

Trans 15

GROUP INTERVIEW AT THE LADIES' CIRCLE, CHRISTCHURCH
12.5.94 GREENWICH
Interviewer: Rib Davis

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Group members:

Mrs Eastick, nee Lee
Mrs Wilson, nee Dierce
Mrs Burke, nee Jonson
Mrs Winzar, nee Wheeler
Mrs Sarah Williams, nee Hirst
Mrs West, nee Mason
Mrs Peggy King, nee Canon

R: Would anyone like to kick off and say what they were doing at the end of the Second World War.

?: I was nursing in St Elfridges (?) Hospital and I had to give it up because I knew my husband was coming home from the navy and the time wouldn't do. At that time they made you go to work. You had to go if you had no family. I went to a school and I worked at school upstairs as a teacher for all the new ones coming in after the war. I was very happy down there. The Dreadnaught School, which is now closed. It was a very good school.

R: Where were you living?

?: I was living in Woodlands Walk at the time. The street was pulled down. It was a lovely street. All during the war we helped one another. Everybody knew everybody else and it was very neighbourly. Which you don't get today I'm afraid.

R: Can you give any examples of that?

?: If anyone was sick, a neighbour, anyone in the street would go in and help, do shopping or washing or anything for anybody. If they were poor and they hadn't got a lot - there was a very poor family up there - we used to make soup and things and give puddings and drinks to the children.

R: Was there a lot of war damage?

?: Yes, there was a lot of war damage. That's why they pulled the houses down. My house was badly damaged. There was a bomb dropped in Myer Street. It blew the backs all out of the houses. I lost my father over that. That was in 1944. He was in the house at the time and he got badly injured and he died of his injuries. They took him down to a hospital in Slough and he died down there. He went in here first, Greenwich and they transferred him down. It used to be a mental hospital and they turned it into an out of London hospital for the wounded down there.

R: What exactly were you doing in St Elfrages?

?: Nursing in there.

R: General nursing?

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?: Yes. I did mostly midwifery and childrens nursing.

R: Did you have children of your own?

?: No. Unfortunately I lost them as babies. I couldn't rear them. It was because my husband's blood and mine didn't ... They'd do something about it now but they didn't then.

R: Can you explain exactly why you had to leave nursing?

?: I left myself because I knew the hours wouldn't suit my husband when he came home from the war - all those different shift hours, and you did longer hours then than you do now.

R: Would you have rather stayed in nursing otherwise?

?: Yes, I would have done. If I'd have been single I would have done. And I had no husband and that at home and a home to see to, I would have done.

R: Did you mind leaving it?

?: Not in a way because I really wanted a home life, to be with my husband more.

R: Had he been away a lot in the war?

?: He was away the whole 5 years of the war.

R: So what was it like meeting him again?

?: He'd been home on leave in between but not often cos he was on Russian convoys for one part and then he was in the African landings. It was very interesting. I've lost my husband now. He died 13 years ago.

R: Had you got used to living by yourself during that time?

?: Now I have, though the older I get, the more I miss him.

R: But back in the war, didn't you get used to living by yourself then as well?

?: Well, yes, but it was very hard. I had my father with me of course for a little while. He died in 1944 through the bombing, from his injuries, but I had him with me till then, right through.

R: Did it seem strange having your husband back again in a way?

?: I suppose it was really, after being away so long. Then I was by myself living in a house that was half bombed down. It was just patched up and that's why they pulled them down after the war, about 1946.

R: You said you had to work? Did you have to work even when your husband arrived back?

?: The governemtn made you work. You had to go to work if you were single and you had no children to look after.

R: But you weren't single, you were married.

?: Yes but you had to work if you were married or single. Yes. The single ones mostly went into munitions or on the land or in the army.

R: At the end of the war did you still have to work? When the war finished?

?: Yes. It carried on I think for another 2 to 3 years after the war, that they made you go to work.

R: Does anyone else have memories of people coming back at the end of the war - a husband or maybe children?

?: I remember them coming back to the school, all the children.

