

Terry Pankhurst (TP) interview with Mr Mayles (MM), 12 Marford Road,
Wheathampstead

17th February 2012

TP Mr Mayles can you tell me who your parents were and when you were born please?

MM You want their names?

TP Yes please.

MM Charles Mayles, Annie Dellar.

TP And when were you born?

MM October 20 1929

TP Right. Can you tell me anything about the house you were born in?

MM Not really because I was born in Luton, and then I think we were in a cottage down on one of the farms for a year down Nomansland. Then we moved to 34 Marford Road when I was young, you know, when I was possibly 1 or 2 you see.

TP So you didn't spend a lot of time at The Folly, or you didn't spend any time at The Folly?

MM No not really, the time I remember was when we were along where the dentists is, no 34.

TP So you've not moved very far?

MM No not really (laughs)

TP So tell us what you can remember about your early childhood.

MM I remember the War starting, a policeman with his whistle, blowing his whistle and telling us there was a siren, and that was the first time you know. And then saw a flying bomb go by this side.

TP That was the south side of Marford Road?

MM But it was ok because it hadn't cut out you know, you could see the fire going out the back, and it dropped in Redbourn in the end. And there was a big bomb dropped at the west end of Caesars Road, you know Caesars Road? There was a massive bomb there, 'cos we all ran up and looked in the crater there, and there were quite a few bombs. Down at the Elephant and Castle something went off down there, but they wouldn't let us in, it was a bit secret that one. You know like children you run down there, 'cos I was about 8 then you see, and um...

TP And are they very much your earliest memories at 8?

MM Oh yes, really, well I used to pop over the road where they played football, you know where the village hall is, it's right opposite, mum used to put me over and I used to sit and watch them, or stand with them and get near the goal. And somebody blasted one and I remember it hit me in the stomach, and they said "buzz off", they meant get away from the goal 'cos it's dangerous isn't it, you know, 'cos I wanted to be near it you know, and see it, I remember little things like that.

TP What do you remember of your school days in the village?

MM Well um the main thing about the school days is the War came and the air raids if you...if the siren went the junior school used to go up Ash Grove, up the top left, I forget the name of the road,

round the back of Brewhouse Hill a little bit, and they all had zigzag trenches like this to put us in, with no top on, and they just pushed us in and you could see the sky you know, which was a bit, you know, with being youngsters....and then when later on they shoved us up Brewhouse Hill in the brewery, and when you went in the brewery it's very high, I don't know if you've ever been in? The bricks look as if they're going to fall, you know, they're so old.

TP Is this in the tunnel bit?

MM Yes in the tunnel, and if you were young they pushed you in and you was right up the end you know, it was quite frightening really – the big arch and all these bricks and that.

TP Was there anything else in there, anything stored in there?

MM Not to my knowledge, you know, and then as the War progressed we went to the top school and they had proper shelters then, you know, so it was different then.

TP What do you remember about your lessons at school and the people you were with?

MM Well um I was pretty good at arithmetic, it was easy, it's funny to me, it's funny. Not much good at correspondence and things like that, but give me sums and that, I won prizes right from the beginning on arithmetic. And when I got to the top they just let me carry on, you know, but it never got me anywhere. (laughs)

TP Do you remember the names of your teachers?

MM Teachers, yeah, Mr Housden was headmaster, he lives at Bloweys Farm at Ayot St. Lawrence. And the teachers, I can remember the junior teachers there was Miss Warren, who lived at no 10, Miss Young opposite the school, there was Mrs Wade, Mrs Crawley and I can't remember the last one in the bottom school. And in the top school there was Mr Mees the sportsman, Mr & Mrs Fooks, and that's about all up in the top school. I remember the junior school because they came and picked me out to play football with the big ones, you know, so that pleased me and I was off. And at the school they had 4 houses, Haig, Bodes, Stevenson and Nelson, you know, they named 'em all in them times so you was part of the team. When the War started there was no football, the team played at the top of Brewhouse Hill behind the houses, so that was finished. And swimming was in Helmets, they had a swimming pool at Helmets.

TP Up Brewhouse Hill?

