TRANSCR. 6
(with corrections)

INTERVIEW AT CATESBY STREET, SOUTHWARK. FEB 95

Pam: What is your name?

F: Florence Ball.

P: Were you in this area during the war years?

F: Yes. In the flats oposite. Darwin Court. Where you've parked your car is Crowl Row. We lived in the flats. I was born in them.

P: Did you make a decision whether you were going to leave London or stay.

F: I stayed. We weren't even married. Not then.

Joe: 1940 we got married.

F: We had Eileen in 44.

P: Did you stay cos you didn't want to leave your boyfriend?

F: We worked at Crosse & Blackwells in Crimstock (?) Street so we just stayed. Didn't worry. The only time I went away was when I had Eileen, thats my daughter in 1944. I went to St Albans to have her. Then we come back. Afterwards when it got too bad with the flying bombs I went to my brothers at Crowthorne in Berkshire. I stayed there a little while and then brought her home.

P: Was there quite heavy bombing.

F: In 1939 we had nothing. Then 1940 it started. They bombed the docks. We went on that roof. You could see all the docks alight. We stayed in them flats all the war. We got married in 1940 and we lived in 102 till the end of the war. When raids come we just went indoors.

P: At Crosse & Blackwell factory, now Darwin Buildings, Darwin Court, did they carry on functioning all through the raids?

F: They didn't at first. They used to make us go down the shelter. But we lost such a lot of time that afterwards, when the raids wasn't so bad we worked till it got near, then they put us down the shelters. If it was dinnertime we'd run home.

J: The factory had spotters on the roof. When the air raids were announced they'd watch the planes. When they got too near they'd sound the alarm and we all went down to the shelters till the all-clear went.

P: What work were you doing at Crosse & Blackwells?

J: Tinned foods. Baked beans. Soups. Making the tins. All the manufacturing.

F: I used to label the beans and soups.

P: Was that work you'd been doing before the war?

F: Yes. I went there when I was about 14.

J: It got bombed now and again. We had a bomb right at the side of the building, an unexploded bomb. We worked while the bomb squad dismantled it.

Louise: I lived in those flats as well. I was born in there.

P: Have you known each other all your lives?

L: Yes. I married in 1938. I didn't go to work. My mother was a widow. She had to go to work and my grandmother was there, who wasn't a very fit woman so I used to look after my grandmother while my mother went to work. And in between my husband was at home. I had the baby in 1942 and my husband was in the army then but he came home when the baby was 3 months old. Then when he went away he was nearly 5 when he came home. I brought the baby up over here with just my mother and I then. My grandmother had died. We never went out. I used to roll the baby up in the cot, take him straight out rolled up and put him under tha table. We spent every night like that.

P: You didn't bother going down the shelters?

L: No. My mother used to go out, 4 o'clock in the morning, right over to London Bridge where she worked, all through the raids. Every night and every morning she did that right until tha war was over. I looked after the baby. When he was about 6 months old I went to work but I used to do part time in a doctor's house and take the baby with me. He was just coming up to 5 when my husband came home.

P: When the raids were on in the 1940 period, did a lot of your neighbours decide to pack up and go?

J: No.

L: The woman over there, Dolly, she went. But there wasn't many. The people that lived at the top used to come down into our place sometimes.

F: They're six high. The 3 tops used to come down to our flats.

L: They'd bring a bit of tea and sugar with them and we'd make a pot of tea and all sit round and the baby was under the table.

P: Did people stay in each other's flats all night?

All: Oh yes

L: They used to start leaving my flat cos my mum used to go out half past four, five o'clock in the morning so they'd go when she went out to work. She was office cleaning. Then she'd come home and go again at 4 o'clock in the afternoon and get home about nine. When the raids was bad, sometimes, well, one night she didn't get home till about 3 o'clock in the morning. They'd walked all the way home over all the fire and hoses and glass and everything else.

P: At Crosse & Balckewells did you always work a shift?

F: No. Eight till half past six. Eight to one. You had your dinner one till two. Then 2 o'clock till half past six.

P: Did you come home for your dinner?

F & J: Yes.

P: In that period, the landscape must have been heavily bombed?

L: We had all our windows stuck up and blown out.

F: I didn't have a window broke.

L; I did. I lost some round that side.

?: We had that brown stuff they used to put up.

J: ...bombed...(?) the victory one went. One come between the two lots of flats over there.

P: What happened when someone's block of flats was bombed. Did the neighbours take people in?

J: We didn't really know cos we were lucky.

L: My sister in law that got burnt out over Docklands, she had 10 children. They took them to a church hall, and then took them on to another church hall. They had nothing, only the clothes they stood up in. They stuck together a few old houses that was a bit blasted but liveable patched up and they put her in one of those in St James's Road in Bermondsey.

F: We used to have a lady in our flats, she was always knitting. She'd sit with her head against the wall and go to sleep. That's how she slept, till it finished. Then she'd go upstairs. When the all clear went, up she'd go.

P: Was it like Louise said, that they'd bring their own tea?

L: They'd come down and say "It's our turn tonight. They'd bring a bit of sugar and a bit of tea and you had to have a cup of tea, all those hours.

P: What did you do to pass the time?

All: Knit. Put the radio on. Sing to the baby. Listen: "Something's coming..Plonk!" Listen to the bombs coming down.

L: When we had the flying bombs I got so fed up with being up night after night eventually I used to go to bed. I used to put the baby in the cot and light a night light so that I could see the baby and I used to lay on the bed. Sometimes I'd fall asleep, but I was always dressed so that should it be too bad I just had to grab hi out of the cot and - I don't know where I was going to go - but I was always ready to go.