?: 1945 I was evacuated to Bedfordshire. I had one little boy. We came back and the nearest school was the Dreadnaught School near the tunnel. All the children had been evacuated and they were all gradually coming back and they needed help in the kitchen to get all the meals for the children. That had come in then, you see. It wasn't exactly basic, it was just sort of brought together. The chief person, she worked voluntary, she was one of the Alders of Catford. We all mucked in and got this job cos my boys started school down there. It was like a little village down there. There was little shops, post office, all down by the tunnel. Course it's all gone now. I'd never worked in a kitchen before but we really enjoyed ourselves and had good times. That's where I met Mrs Wilson. And we came back. Mostly because they said - we had our own house - if we didn't come back they were going to put a family in my house. Although it was mine, as it was empty and they were looking for homes for people, they were going to put a family in the house. But after that things went on pretty normal - They started rebuilding. I just kept into the kitchen. And then we had these boys that were mentally subnormal. And we had the little children. Divided of course. But it was really like a little village down there where people lived. It's all gone now of course. Everybody worked at the gas works. There used to be throngs of people going down to the gas. And quite a lot of factories down there - There was Redpath Browns and the Delta.

R: Can you explain what they were?

?: One was engineering - Redpath Browns was quite a big engineering firm. They used to come into the school for so long and you used to do dinners for them. They used to come in, all these other people from the factories because there was no other place for them to get meals. Might have been a little restaurant down there. The trams used to run down there, just as far as the tunnel and then they'd turn back. Nowadays you see nobody. It's all gone. The gasworks has gone, which was quite a huge concern - used to be thousands worked there I should think. There was ropeworks, opposite where I lived there was a cableworks. The back of me was empty until they built this new motorway.

R: What did you do in the war itself?

?: I was evacuated and I worked printing bank notes.

R: Why were you evacuated?

?: Cos I had a little boy.

R: So you were evacuated with your child? Was that unusual for the parents to go with the child?

?: You could do if you wanted to. It was rather dicey round here at that time. My husband was in a reserved occupation. He was sent away. When the fly-bombs started I went.

R: So initially your son or daughter had gone by himself and then you went and joined him?

?: No. I went with him.

R: And when was that?

?: 1943 or 44.

R: And you came back when?

?: A week after the peace was declared. I came back. I couldn't get back quick enough.

R: What were your feelings on coming back here?

?: It was lovely to be able to take the blackout down. We'd had bombs opposite us and had damage. Had the roof off and all sorts of things. It was just a nice feeling. Although I'm not a Greenwich person. I lived in Eastbourne and bred in the East End of London. Bu it was different round here then. Things are not the same as what they were.

R: In what ways?

?: Lots of ways. They were a nice community where we lived and where we worked we all knew one another. All the children grew up together, perhaps passed exams and went to grammar schools and that sort off thing. The children were all different then.

R: What was the street that you lived in after the war?

?: I still live in the same road - Tunnel Avenue. We used to have trams past the door and it was quite easy. The children would go to a cheap cinema up the top on Saturday mornings. I dunno if it was tuppence or whatever it was. Tuppeny cinema. They used to love it. And there was a church down there that used to run little things for the children. That's all gone. We have no sense of community now at all. Help one another. If anyone was ill you'd go in and see them.

But now you don't know your next door neighbour.

R: The first speaker was Mrs Wilson and the second was Mrs Burke.

R: Could you just tell me what you were saying just now about how it has all changed?

?: You could leave your front door open, go to your next door neighbour. Very friendly. If they wanted something and you were going up the road, you'd get it for them. Now you don't know your next door neighbour.

?: We used to play out in the streets.

?: Yeah. My two boys used to make the road a skating rink, and there used to be grown ups as well.

R: Which road is that?

?: Banning Street. There was 2 fellas that was in the Air Force, they used to skate with the boys, make figure eights and all that. They used to be out to a fine time, perhaps to about eleven o'clock at night. Now you wouldn't see anybody next door, let alone eleven o'clock at night.

R: Can you describe to me the people in Banning Street?

?: Next door to me there was a lady and her husband, Mr and Mrs Day. He used to do a bit of betting and hire out bikes - He had a side door beside his house and he used to have bikes, he'd let them out for half an hour so kids got the chance of having a bike.

R: Was that his main job?

?: No. He worked on the council. It was just a little by-line. Next door, didn't have much to do with those really. They were an elderly couple and none of us saw a lot of them. The one on the end, Mr Woolard and his wife - He used to have a garden, corner house, garden right the way round. Summer time you'd see his beans grow right up to his roof, where he's took them up there with a bit of string and a bit of wire. He used to sit out there in the summer with his panama hat on and his chair, talking to everyone that went by.

R: Is this in the front garden?

?: Yes.

R: Were the beans in the front garden?

?: No the beans were at the side cos we'd got no front gardens. The doors open out onto the street. The end house had got the garden at the side. Then a friend of mine used to live opposite me. She had 2 boys. Thursday and Friday we used to take the 2 children in the prams, push them all the way to Deptford to the offal shop to get some kidney and brawn or whatever was going and push them all the way back. You wouldn't think of walking all that distance now would you? Anywhere there was anything going we used to be. "So and so's got something coming in" We used to go up the road and they'd say "Some oranges come in up the road". Leave everything and up the road for the oranges!