MM No down in the village and it stopped when I got to the time to go swimming. I didn't mind, I didn't fancy swimming, I was always footballing or something like that, but they stopped it then, you know. I thought good job, you know, I don't want to do it anyway.

TP Was it a big pool or a little pool?

MM Well I thought it was quite a reasonable pool you know. I know the children used to go there regular; then they sent some of them to Kimpton in the end, afterwards when we got round the top.

TP Were there different things that went on in the school, seasonal things like May Day or Christmas, what sort of things did they do?

MM Well they had the natural sports days and things like that you know, the Church had a lot to do with the school really, you know, you was more or less made to go to Church at certain times. Me mum sent me to Church. I was a choirboy, twice a week practice, a penny a time you got for that, and 3 times on Sundays. And you picked your wages up at the end of the month. The organist used to

pay, you know, about 4 shillings a week with all the pennies over a month, it was 5 times a week you see, 3 times Sunday and 2 practices. It was quite a lot of money really.

TP Not bad. (Mr Mayles laughs) What about your school friends, can you tell us anything about those?

MM Well all I know the evacuees came then, and that mucked up everything, because there was too many, so we went to school mornings one week, and the afternoons the next, and the evacuees alternated with us, you know, and there wasn't room for us all there. There were lots of fights, you know.

TP What did you do when you didn't go to school on those occasions?

MM Can't remember – probably go wooding, I used to go wooding a lot, mum used to send us wooding over the dumps.

TP That's collecting firewood?

MM Yeah, yeah. Pull it all out of the hedge, we used to go nearly to Ayot St. Lawrence to get it with a couple of trucks, you know.

TP Sort of trolleys, barrows?

MM Yeah, well 3 children at me auntie's come to live with us then, 'cos she died having a baby, and the baby died as well; so it's me mum's sister, so they came to live with us, which was quite crowded. In one bedroom there was me oldest girl cousin and her young brother; and me and the other brother in one room. And in the other room was me mum and dad, and me young sister, you know, it was quite packed out then. And they stayed till they grew up and left school. And off they went, their dad called them up and they went and lived with their aunties at Rugby (?) which I thought it was a bit you know. I think she got five bob a week for that then. Things were hard, and I done paper rounds as well, you know.

TP Where did the evacuees come from?

MM London. There was a celebrity, he was a black boy and he lived at 124 Marford Road, along there the first one at the back, and this chap he was an old boy, and he had a 3 wheeler bike, and this black coloured boy he used to get on this bike, and he was a celebrity, you know, on it, 'cos nobody else was allowed to ride it. And he used to cut about on this bike (laughs) well you always remember things like that.

TP That's right. When you say he was a celebrity, it was because he was the only coloured person you knew?

MM Yes he was the first one I'd seen, and most of them had never seen things like we'd got in the country, you know, they used to say about it.

TP What did you used to do in the way of games and things, outside of school time?

MM Football and things like that, we used to play in the Dyke quite a bit, and go down the river along Long Meadows, on the right hand side, and get in the water there. Up the dumps which was a going concern then. There must have been at least 30 odd people worked at the dumps; 3 trains a week used to come down roughly at half 11, 12 and 1, from London you know.

TP 3 trains a week?

MM 3 trains a day, and they had a little train there, you know, they used to take it down and put it on the little train and take it round the different part of the dumps. And then potatoes, they used to set potatoes in the dumps, we used to have potato picking, that's how we earned some money, you know, girls used to do it and boys, and we'd go up the dumps, and Bloweys Farm at Ayot St Lawrence, and all around, earning good money, you know. And we used to pick up acorns for the farm, for the pigs and that I suppose – so much a bucket. It wasn't very much, they made their buckets big, you see, and we thought we'd got a lot, but when they measured it out it wasn't so much.

TP Well, that's interesting. And in your childhood did you have many toys and things?

MM Well I had a football, that was my.....never had a bike or anything, never even had a wireless. I actually bought the first wireless in our house, second hand

TP What about a gramophone, did you have a gramophone?

MM Yes we did, that's right, we had quite a high gramophone, a high one, we did have one of them, because mum used to play the same record, you know.

TP Are there any particular tunes you can remember that you used to play on it?