F: When the flying bombs started I went down my brothers.

L: I often used to stand at the window with my Ernie in my arms waiting for the bang.

Tom: I was in the Home Guard then. At Pickfords, I worked then at that time. When the flying bombs started they said our Spitfires would shoot them down. But then they came, the flying bombs.

F: When I had my Eileen during the war.

P: That was when you got really scared, when the flying bombs came?

L: That worried me but I couldn't go away cos I couldn't leave my mum on her own.

F; I took my mum with me to my brothers.

J: I stayed here.

P: What about you? Were you here all through?

Gladys: Yes but I was bombed out. It was well into the war. They dropped a bomb one night and it didn't go off. It was a beautiful summer's day. I'd been to the shops and I was just taking the baby up to bed. There was this terrific boom. I lived in flats. My mother was on the ground floor and I was on the next. It was a bomb. When the men came they said to me "You were so lucky. If you'd been as far as the bedroom, the roof is gone". It was a dreadful experience really. I lost 2 cousins in it.

P: The flying bombs were 44, were they?

J; Yes. 44.

G: They dropped a bomb in 45 and they never found it. There was a shop at the end. It was a shop not being used. They didn't know and when it went off they found out that it wa a delayed bomb. I stopped in London all through the war.

P: Were there people coming and saying "We think you should be moving to safety"?

?: One or two people did come. A welfare lady came to me once and said wouldn't I consider going away cos I'd got a baby. But I said, "No, my mum and I would stay together and if we went then we'd go together" and that was it and I stayed.

G: I'd booked to have my baby at home with the local midwife and they came and said "I'm very sorry but you'll have to be evacuated". Three weeks before he was due I had to be at a station, I didn't know where I was going. My husband saw me off and I arrived up in Leicester. They took you in a hall and people came in and said "I'll take her". It was dreadful really.That was 1941. I had the baby but I didn't stay. I just stayed the 10 days and came back to London.

F: I had the baby at St Albans. I was booked in at York Road Hospital and they sent all their mothers to St Albans. I went to St Albans till I had her and then I came back to London.

P: Were you with people you knew in St Albans?

F: No, no.

P: Did you also feel you wanted to come back?

F: I was only there to have the baby. I knew I was coming back. Once I came back, he said "You're not staying here", and my brother took us, took me and my mum with the baby.

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P: What is your name?

L: Lydia Dawkins. Of Catesby Street. Here are my photos of the First World War. On 19 and one 21. One was killed in Ypres. The other was an airman, killed in France somewhere. I was 4 years old in the First World War. My mother had 13 of us. This will explain...

P (reads): Lydia Dawkins nee Freeman. She was one of 13 children. Her parents were Frederick Freeman and Lydia Sarah Freeman. Lived at 82 Coburg Road. THat's very near here, isn't it? Her father was a money-lender based at Coburg Road. Her 3 brother and 10 sisters were Mary, Alice, Fred, Phil, Ted, Joyce, Annie, Ada, Ida, Carrie, Mullid (?), Lydia and Fursa (?). Fred and Ted attended Trinity College Mission in Albany Road. They joined the army during the 1914-18 war and were killed in action in 1916. This postcard arrived in England 2 days after Fred was killed and Lydia was the last but one of the 13 children and cannot remember Fred and Ted."

P: Were your family Jewish?

L: No.

P: I'm Jewish myself. I wondered because a lot of moneylenders were Jewish, because it was the only thing they were allowed to do. The name Freeman is Jewish.

L: Not that I know of. I can't remember my mother. They both died of cancer.

P: Is this you outside your house in Coburg Street?

L: Yes.

P: Who arranged these photos for you?

L: I went to a club and they had an exhibition. When I used to go down the Manor Place Club.

...general talk...

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P: Ladies, thankyou for coming. Last time we were talking about the home front in the war years. You were the lady who worked at Crosse & Blackwells and you had children. I wanted to know how you coped with food and clothes, with the rations, the limited supplies...

F: You used to share. If you had a friend. Say they didn't like eggs. You'd give them tea and they'd give you their eggs or vice versa. Or buy them off them.

P: What wouldyou buy them with? With other things?

F: If they wanted tea...I knew a girl worked at a tea factory so we used to get tea allright, see? I used to pay her rent for her! She used to go to work and couldn't pay her rent so I'd ...(?). When she come out, she'd give me the tea. Thats how we worked it.

L; We all used to do thet. May used to do that sometimes, bring me a little bit of tea. My aunt used to send me soap from Canada for the baby...(muffled).. You couldn't get washing powder and stuff and with babies nappies every day! You might get the occasioanl little paper of soap flakes. My aunt used to send me dried fruit and baby soap, baby powder and things like that. So if somebody didn't have any soap, or May sometimes, She'd say "I'll give you a bit of tea" and I'd say "I'll give you a bit of tablet soap". It was lovely soap she'd send. It was called White Swan soap, with a big swan on it and it used to float on the water. A little bit of dried fruit, baby powder, baby cream and soap was a god-send when you'd got a baby cos you just couldn't get it.

P: Around here there were a lot of factories. I thought there was soap making round here?

L: The only soap-manufacture I knew years back was that one under the arches up by Waterloo by the Cut.

?: Peak Freans had a buscuit factory in Bermondsey.

P: But there wasn't a soap factory.

?: Not as far as I know. We had the Crosse & Blackwells in Bermondsey, Shuttleworths was in Bermondsey, Peak Freans biscuits, Barratt at ....(?) - that was a leather factory, and Peaks, the tin people.