R: This is after the war is it?

?: Then there was lots of people that wanted sugar and couldn't get it. My two boys would only have a little bit of sugar, they wouldn't take milk in their tea. I didn't take sugar. My husband didn't take sugar although he was in the service. So I used to swap my sugar for margarine or whatever was going in the way of fats for the children. That's how it carried on. When it came, two or three years after the war, you didn't want sugar. Thing is, once the boys got married, the sugar went with them. We got on well.

Then we had a big street party after the war. When the war finished. There was street parties all over the place.

R: Can you describe the street parties?

Mrs West: Our street party was very good, The lady opposite where we lived, Mrs Hemmings, she had 2 men bring the piano out into the street.

R: Where did the piano come from?

Mrs West: Out from Mrs Hemmings. They got it through the window - took the window out and got it through the window. At the time there was a building over on the corner. The shelters, they'd took down and they were rebuilding there. We borrowed a tea urn from them and made that full up with beer. We had it with tea first of all and a lot of people made jellies. Some gave tins of ham and stuff that they'd stored up. We had a really good time. And then of a night time, after all the children were gone - put to bed, they all had a little present each - it was all the grown ups. We had the big urn. We took the jugs up the pub and we put all the beer in the urn and put it on the table outside. Ran an electric light off of my light in my front room and then we had dancing and all that. It was really good. We had people, Mr Camell playing the piano, from Bradall Street. And a knees up and everything. Everybody said after thaey'd never enjoyed themselves so much. The woman up the sweet shop opposite where Woolworths used to be, up the main road. I took some sweet coupons what I'd collected - lot of people gave me sweet coupons - and I took them up to her and she made them all up in little bags of sweets for me for the children.

?: Was that Daphne's?

Mrs West: Daphne's. Yeah. Anyway, when my husband came home from the service, when this was going to happen on the weekend, all the boys where he was in barracks, they'd all collect together with bars of chocolate for the kids. We had a good time there. We had racing during the afternoon for the children. One and sixpence I thik was the first one and sixpence for the third one.

R: What sort of presents did you give - You said all the kids got presents?

Mrs West: What we could buy for the money - little things like drawing books and packets of pencils.

?: We had Woolworths then, didn't we?

Mrs West: Packets of pencils and all that. Somebody I know went up to the warehouse and got them for me. A little handkerchief for the girls. Anything we could do so that they all had one. I always got that in my mind - You'll never get that again. And all the children were pleased as punch about it.

R: This is Mrs West, isn't it? What were you actually doing in the war?

Mrs W: I was in the naval depot in Wales, storekeeper.

R: Why were you there?

MrsW: I was evacuated. My uncle lived there. They still live there, my cousins. Course anyone that could work had to work. We used to have an army lorry come and pick us up, five o'clock in the morning, take us all the way to Tracoon. That was about 15 miles from Fishguard. Then they'd bring us home of a night -we'd finish about half past four - back to

Goodick. From Goodick we had a 5 mile walk. No buses or anything from Goodick to where we was staying with my uncle. One morning I got up to walk to Goodick and it was foggy. You know what fields are when they're foggy. I gets over the fence to walk up the lane, a short cut. Did I? I must have walked all round that field. Couldn't find my way out! Instead of getting to work, to the whatsname (pick up point) at 5 o'clock, I arrived there about half past six. The lorry had gone and I was stranded. anyway, one of the bosses come along in his car and he recognised me and I told him what had happened. "Jump in" he says. "I'll take you". So that was it, cos I was in charge of a lot of them, see, so it was essential that I was there. But I've never seen so many lazy people in all my lives. They'd got out of their farms, or smallholdings, to dodge the war and undercut everybody else. I do know it's true cos I worked amongst them. But there again, you couldn't say nothing. It was up to the bosses to sort them out.

R: How do you mean, they got out of their farms?

Mrs W: They have smallholdings. They volunteered to come in the depot, leave their farms to the wives and they undercut the prices. There was a lot of them there. The girls there worked very well. One day I had to get smoke floats. I had to get a whole magazine - what they call a magazine, it was like under the mountains - we had to get these out because the boys wanted them abroad. So the girls were breaking them down and the men were loading them up in the small railway trucks. We were supposed to get them out by five o'clock. We hadn't got a third of the way by dinner time. When the boss come in, Mr Mortimore, I told him about it. He said "Do what you think best". So after they had their lunch I swapped them round and made the men break 'em down and the girls loading up. We got them through - just two minutes to five, the last one.

