parliamentary Panel at the same time as I was on the same night in the same room was Tony Banks and Betty Boothroyd and you know what happened to Tony Banks and Betty Boothroyd became Speaker. Now also interestingly a great friend of mine was the MP a character called Maurice ?? who was the MP for Betty Boothroyd's seat as it is now, and when he gave it up he asked me if I was interested as he knew I was interested in politics and I said no I didn't want to but he had some very good friends there and I think I could have got nominated I think I could have taken it if I'd wanted it. But Betty took it and went on to become Speaker of House. So it wouldn't have happened I know but it was one of those days that you say if I'd had taken it maybe I would have been ended up as speaker or like Tony Banks.

M: Was there any reason why you didn't pursue this feat.

D: Yes because it was out of London and I had seen what had happened to a number of friends who became divorced.

M: You were married at the time.

D: Oh yes, yes. and I decided I didn't want it I wasn't thinking of me and that's where I stayed Local Politics schools end of story OK.

M; That's lovely Thank you.

GRDONNSW