P: What was Shuttlewoods?

?: Chocolates. Sweets.

P: As workers, did you get anything from the factories in the way of food or supplies?

F: No. You had a shop and you could buy stuff in there cheap.

P: Not on ration?

F: Like, a tin of salmon, we'd get for 6d a tin.

P: How much would that have been in the shops?

F: I wouldn't know. You could buy tins of beans, but they were , what we called 'bent'. You got them cheap.

P: They couldn't sell them.

F: They couldn't, but they did afterwards - they used to sell them to Tescos. That's how he started. He used to buy loads of damaged goods and sell them cheap. He used to be in a little shop in the Old Kent Road.

P: What was his name?

F: It wasn't that name then. He took that name from his wife. I think she was Tessa or something, and he was Cohen. The shop was called Blochs then. Thats what we've heard. It could be true. He'd buy a lot of damaged stock. I worked on baked beans. I used to label them. If we got one and it had bent, something wrong with it, we had to put that in a certain place and then they'd go there and they'd either sell them in our shop, what we called 'our shop' , the factory shop, or he'd buy them.

P: Would he retail direct to the public?

F: He used to. He used to sell them up the Old Kent Road. He had a shop.

?: I didn't know where he got the stuff from but I do remember the shop.

?: I bet that wasn't the only factory.

F: He might have had jam from Hartleys.

?: He used to sell it cheap so you could get it.

P: When you got home from the factory at night, who cooked? Was it you cooking for yourself or your mum cooking for you?

F: No, my mum never done a lot.

P: But you didn't have children at that point.

?: No.I didn't have my girl till 44, when the war was nearly over.

P: Who were you cooking for? Just yourself?

F: Me and my mum and Tom.

P: Was your husband working here then?

?: He was working at Crosse's with me. We both worked together.

P: Why was he not called up?

?: I dunno. He wasn't fit enough, I don't think.

P: So you had to make do with whatever you were able to get. There wasn't really a proper lunchtime for shopping was there? When did you do your shopping.

F: Of a night. They used to stay open till about 8 o'clock.

P: Did a lot of the shops stay open late at that time?

F: What they had to sell...but they kept open!

P: They kept open even though they didn't have very much? So could you be sure of leaving work at six or half past six and being able to buy something for supper?

F: Oh yeah. You'd buy it the day before. My mum would do it for me.

P: She was at home? She wasn't working?

F: No

P: What was she doing? Keeping the house?

T: No. She just lived there (laughter) Bloody nuisance at times!

P: Do you have a lot of memories of black-marketeers around these areas?

L: I suppose there was, but even if they had been going, I wouldn't have had the money to have bought it off of them, so I didn't know anybody. But they must have been in every area.

?: Black market was everywhere.

?: If you had the money, you'd get it.

P: Was it more rampant during the war, or after the war?

L: It went on and on till all of a sudden it gradually died out, or you never heard so much about it. I think there wa a lot of it just after the war. People like us who never had much money, we weren't interested in it, for the simple reason that we couldn't have bought anything anyway cos we didn't have the money. My army pay was 22/6d a week. It wasn't much. My rent was only 4/- a week, but still...

(all talk together)

P: At Crosse & Blackwells, did the men and the women earn the same?

F: No. We earned 28/- a week. I think my husband earned 56, I'm not sure. He'll tell you when he comes back.

P: Were all the women who were working there people who had worked there before or did a lot of them come in when the war began to take over men's jobs?

?: Dunno. You just worked there. I went there when I was 14. Everybody worked at Crosse & Blackwells. Well, they ain't got so many now.

P: What were the working hours at that time?

?: We used to do eight to half past six. The men, like my husband, he worked later, get a bit of overtime if he could.

P: Did they have their own shelters?

?: Yes. They had one underneath.

P: And you did do that? Did you stop?

?: Not if I could help it. Once the siren went, I'd run home. Never went down the shelter much.

P: If the siren went and you had to stop working, were you still paid during that period?

T: Yeah. Till they got fed up with it, cos we was going down there and there was nothing happening. So after a little while they said - they had people on the roof to say if it was dangerous - then we went down.

P: So you could hear the siren going but you just carried on.

?: Just carried on, and if a plane got near, we'd go down the shelter.

P: What kind of shelter was it? Was it basic? Were there seats?

F: Oh yes. You'd sit down there and knit, and read. Just a shelter.

P: What kind of chairs did you have there? Wooden chairs or benches or..?

F: I wouldn't know. I only went down there about once. I used to run home. I couldn't stand the shelter.

?: I would have got too frightened, in case you got buried.

P: Working these long hours, did you have any time for a social life? Did you go out and have a good time?

?: Pictures.

?: No. Went up the pictures...(?) Didn't have the money, did we. Not like they are today.

P: Was there a picture house at the Elephant? Where were the picture houses nearby?

?: We had 2 at the Bricklayers Arms: The Globe and the Old Kent (?).

?: Where the flyover is now. There was one on one side of the road and one the other.

?: Then we had one at the Elephant. A little one in Walworth Road.

?: That's right. The Rialto.

P: Would you go once a week or something?

?: Yes. Saturday night or Saturday afternoon. 6d or 9d, penny bar of chocolate.

P: Any other forms of entertainment? Did you go dancing?

?: No we never went dancing.

P: So you were a married woman, but you didn't have children. Your name is Flo?

F: Yes. Flo Ball.

P: And you, Louise Sedgewick, you were a young mother, weren't you?