R: At the end of the war, did you come straight back here?

Mrs W: No, I stopped for a while down in Wales and then I came back.

R: And you had children with you at the time?

MrsW: One boy at the time. I didn't have the other one till I came back. That one was born in 39. I'll tell you the reason for that. I was evacuated to have him, to Brighton. I didn't have a very nice place to stop in any case. There was four of us in this place. We all went down onto Brighton beach. We were sitting there when the air raid warning went for the starting of the war. One of the girls with us, she said "Ooh, I'm going to have my baby". I said "Hold on". I got up and walked as quick as I could to the hotel. There was a big car outside this hotel so I asked the chauffeur if he could run her up to the hospital. "Oh," he said "but this is a doctor's car. He's on call. Anyway, the doctor came out at the time and I told him what had happened. He said to the manageress "Will you get me some blankets?" So he bundled her all up in the blankets in his car and run her up the hospital. I thought to my self "That's a good start off for the war, on Brighton beach!"

R: When you came back here, where did you go to?

MrsW: I stopped with my sister in law for a time, cos my house was badly bombed. Then I went to the town hall for rehousing - I got a slip from Mr Archer that was at the town hall at the time - and all they could offer me was two rooms right up the top of Church Lane for my husband, me and the baby, and the little boy. So I refused to have it. I searched around and my sister in law heard of someone that was going to move, in Banning (?) Street. I've been there all that time. Ooh, it was in a state. Anyway, I went round to the agent in Christchurch

Way and I told him - Mr Bell - told him what had happened and that. He said "Where's your husband?" I said "In the service". I showed him this slip I got from Mr Archer. He said "I haven't heard any notice of these people going, but if it's right what you say, you've got a first chance of having it." He took my name and address. He said "Where's your husband?" I said "In the service". He said "Well, you'll certainly have it". So of course I got it. But oh my god, when I got it - You wouldn't credit it, the state it was in. It was an old kitchen - and I think from there to there right the way down with cinders. Hadn't been touched for weeks.

R: When you say from there to there - do you mean two foot wide?

MrsW: Right the way down like that.

?: Out on the hearth.

MrsW: This is say the stove, and there's the ashes, right the way down. Anyway, the landlord took that stove away and my mum and I had it all up. In my kitchen I had a big hole...

R: That's about a square yard?

MrsW: Yeah. In the wall. Do you know what that was for? The people that was there had that hole cos they had 9 children. They had that hole to let the heat from the kitchen into the front room where the bedroom was. The landlord had to block it up. All the time I had it, right until they modernised my house, it was down like that with a bump on it. We always called it "the pregnant wall" !

R: Was that because they plastered it badly?

Mrs W: Yes. They couldn't do anything else, the way they'd knocked the wall about.

R: Why was the house in quite such a state?

Mrs W: It was the people that had it. Hadn't looked after it. They just let it go.

R: This was a council house, was it?

Mrs W: No. It was a Mordon College house. The man that come to do it up, he said "If I had these people, I'd prosecute for the way they've done this house". It was shocking. You ought to have seen it. And they'd done it with paper cos you couldn't get no paper during the war. You know the paper you have all round the ceiling ..(?) - You had a narrow border round the top to finish it off. In my front room I had mauve and black. It was in sheets, where they have it in sheets and cut it up - They'd put it in sheets on the wall down that way. In the kitchen I had grey and yellow. Upstairs it was distempered in dirty green, brown paint. Eugh! We couldn't do much about it cos you couldn't get paper off paint in that time. But soon as it was possible we had it all done. I'll never forget that - when I walked in and see the paper. I always remember when they done that it was snowing hard during that time. What with the snow, and in one room while they was doing the kitchen, it was shocking what with the paper and all.

R: That was that very hard winter, wasn't it?

Mrs W: Yeah.

?: 1944, I think.

R: Shall we pause now.

END OF AUDIOTAPE, SIDE A

SIDE B

R: Could you tell me how old you were at the end of the war?

?: 26.

R: And what had you been doing during the war?

?: I was a Red Cross nurse during the war.

R: Was that locally, here?

?: No. All around. At Royal Herbert Hospital. ..(?) Freemans Hospital and Charing Cross Hospital.

R: Had you been trained for that anyway or did you go in because it was the war?

?: I went in because it was the war. I was a Red Cross girl before the war started, a cadet. When the war started I became a Red Cross nurse.

R: And at the end of the war?