L: At the beginning of the war I didn't have them cos I was married in 38, so the war came the year after we were married. I used to go to work then. Then my husband got deferred for a year because he was a glazer. Then he got called up. Then I had the baby and then he went abroad and he was nearly five by the time he came home. He was 3 months when he went and nearly 5 when he came home. My mum lived in the flat so we just sort of mucked in together. I did the dinner. My mum went to work mornings and nights. That was it.

P: You went to work not at all?

L: Not for a little while, I didn't. Then when he got a bit bigger I went to work in a doctor's house. It was next door to..(?) my sister in law lived in a big house. They lived in Merrick Square, the one before Trinity Square. She got friendly with the lady that moved in next door. Her husband was a specialist at Moorfields. He was in the forces as a doctor then and she moved in with 2 children and she wanted someone to help her. My sister in law said to me "You go and help". So I did, and took the baby with me. I used o go every morning for a couple of hours and if she wanted me back in the afternoon for an hour, or sometimes if she wanted me in the evening, I'd go and take my baby and if he went to sleep I'd put him on one of her beds and she'd bring me home in the car. It wasn't a lot of money but then again, it was a help to me.

P: I suppose it got you out of the house as well. Did you walk there with the baby in the pram?

L: Yes.

P: Was there any pressure on women with children to go back to work? Did anybody come and say "We think it would be a good idea"...

L: Thing was, you'd got to cope with the air raids, you were up at night, you'd got a baby. I'd got nobody I could have left the baby with because my mum went to work 4 o'clock in the morning all through the raids. She'd get home about 9. She'd line up if there was anything going for food. Time she got home and we'd cooked the lunch and did a bit of washing, whatever she had to do, and I had to do, and we'd have our lunch cos she used to have to go back to work at 4 o'clock and then she'd get home - well, her time was to get home by 9 but if the raids was on, sometimes she'd be over there all night. She wouldn't come back till next morning when she'd done the morning and cleared up again. That's how we coped. My mother's name was Louisa Smith.

P: How old was she during the war years?

L: My mum was 26 when she got married. She was widdowed at 28. That wa just after the war closed, 1919. She'd only been married 2 years. I was 10 weeks old when my father died and my mother wouldn't bother any more - She said she was happy with the couple of years she'd had. My father lived in the flats where we lived over there. That's how my mum met him, because they all lived in the same flats.

P: So she was a widow. Did she work in the years prior to the war?

L: Oh yes. She worked in the tin firm in Bermondsey.

P: So as a little girl she was keeping you.

L: Yes. You see, when my mum was left a widow there was no widow's pension then. They only got what they earned. I remember once when I was ill, I'd had pneumonia. The doctor told

my mother to go to this place - They said "They'll give you some food". They gave her - I can remember my mum coming back with - one pint of milk, and that's all we got given. They came down and told my mum to sell her furniture and make do with that money. This was when I was quite young, when I was about two and she was getting desperate. My mum told me. She went and said "What could she do." She couldn't really go to work. There was nobody to leave me with. That's how she come to do cleaning jobs. She had two sisters that lived near. Sometimes one would have me and sometimes they wouldn't. In the end, as I got older she used to go and I used to - I had a granny then for a couple of years or so - I used to sit with my gran until mu mum came back or I'd go to bed and wait till she came in. That's how we sort of coped. I got used to it because I never knew any other way of life.

P: You were born..?

L: 1919.

P: People do talk about during the war years there was an increase in creches and facilities for young mums...

L: I never found any. There was nothing round here. It was bombed round here a lot, but there wasn't a lot going. For a little while I never went anywhere cos I had the baby when he was young. When he got a bit older I went and done that little job. You had really nothing. You couldn't get any help or anything. We just had to cope best way we could.

?: Your mother was your best pal in those days.

L: Thats right. I used to help my mum. She used to help me. We used to pool the food and cook it so that we had one main meal a day. That was how it all went.

P: And this business of having enough soap. Even that kind of thing was a problem for your nappies?

L: Oh yes. And a problem too was if the gas got cut off. You'd have to cook on the fire. I've known a time when I've gone to the Coal Wharf in Walworth Road with the baby in the pram to get a little bag of coal like that to come back and light the fire with. Then, if the water was turned off. I lived in those flats over there, I was third up. If the water was turned off you had to come down into the street to get a bucket of water from a standpipe. You'd get one for your washing and doing and you kept one so you could boil it for drinking. The only thing I was lucky with in the war - I managed to feed the baby myself. I couldn't feed the second one but I did feed the first one. I don't know whether he got on - He probably was hungry a lot of times. I used to give him a dry crust to suck and things like that.

?: There was a clinic. You could get your milk cheaper.

L: When I had the other one - 47, nearly 48 - I couldn't feed him. I used to go to the clinic in Walworth Road and get Cow and Gate. You used to get it a bit chaeper.

P: Your husband was away a very long time. Your little boy was 5 when he came back. How did that work out?

L: Terrible for the boy when his dad came home. I always had a photo on the sideboard and I used to say to him "That's daddy" and I used to say to him "Say goodnight to daddy" and things like that. Course, when my husband came home, my boy was absolutely petrified of him. He wouldn't stay in the same room with him. If I went to the loo he would come and wait outside the door for me. He used to keep saying to me "Mum, when's that man going". Funnily enough - was it last week or the week before - there was an item about that in the Daily Mail. I was reading about it, the experiences people had when their husbands came home. They all said the same - that their children could not take to their fathers and they never reallly got on well with their fathers.

P: Did that last through later years?

L: Quite a time before...That's why... Me being an only child I wanted to have another child and I didn't want too much gap. I said "If we have another baby straight away, maybe it will make things better." It did. They got on allright after a time. I said we were having another baby and he wanted a brother Peter. So when I had a boy we called him Peter cos he wanted a brother Peter.

P: How did your husband react to this rejection?

L: hE said "Well, it's understandable". He'd been in a house with 3 women all that time. Obviously, a man coming into the house, as much as you tell a child on the photograph, it's not like a whole human being coming into the place.

P: Had you had him in your bed through the war years?

L: No. I never took him, well, only a couple of times I took him to bed when the raids was really bad and I was so tired. Other than that, no. I used to put him in his cot and wrap him all up like a bag and if it got too bad - we had a very heavy dining table, it was my mum's actually - we used to put him under there. Funnily enough, when he got bigger and he was playing he always used to play under the table. If an aeroplane went over he used to say "Plane!" and he used to go straight under the table. I think it was born into him to do that.

P: When your husband did come back, were there problems for you too or was it easy for you?

L: It wasn't easy cos he wasn't a fit man. He'd been missing for 9 months and he'd [been in Africa and Italy] got blown up and I didn't know if i was a widow or not for nearly a year. When he came back he was a bundle of nerves. He wasn't fit, he had malaria, all sorts. We never had actual problems which would have broke up the marriage but it was hard going and he was ill a lot and he was out of work. Anyway it all gelled together in the end.

P: Where was he stationed? [Queen's Loyals]

L: He went to Africa. Italy. He was on Anzio (?). That's where he got blown up, on Anzio, on the beaches, where he was missing. THey was taken in American field hospitals or something, and moving on and moving on. That's how he come to get lost. Finally, I got a big stack of letters like that. I got on to the Red Cross and they got onto the Army and they chased it to the Americans and that's how we found out.

P: I am interested in the idea that you can have a marriage that has only been established for a very short time and then somebody is away for longer than you have been married for. And then all the business of re-establishing those relationships must have been very difficult.

L: I suppose, at the time you didn't think about it. You just sort of muddled on and got on and eventually it all gelled together again.

P: Did he go straight back into work?

L: No. He was out of work for nearly 2 years cos he wasn't fit. He was a glazier and used to do all these stained glass church windows and things. He couldn't go back to that job, not being fit. So when he got a bit fit he went to County Hall and worked there in the Legal & Parliamentary Department. He was there 32 years till he retired.

P: One always hears that in the period after the war you could get a job anywhere?

L: No, no.

?: It wasn't easy getting jobs after the war, was it ,Tom?

T: No, no.

?: Very hard.

T: After the war they was supposed to give the jobs back to the ex-servicemen. The people who didn't go in the army, a lot of them got the sack to let the ex-servicemen in. Which was fair enough.

P: What about someone like Louise's husband who wasn't very fit?

L: He couldn't get a job because they said they didn't want unfit men, who came back unfit. It was nearly two years. They said he'd have to have a light job and that's how he got the office job.

P: What did he live on in the period when he wasn't working?

L: Unemeployment money. Peanuts. Couple of quid. Wasn't any more.

P: So how did you keep the family alive and well during those 2 years?

L: You had to cope. You had to get on with it. It was your life, you were left with it. You had to cope with it. You didn't have any houses. You didn't have any clothes or things like that. As long as we got a dinner every day. That was the main thing. He tried to get a pension when he came out, but he didn't get one.

P: So did they give a generaous gratuity payment to men coming back?

L: No. You just got your pay and that's it.

?: You got nothing.

T: You got a suit.

L: He got a suit and a funny trilby hat and a pair of shoes that always hurt his feet.

P: Do you think he was unlucky or were there a lot of people like that?

L: No he wasn't by himself. There was hundreds and hundreds who came home like that. My brother in law came home the same like that.

?: Even now, they don't get what they should have. Look at all those men who were in Japan. Couldn't care less about them.

?: Look at Lil. Look at my cousin Ted. He was away about 5 years prisoner of war in Japan and he didn't get nothing much when he came back.

?: They're still fighting for it, poor devils.

L: I think we all got a very raw deal. What we went through here, we should have all had a medal. A lot of people used to run away with the idea, they used to say "You in London, you're all doing all right". But those that lived in the country were best off. In London we were the worst off. We got all the bombing and we had to put up with all the inconveniences. We didn't get anything extra.

P: Is this kind of thing what led to the election of the Labour government in 1945. Were people angry about the way they had been treated?

END OF SIDE A

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P: Louise. Did your husband come back after VE Day?

L: I honestly can't remember.

P: What's your name?

G: Gladys Fish.

P: You were a young mum during the war. When did you get married?

G: I got married in 40 and I had the baby in 41. I didn't have to get married. I went the year round. Then I had another one in 44.

P: So at the outbreak of war were you a young working woman?

G: Yes. I worked for Cookson and Comapny by St Pauls Cathedral. They were a shop like Selfridges but they were wholesale. Thats where I met my husband. I was working in the bridal department. Artificial flowers and brides head-dresses and things like that. They'd come in and order in bulk. I stayed on there till I was about 5 months with the baby.

P: That bridal department ground to a halt at the outset of war?

G: No. We were still selling. Just bridal head dresses I worked in.

P: One hears stories of how difficult it was for people getting married in the war years to get a wedding dress.

G: I had a white wedding.

P: Maybe it got more difficult as the war went on?

G: Yes.

P: You had a white wedding in a local church?

G: St Matthews. New Kent Road. Didn't have a hall or anything. We had people come home.

P: Were there a lot of people called up and away? How many of your family were there?