?: At the end of the war, I came home. Back home to stay. And I had a nervous breakdown owing to - I got bombed, blown from Wellington Barracks, in London. I had to go into a nerve hospital. When I came out the doctor told me I was to take care of the house and let my mother go to work and have a responsibility to get the nervousness out of my system. So I looked after my mother's house - the shopping, the cleaning, the washing. Then I got better and I started working at Noble's selling toys - a big shop along Greenwich Road.

R: This is after the war?

?: Yes.

R: If you don't mind talking about it, can you tell me about the bombing itself? What happened?

?: I'd come out of Charing Cross Hospital at about 11 o'clock. I was with an American nurse. We went along to Wellington Barracks because Princess Elizabeth was coming with a load of ATS girls, as a child, she was coming that day to church. Lord Egmont was going to take the sermon. We went along to the gate and waited there. While we waited there a doodle-bug came over and stopped over the head and came down, right on the chapel where Princess Elizabeth was supposed to have come. But she didn't come that day. That was fortunate. And it went right on the pulpit of Lord Egmont.

R: Did you haer the doodle-bug coming? Were you aware of it?

?: Yes. We just lay on the floor outside with the guard. It stopped and we flung ourselves on the floor and it dropped right on the chapel. We dug for three hours there. Arms, legs and everything else of servicemen and servicewomen.

R: Were you injured as well?

?: No. It shook me. The shock. I had involuntary movements all the time. I was shaking all the time. I've still got a tick in the head - I've had that 50 years now, since the war.

R: And a lot of people you got out were already killed?

?: Definitely. They were all killed. There were about 300 in the chapel and I suppose about 100-odd got killed. Grenadier Guards from the barracks, ordinary soldiers, ATS girls.

R: How did you deal with that memory?

?: It wore off after the war. I had the children. I met a soldier and I married him and I had two children and life just went on. But I did have a while in an emergency hospital which was made into a military hospital. Often at night you would hear boys - young airmen and soldiers in the wards - rat-a-tat-a-tatting- thinking what they were doing through the war come back in their minds in their sleep, dreaming about what was going on. They put me to sleep for 3 months with powderhyde (?) - it's a drug. They put me to sleep. They used to wake me up in the morning, give me breakfast, and then put me to sleep, sedated me through the day. Then I had a brain scan - what was it - GCE? (NB: ENG perhaps? - Vanda) I used to have GCE's twice a week. I gradually got better and better and then I was allowed out on my own.

R: Where did you go when you came out?

?: I come home to my parents - I had a happy family life.

R: Where was that?

?: West Street, where I'm living now. Seventy years, I've lived there. They told me to take my mother's position. Mum went to work at Johnston and Phillips with my sister and I took the house over.

R: How did you meet this soldier?

?: Through a dance in our local hall, Christchurch Hall.

R: were those the most popular ways of spending your time?

?: Yes. We used to have 1/6d dances at the Greenwich Baths every night. And on Saturday nights we used to have dances at the Christchurch Hall, didn't we?

?: Three Cups Hall. Upa side street.

?: And down the Broadway, the Palais. These were the locals.

?: You got sixpenny hops.

?: What was it called on the Broadway? Lady Florence Institute.

R: Can you describe what it was like in there?

?: Soldiers and sailors and young girls and youngsters.

R: What were the dances you did? And the music?

?: Jitterbug.

?: It was more ballroom dancing. It wasn't so much jitterbug dancing.

R: What is jitterbugging?

?: There's a partner making your feet work. It's more what you see now on Come Dancing - Swinging each other under your legs and over...

(muffled, all talk together)

?: I always remember that one cos you got a book, and the book I got was a story book called The Red Reuben.

?: I went to the first opening of the Granada.

R: When was that?

?: Before I was married.

?: It opened in 1936.

?: Oh well, that's when I went.

?: No. Not until after the war. There was houses there because there used to be a doctor's there.

?: Yes. A doctors and a night club.

?: The film it opened with was "Elephant Boy".

?: That's right. Sabu came to the opening.

?: I was there at the opening.

?: We got complimentary tickets to go.

?: We got tickets for upstairs.

R: Is this the place just up the road?

?: Yes. And the Trafalgar opened when I was at school. We had a writing competition. Eileen Miller won the competition and she opened the Trafalgar Cinema. That was the other end. That was our Monkey Walk every night when we were young girls. From the Granada to the

Trafalgar, meeting the young cadet boys from the naval college or meeting the air force boys coming from Banborough Castle.

?: I went to the opening of the Odeon at Deptford. Before I got married.

?: I was at the opening of that.