G: I only had one brother. He was in the air force. He joined up before the war. His wife was a WAF. My mother's brothers, couple of them were in the army.

P: Did they manage to get leave for your wedding?

G: Yes.

P: So your husband wasn't called up?

G: He was called up the same day I had my first baby.

P: How did he manage to avoid being called up till then?

G: We thought perhaps they'd mislaid the papers or something. It was 9 months after he'd had his medical. Of course you didn't rush them! I got married the beginning of March and I had my baby in January. I had to evacuate. I was going to have the baby at home. The midwife said they couldn't do it at home cos of the raids. The day after Boxing Day I was to meet up outside Guys Hospital, which we did. We didn't know where we were going. We all got on that bus and I ended up in Leicester. I was there 3 weeks. The baby was premature and I had a telegram to say my husband had got his papers a couiple of days before. Whether it was the shock of that or not, I don't know. He came up to Leicester for the weekend. I saw him back the previous night and then I went into labour in the evening.

P: So he didn't see the baby before he went.

G: No, no.

P: How long was he away for after that?

G: He was in the army right till the end.

P: Did he have the opportunity to come back and see the baby?

G: Yes. He used to get leave now and again. He was up in Yorkshire for a long while. Then he went to France and all over there.

P: What was the longest period when you didn't see him?

G: When he went over to France it was just his annual, regular leave. When he was in Yorkshire he used to get a weekend now and again.

P: So in France he only got annual leave. He was there 2 years?

G: Yes. He must have been there 2 or 3 years.

P: So he didn't see the baby in the first years. What was that like for you?

G: It was very hurtful, when he's not around. Course you're so thrilled when they're coming home. But I had a wonderful mother. We lived in the same house. She had the ground floor and she helped me so much. When the baby was old enough, cos I couldn't manage on army pay, she used to work early morning and I used to do up at Davy Greggs in the lunch place. So we fitted in with one another. She had the baby while I worked.

P: When your husband came back, did he have a job to go to?

G: He went back to Cooks but the money was very poor. He tried to get into the Civil Service but you couldn't get anything. You just had to have what you could get. So he went back to Cooks. The money was very poor and of course I'd got my second baby by then. He stayed there several years.

P: Did he get into the Civil Service in the end?

G: No.

P: What work did he do after that?

G: He worked as a bookkeeper, not far from here, until he retired.

P: On hiss return was he also quite unwell? Or psychologically?

G: No, no. He was allright.

P: Did it take you time to get used to him?

G: Not realyy. I was so thrilled to get him home. We had mum and dad there so we werelike a little family.

P: Was it a boy or girl?

G: It was a boy.

P: How did he react to his father?

G: Lou's boy didn't see him. But he used to see him every now and again.

P: So you managed to get things together, except financially?

G: Oh yes. It was a bit of a pull. But I had a good mother and father. They helped us a lot.

P: When you were living with your parents in the war years and you had the baby, how did you manage over things like air raids? Did you have a shelter in the garden or..?

G: We had - these were a lot of houses and there's another road at the other side and they built brick air raid shelters for the two roads. We used to go. My mother didn't like going. My dad never went. But she'd come because I wanted her to. The baby was a cross baby, always crying. They used to say "Keep that so and so baby quiet." In the end we used to sit on the stairs. My mum's one sister on the ground floor, her brother on the next floor, she was on the next and I was at the top. We all used to sit on the stairs.

P: Was that considered safer?

G: Well, it wasn't reallly. But it was considered safer.

P: Did you see houses in the area coming down around you?

G: Oh yes. I was bombed out myself, but not until after the war. No, it was during the war, but it wasn't during a raid. It was a delayed action bomb atthe endof the road. It was a brilliant day, on a Saturday, about 9 o'clock. I was taking the baby up to bed and this terrific bang, and it turned out it was the end of the road and there was a bomb under the house and no one knew about it. There were quite a number of people killed. I lost 2 cousins, 2 children.

P: What was the impact of the bomb on the house?

G: It was more or less finished. We were very lucky to get down. I remember my dad - I was on the stairs - He kept saying "Keep your feet! Keep your feet!" When the people came to ..(?) us, he said "You were so lucky. Had you been up there it would have been your lot". Because the entire roof was taken off.

P: What floor were you on?

G: I was on the top floor. Three stories high.

P: And you heard the explosion?

G: Yes It was terrific.

P: What did you do?

G: I was just shocked. My dad run out and I got the baby "You'll be allright, you'll be allright!". Dad was indoors and he come out of his rooms - It was a house let out in rooms. He got up the stairs. I wouldn't have got down on my own.

P: With ladders or was the staircase still intact?

G: No. The bottom part of the house wasn't completely...I was terrified. They said where the baby's cot was, the roof was caving in.

P: So you'd just lifted the baby out of the cot?

G: No, I'd been downstairs with mother and I was taking the baby up to put him to bed. Had he got to bed we wouldn't have got out. It was just luck really.

P: Did that shake your nerve?

G: Yes it did. But I wouldn't go away. I wouldn't leave my mum and she wouldn't go away.

P: You were saying she was working?

G: Yes, she done a little cleaning job. I think she worked at Bush House.

P: Wasn't that the BBC?

G: I don't know. Your mum was your best pal during the war. The children today don't think the same, I don't think.

P: I suppose it was necessity brought people together. From what I've heard it wasn't only mums. There was a lot of neighbourliness, people helping each other?

All: Oh yes. Neighbours were very neighbourly.

?: Over there we all clung together for the sake of feeling safe.