?: It was after Gracie Fields, Petula Clark came.

R: If you met a boy you liked, what was the procedure? Where would you go?

?: At that time you'd go to the Empire or the cinema.

?: New Cross Empire. Edgar Wallace's films.

?: I know when I was courting (?) we used to go in the boxes. We went to the Empire. Box of chocolates every night.

?: Opposite the Empire there was another theatre. The Broadway theatre. It used to have lovely pantomines.

?: And the one that used to be the Commissionaire at the Trafalgar - he was the Commissionaire at the Broadway and all.

R: Courting in the years after the war - you were in your twenties? - did it mean that you never had the man back to your room?

All: Oooh, No!

?: It was a long while before you took him home to mum.

?: I had to be indoors by 10 o'clock.

R: Even in your twenties?

?: I was engaged. My husband to be was at my door at half past ten. My father used to shout out "Penny, come on! Bed!". That was half past ten and I was engaged to be married!

?: No, you weren't allowed...

?: If you wanted to go to a dance, you had to lie.

?: "You've got to work tomorrow, my girl"

?: If I was late, my mother grounded me - I wasn't allowed out for a week.

R: Is that a word you'd use - would you say "grounded me" in those days?

?: Yes. Made you stop at home. You wouldn't argue.

?: I was late- I'd visited a friend in Croydon. I was well in my twenties. Coming home, my father was sitting on the stairs with a candle waiting for me.

?: I went to a dance and we come back late, Donda and I. You wasn't allowed the key in them days. I thought "Now how am I going to get in?" cos it was about half past eleven and I knew my mum and dad was in bed. I thought "I'll get through the window in the front room". Well, inside the front room window there was a shelf all the way along and a big aspidistra on it. I got the window open with my nail file, gets in the window and, course I knocks the plant over, don't I? I thought to myself "Oooh!" I was praying there that they wouldn't hear it. I crept outside and I got the cat. I shoved the cat in the front room and I went to bed. Course, the next morning, my mum's calling the cat everyting cos of the plant being knocked over. It was me. Poor cat!

?: We never argued, did we?

?: Never argued with our parents.

?: I was fifty and I had two children growing up - I said something to my mother. She said "Who do you think you're talking to? I'm your mother. I'll slap your face for you". And I was fifty! That's my mother!

?: You were never allowed to answer back to your mother. Even to the day she died she was Victorian. No crying or nothing.

R: what would be the sort of thing you'd say to her, that she'd get that upset?

?: I cheeked her. I dunno what it was. Answered her back.

?: I went to visit a cousin of mine at Kidbrooke or just further out. I went by train. And when I went to get the train to come home, it was cancelled. I had to sit on the platform and wait for an hour. So I was consequently an hour later than I should have been. My father was waiting at the bus stop for me. Mum had probably sent him up. All he said to me was "I'll speak to you in the morning". And we went the full length of Christchurch Way, cos we lived in the last house without another word. But I made sure that dad had gone to work before I got up the next morning. But I think I had my punishment in wondering what he was going to say to me. I'd made up my mind to leave home - I was getting on for 30 then. I wasn't married till I was 32.

?: Parents today are too lax.

?: Out in Singapore they got all these lashes for doing something. An American. Four lashes. Everybody's making a fuss about it.

?: Done him good.

R: Did your parents or your dad ever hit you? Or your brothers?

All: No...A tap on the legs... We were smacked... I had a hiding...And there was always a cane in the room hanging over a picture.

?: ...There were 9 children, and she always had a cane. Not me cos I was an only one. I always remember my husband used to say - When the cane wore out or broke, she'd say "Go and get me a cane". When you brought it back, they'd say "You brought it, you be the first

one to taste it". Well, I mean, nine children was a lot, wasn't it? Just a little taste to see what it was going to be like!

All: You got caned at school as well...I got caned at school...I didn't...I got caned for getting a sum wrong.

?: didscipline at school was very (strict). It didn't do any of us any harm though. Didn't hurt us.

I think having Victorian grandparents, my son and daughter's grown up quite all right.

?: I remember....(?) going home once and telling mother she'd got the cane and they said "Well, if you've got the cane, you've done something wrong". And mum said "And I'll give you another one".

?: I worked in a school. One of the teachers said to me. "Did you notice any dust on your boy's trousers? He got the slipper this afternoon." So I said "He must have deserved it". She said "I wish every parent looked at it like that". She said "Now they come up here and fight everybody". If the children see that, they've got no respect.

?: That all started after the war - there was no discipline.

?: After the war the mothers that had had their children evacuated went to work. They had their own money. Their husbands had their forces money and they had their own money. Then when they come back they didn't want to give that money up. They still went to work and the little children - I know this cos I was in the classroom - used to come with a string round their neck with their keys on it.

?: They used to call them the "latchkey kids", didn't they?

?: They went home from school and had to let themselves in until their mother left work at 5 o'clock.

?: When we all went home, what was our first words?

All: "Mum! Are you in?"

?: Mum was always there for you.

?: What they did then, they were in the streets playing and got up to all sorts of things. I'm sure that was the start of all this problems today.

?: There was a good many children by us, used to come out with their tea in their hands. A big lump of bread and jam. One day our boys come in - I think it was our Peter - "Robert's got a slice of bread and jam. Can I have one?" I said "No, you want your tea, you sit down and eat it. You're not taking it out in the street".

?: Yes. We used to sit down at our tea with our mum and dad and have the wireless on and listen to Uncle Mac. And say grace, and say "Please may I leave the table?"

R: Clearly some children then didn't have that. Some children were just given some bread and jam and said "Push off" ...?

?: Oh yes. Look after yourself. Some of them.

?: That was the mothers who were out to work.

?: That all started after the war. They were at home during the war. Specially in the school I was in, the Dreadnaught. But after the war, the children come home from ..(?). They opened up the school. The children came there and some of them only five years old and under, four and a half. When they started school the mothers didn't want to give their work up cos they had their own bit of money.

R: Are there any people here that that applies to? Working in the war and wanted to carry on working afterwards?

?: I worked part time in the same school where my boy was going, so I was home before he come home from school.

?: Our Bill went to school when he was two and a half. I used to take him up to school and I'd be waiting for him. He'd be straight in, on the bed and he'd be asleep in a couple of hours.

?: They were glad of their work during the war, they were glad of the women during the war cos the men had gone to war.

R: Did the women resent having to go back into their homes sometimes?

All: Some of them did...A lot of them did...Depends on who they were.

?: They'd been free for five years, more or less, nobody there, their children away, they were getting their own money.

?: That was when they opened nurseries. Didn't have nurseries in the war.

?: Yes they did have a nursery in the war - Connolly Street. Cos I remember taking the children to the plays. I did a little stint down there, about a month. Sister Penn. I remember walking with the children when they took the bomb at Catford. It was 7 till 3 and then 11 till 7.

R: At the end of the war when the Labour government was elected, it seems that there was a lot of optimism, a feeling of people wanting to work together. Is that false?

?: Not really. People wanted to get onto a job, they'd go, apply for it and that was it. If they got it.

?: Before the war we were all in the same boat - we all had nothing. You never got the burglaries because your next door neighbour had nothing, you had nothing, there was nothing for a burglar to get. Nowadays it's a different thing. If someone is out of work or wants money for drugs, he knows where to go and get it.

R: That feeling of idealism that there seems to have been at the end of the war - that people worked together through the war in a way that they'd never worked before. Was there that feeling after the war?

All: No. It went....It went after a while.

?: All the women got washing machines and televisions.

?: When they started having Family Allowance and all that...

?: We never had Family Allowance, did we? I had eight shillings a week...

?:...We got no money.

R: Are you saying you preferred that?

?: It gave you a sense of trying to get on. Now - lets be truthful - you're looked after whether you've got nothing - you're looked after better than if you'd been a saver. If you've been a saver all your life, you're a fool.

?: You're penalised for it.

?: Whereas if you've never bothered the state - the people of today think the state should look after them from birth until death. They don't worry. It all comes in, doesn't it?

R: Are you saying that because people got better off after the war, and had more things, that that stopped them working together?

All: Yes... They got jealous of one another...There was competition, wasn't there?...It's like "Keeping up with the Jones's"...Everybody wanted a bit more....Cars...

?: When I got married my husband earned £2.10/- a week.

?: Daddy earned £2.10/-. My mum brought us two up on it.

?: We managed to buy a house, mind you, the houses weren't dear then. But we scrimped and scraped, to get yourself a bit better than you had been.

R: Was this before the war?

?: Yes. Just before. 1934 I got married...(?). It was cheap enough to buy a house. Mind you, you had to buy a house on the husband's money. A woman, although she went to work, wasn't counted like it is today. Not like today. The house goes today if one can't pay towards it. We had nothing, no children's allowances. An old age pensioner only had ten shillings a week.

?: I got ten shillings widow allowance when my husband died.

?: There was no social services.

?: You were young enough to work.

?: You even had to pay for the doctor.

?: Yes. Three and six a visit.