G: After the raid, if you hadn't seen anyone you'd go and knock at the door, "Are you allright?"

P: Was there anybody who you didn't trust in those years? Any neighbours you weren't sure about?

L: We lived over there, didn't we Tom? Our doors would be open. Anybody would come. If someone had a baby - when I was a little girl I can remember people having babies and the neighbours would be going in with rice puddings and custard and doing washing and things like that.

?: You weren't afraid of anyone robbing you.

L: The block I lived in when I was a little girl, I think there was about 20 children in that block. All the mums mucked in and everything was scrupulously clean. Never heard neighbours rowing, did we, in those days?

P: And those children were not sent away during the war years?

T: Some were.

?: That was when I was little. We were all grown up and married by then.

?: A lot of people sent their children away but there was a lot round here didn't.

P: Were you aware that there were kids knocking around the area who perhaps weren't at school?

T: Oh no. They went to school.

P: Which schools were kept open in this area?

T: School in Rodney? Street. Victory Place. Townsend Street. Paragon School.

?: If there was something drastic, perhaps they'd close for a day or two. But they all went back to school again. I think Townsend Street had an ARP station there.

P: This helping each other. Was this something you felt stopped after the war?

All: Yes...Stopped.

P: Why was that?

T: Cos of these new flats being built. A lot of people were bombed out and ...(?) other people. And when they started rebuilding they didn't build the streets. They built high-rise flats. That finished neighbours.

P: Was that a long time after the war?

T: They had a lot of profabs. Quite a lot round here.

P: Were they unpopular, the prefabs?

?: Yes. I think there are still one or two existing now. When houses were let out in rooms, I think everyone was more neighbourly.

P: What happened to that arrangement at the end of the war?

?: They built flats and people moved out.

P: When was this? I thought the building of flats was more in the 50's and 60's.

T: The high-rise flats. Yes, they were.

P: Inthe period 45 to 50, immediately at the end of the war when people were back - What's your impression of the atmosphere at that time?

?: It was allright but not quite as friendly as when we were up at night. I think it was the thought that you might be here today and gone tomorrow that made people neighbourly and friendly.

P: What about the euphoria and excitement of when it was all over?

T: We all went mad.

?: People gave vent to their feelings cos they'd bottled it up for so long.

P: How did you do that round here?

T: Had street parties for the children. It was good, our one was here anyway.

?: We had a long square and they had the parties out there.

?: Banners out across the windows. Flags.

P: How did you get hold of flags?

T: Made the flags then.

P: Painted them?

T: No. Made to buy. After the war they made a lot of flags.

L: I remember my brother in law had a big flag for years before the war. When my husband came home, when we went round there they'd got this big flag out the window with welcome home on it. He'd had it for years, this flag. It was on a pole. They lived in a big house with a basement and 3 floors up in this big house they hung the flag out the window.

(General noise)

P: Louise, can you repeat that?

L: They put the big flag out the window on a pole. My brother in law painted a big peice of cardboard, stuck paper over it and painted on it "Welcome home" for my husband for when he came home. He said "We'll come round and see you". When we went round there, that's what they'd done. They had all the neighbours in and they were having tea and cakes as a celebration.

P: About the VE Day parties? What food did you have?

T: Anything we could get hold of.

?: You all put in together.

?: People made cakes, made jellies, all sorts of things. You all took it and it was all pooled together.

T: Spam. Everybody put in.

P: Did your wife take a tinof salmon from Crosse & Blackwells?

?: Oh no. Only black market.

P: She worked there, you see.

?: We were still on rations, weren't we? We didn't really have a lot.

?: They were making jellies with fruit juice, gelatine and water.

?: What time of day were the VE DAy parties? Afternoon or evening?

All: 4 o'clock...3 to 4 in the afternoon...Teatime...You couldn't have the children out too late.

T; We had ice cream for the kiddies.

P: What did you do at the parties?

T: We had entertainment.

?: Singing songs. They got a piano out. Games for the children. Races.

P: What sort of songs?

All: Most of the wartime songs... Rule Britannia. Tipperary...Run Rabbit Run...

P: And it was a good atmosphere?

All: Oh yes.

P: And what was the atmosphere like when all the celebrations were over?

T: They got back to work. You had to.

?: And those who were coming home were trying to find work.

T: We had to get back down to basics after that. They wanted to get back to work.

P: Do you remember being shocked by some people coming back in very poor condition?

All: Oh yes.

L: Some of them had come back from Japan. I had a cousin who came back, Tom's friend. They looked terrible. Their nerves was bad. Some of them had to have treatment. Hospital psychiatry and things like that.

P: Did they ever speak about it?

L: No. No!. My husband never spoke about all the things that he went through.

P: Did you ask him?

L: Yes. He used to say "It's all behind me. I don't want to think about it.

P: Was that true of your husband as well?

?: Yes. He never ever spoke about the war. He was a driver in the Tank Corps. The Colonel's driver.

L: The only thing my husband did say - He did praise up the Americans because they were so good to him when they were wounded. They had only tents, field hospitals. But he said they were absolutley marvellous to the wounded. He said "I don't know what the Americans did other than that.." because he was only amongst the medicals, when they took them off from Anzio when they all got blown up there. My husband lost his sight and he lost his speech, with getting blown up, but fortunately he got it back again. On Anzio beaches. They come to get him to the American tented hospital. Then he got moved on and moved on. That's how he come to be reported missing. I daresay there must have been a lot of them got reported missing like that.

P: Where was Anzio beachhead?

L: Italy. There was a bad battle there cos first it was ours, then it wastheirs, then it was ours, then it was theirs and it went on for quite a time. It was really nasty. Dave (?) never much spoke about it.

P: Did the Americans and the British co-operate?

L: I don't know. All he said once was "I've got the Americans to thank that I'm back in one piece." He said "I could honestly say that the American medical staff were marvellous". He

never said anything about American soldiers or anything like that. I suppose it's like anything else, if you get treated well you praise them up.

?: My husband always spoke well of the Americans.

P: Lydia, was your husband in the army?

L: He was exempt because he had to keep the lorries going for the troops to go down to the coast. He was a motor engineer.

P: He stayed in this area?

L: Yes. We had the garage. THat's where we had the caravan. We slept in there cos our house caught the side when the fly-bomb came over.

P: Were there other caravans around that area too?

L: No, I don't think so.

(all talk together, showing pictures?)

P: So when were you born?

L: 1912.

P: So thhis picture is 1916, in the middle of the war, when you were four.
Tom, you were working at Crosse & Blackwells. Were you also doing a lot of fire watching?

T: Yes. We used to fire watch every night in the flats where we lived. We had a war squad. We'd do so many hours on, so many hours off. every night.

P: As well as your day job?

T: Oh yes. You went to work in the morning 7 o'clock till about half past six or seven at night. Come home, have dinner or tea. Then go on a fire watch, on the rota. Didn't get very much sleep at all.

P: Ladies, have any of you got any photos of you in the second world war?

?: No I've got one photo of my dad. Thats the only photo I've got.

P: Did anyone take any VE Day party photos.

T: Yes. I had some.

?: Half my stuff went when I moved here.

T: There wasn't many films during the war.

P: Were you fire watching just for Crosse & Blackwells?

T: No. Fire watching for the area. ..(?) As soon as the air raid warning went we had to go down and await any developments. We had a lot of fires we had to put out during the nights. ...(?)..a lot of streetsbecause while the raid was on we had to ..(?).

P: Were you ever called to a house like Gladys was describing. Did you have to help on rescues?

T: Yes. At Barlow Street, round the other side, there are old houses. A bomb went through one of the rooves. A wardrobe in the bedroom was all alight. People called us in. We had stirrup pumps, one man had a pail of water and another man had a stirrip pump. Each pumped the water while the man with the ..(?) went up and tried to put the fire out. Most cases we did it. After a little while the Germans started using explosive fire bombs. They started a fire and then after a while they exploded so we had schrapnel everywhere. So ..(?) the man on the nozzle ...(?) he went round it in case there wa explosives. We had 2 or 3 of those.

P: What was schrapnel. Where was it coming from?

T: Out of the bombs. As they explodedthey would scatter lumps of metal. Deadly.

P: What size were the bombs.

T: I wouldn't know that. They had exploded by the time we were there! All the German bombs were huge.

P: What was your recollection of the flying bombs?

?: We could hear them come over. When the light went out, the flash, they knew it was going to drop. We had one come down on the power station along by where I was living. They still got the plaque on the wall if you go round there. Pemrose Street. It used to be a power station. It was the beginning of the war, before I went away.

P: That couldn't have been a flying bomb, then?

T: They didn't come until 1944. Later on. And the rockets.

P; I appreciate the problem with dates.It was a five year period.

L: I got married in 38. I had the boy when I was 23. I was lucky really I had myhusband here for that period before he got called up because he was doing the windows and he was in a reserved occupation. But then once he went, once they got called up they shipped him straight away.

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P: We're talking about radio.

?: We always had the news on.

P: Which news? Was it at ten or what?

T: Six o'clock. Nine o'clock.

?: You couldn't really have the radio on at night because you weretoo busy wondering if that one's going to come down and hit you. Sometimes you couldn't get it on. Sometimes you'd be a week without any. In those days you had old sort of radios that weren't very dependable anyway.

P: Was there favourite music? Band music?

T: Yeah. Big bands. Henry Hall. Charlie Tunes (?) at ...(?) Jack Payne.(?)

?: If you could get a chance to listen to it, your main thing was hearing how the war was going.

P: Did you hear Lord Haw-Haw? What effect did that have on you?

T: Nothing.

?: I used to think "They've got to say something, to frighten us". I think they'd frightened us enough, though we didn't admit it, with the air raids!

P: Did you ever think we might lose?

?: I often wondered if many of the men would come back. I think the most part of worrying about that was when they got into the Far East. I had enough worries and upsets but I thought I was better off than my cousin whose husband was in Japan.

P: Did you think we might lose, Tom?

T: Not really. But there was a time before the Battle of Britain. I was in the Home Guard then. We had a few doubts then. Once the Battle of Britain was over, we knew we would win. When they said 185 aircraft shot down - That was a lift for everybody. That was September 44. The Battle of Britain. To break them over here (?).

P: Battle of Britain - 41.

T: 44.

P: Battle of Britain was 1940, wasn't it?

T: No!. Later in the war of the Battle of Britain, when they'd shot all the planes down, it turned the course of the war. They bombed Germany and we went over there. Hundreds.

?: We saw all the planes from the window.

P: Are you talking about D Day?

T: No. This was before D-Day.

?: One came down on the Oval cricket ground.

P: What were you saying about Lord Haw-Haw?

?: I lived with my parents in Cranleigh, Farm Cottage. The German bombers ripped to road right up where the road went up to his house.

P: Who was Lord Haw-Haw? What kind of a man was he?

?: His real name was William Joyce. He was caught for fraud or something and he went over to Germany.

END OF SIDE B / TRANSCR6.DOC / Transcribed by Vanda.