?: You didn't go to the doctor cos you couldn't afford it. That's why you was ill.

R: Do you think now that there were disadvantages to the Welfare State?

?: Yes.

R: At the time, were you in favour of it?

?: When it first started it wasn't so bad, and then people took advantage of it.

?: It was a good thing when it first started.

R: Why was it a good thing?

?: Because we'd never had anything, doctors and all that. When that came in you had a doctor free. They gave you money for the second child but it was the first child you wanted money for. They never thought of that in Parliament.

?: If you only had one child you never got anything.

?: I got 8 shillings for Marie. I got 3/6d for...

?: Now they get maternity benefit. We got nothing. Nothing!

R: So you were pleased with that at the time.

All: Yes..You could pay for a doctor...You didn't worry...

?: People want too much. They think the state should keep them.

?: They kill everything. They think everything should be free. Someone's got to pay for it, haven't they? Where does the money come from? Only the tax payer. They forget that.

R: After the war there were lots of shortages...

?: Yes. Sugar and soap. Clothes was 'utility'. Sweets was on coupons. Clothes was on coupons.

?: You had coupons to get furniture.

?: I've still got mine.

?: you had coupons for your clothes. Utility clothes.

?: The one good thing about today is that we do get a bus pass, us elderly people. We wouldn't go anywhere. We had to walk, didn't we? We got nothing.

?: Yes. I used to walk to Woolwich, walk to Lewisham. I used to walk to Woolwich with Ally Simond pushing our kids in the pram.

?: I don't think it hurt us either. I think that's why we've lived to this age.

?: We haven't been indulged in any luxuries.

?: I think the children had a very happy life. With their parents - you saw them out together always.

?: Sunday nights after tea, dad and mum and grandma used to get all their clothes on, we'd have our best clothes on and go round the park, round the pier, come back to the Cutty Sark, the little pub, sit there and have a lemonade and then come home. But we'd been out with our grandma and daddy and mum.

?: That wasn't the Cutty Sark pub at that time - it was the Union Wolf (?).

R: Was there a lot more of that, with grandparents?

?: Oh yes. Your grandparents ..(?) on Sundays.

?: You looked after your elderly parents years ago. They wouldn't today.

?: Mor family life.

R: Did they live locally, or where?

All: Yes..yes.

?: Families have dispersed. They all live a long way away. You don't see them.

?: Those that live at hand don't want to know their parents today.

?: Don't want to look after elderly parents. Years ago you were expected to look after your parents.

?: And they were more polite.

?: We thought it was our duty. I had my mother and father live with me.

?: I looked after my father 12 years. And I had to be in at ten still with dad. "Come on Peg. Bed!" I was looking after him and that was only ten years ago.

R: Was it mostly the women who were doing that or the men, looking after the old folks?

?: The women...

?: I think men look after their mothers.

?: One died and the other one looked after them.

?: There was no money for elderly people was there?

All: Oh no.

?: The family was expected to help, look after them.

?: My father had an accident. He was in his late fifties and he couldn't work at all. He got no compensation. My mother had left home previously...

?: If you wanted help you had to sell your furniture.

?: What's the name of that man who used to come down?

All: RO. The Relief Officers.

R: Was this before the war?

?: Yes.

R: And when did that change?

?: During the war.

?: I seen many of them had their furniture put out on the street cos they couldn't pay the rent.

?: These days there are whole estates that don't pay rent.

?: When they put in the paper - "The borough is owed so much rent - thousands" - Now why the hell don't they try and get it back? Instead of letting them still run up debt. The likes of our children, if they wanted a place, they couldn't get it. And yet there's these people sitting in places that they've not paid rent for.

R: So, someone had their belongings put out on the street if they couldn't pay the rent?

?: You accepted it. You used to go in the workhouse then if you couldn't afford to live.

R: Was there any way that you'd help such people?

?: We had nothing to help them with.

?: Nobody had anything.

?: You couldn't help them cos you didn't have enough to help yourself.

?: There was so much unemployment in the late twenties, early thirties...

?: That was the Depression.

?: They came into our house to look and see if there was anything father could sell. They offered him a shilling a week for all us children. He said "No. You can put them in Sidcup Homes. I can't afford to keep them on a shilling a week". Then we all started crying cos we thought we were going to be put in a home.

R: How was it that you weren't?

?: We didn't go in a home. They managed somehow or other to keep us.

?: You used to go along the road and go to the fruit barrels and that.

?: Pick people's specs up.

?: Get apples and bananas that was over ripe and that sort of thing to keep going.

END OF AUDIO TAPE, SIDE B

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