MM Not really.

TP What was the one your mother used to play?

MM I can't remember.....there was a lot of hymns, she was like that.

TP What do you remember of the village itself and the shops?

MM Well I remember this road, there used to be a Catholic School just here, which was different you know, not many, right opposite the Catholic Church. There was this school for the Catholics, there was probably about not many, 30 or so of them. And all that bit there was just a field, a football field where Murphy Chemicals played football in there, and they were called A1Vesco (?) 'cos one of the teachers, Mr Mees, used to play for them, you know, and 'cos me being interested I used to go over the road and watch them. And then later on Garrards Way, Wheathampstead played there, when that was empty, and I was right there, you see, and me sister used to have a box, and I used to run the young team, about 15 of us or whatever it was, with a little collection. We used to have a few people watching us, you know. Cory Wrights had the big house, and then....

TP That's 4 Limes?

MM Yeah. Well they tried to stop building and that, you see, and then I forget who bought it after then, but that used to be a lovely old.....and there used to be the conker trees up there, do you remember the conker trees?

TP Yes, there's only 2 or 3 there now.

MM 'Cos you used to be able to come out of the house, go straight across them fields to the Dyke nursery cottages and down to watch the cricket, you know, because there was always cricket on a Sunday. We used to wander down there, watch the cricket, come home for dinner and go back after dinner, you know, as part of your day.

TP And in the High Street itself, do you remember any of the shops?

MM Yes top of the street on the right there was a cobbler's shop, there was a shoe shop, Blindells, and the cobbler's shop was up a few steps and round the corner. Then there was a cake shop called

Garretts, they were well known the Garretts and Simons, they were related. Further down the road there was Chennells who delivered milk, and he was the....every day.

TP Where the estate agents is now?

MM Yeah, opposite side of the road there was the gents place, I think.

TP Stuarts?

MM Yes, that was before Stuarts, I think it was Jenner, but I'm not sure. The fish shop used to be just down the end there, where the cut into the church is, the fish shop was just there, and there was the stores opposite called Millis. Further down there was Rowe, which was an ice cream fruit shop. And then Stapletons was further down just before the garage. That was a big shop, you know, grocers and things like that; and the paper shop was opposite that, you know, right on the corner further down. And the chemist's was further up as you turned into the churchyard, the chemist was just past the cut in there, with the fruit shop there and that, and the café there. And up East Lane there was Woodley's necessary shop, then on the left there was Westwood's forge, the blacksmiths, and the fire station used to be next to that then, before they brought it up at the top.

TP What sort of fire engine did it have?

MM One of the old sort didn't they, funny old wheels and that wasn't it. I never see it out much.
(laughs)

TP Just as well really. Do you remember the pubs, the pubs that have gone now?

MM There was quite a few pubs, like the Walnut Tree which was up Church Street, there on the left, you know, the electric shop.

TP Cunningtons.

MM Walnut Tree was just there, 'cos they had a sweet shop as well next to the pub, well it was natural, you know, going to school, the sweets you see. The Bell was down the High Street opposite that cutting into the Church. The workmen's club was opposite the post office, don't know if you remember that there.

TP A tin building.

MM You had a job to get in there actually, it was quite crowded.

TP Very popular.

MM Yeah. When they moved it down it took away the people that didn't want to walk that much further. The top one was the Abbot John of course, that was called The Railway originally. I've said The Bell haven't I? There was one at the top of the street, I can't remember the name now. The Nelson of course was down there.

TP The top of the street? You mean where the post office is now or the other end of the street?

MM Opposite the post office that was the workmen's club.

TP Yes. Which end of the street is the other pub you're trying to remember now?

MM They were all on the right-hand side.

TP Yes, going uphill.

MM Yes, on the left there was a little petrol place, the Collins's.

TP Yes.

MM It had one little pump, you know, not a massive one, just one sort of pump you could get petrol from; but it was just unusual, you know, it looked old fashioned or it would now.

TP What about the railway, do you remember much about the railway, the station?

MM Yes, I remember quite a bit about the railway, because when I was a paperboy, we used to go and pick the papers up, we used to get up there at 10 past 5 in the morning, quarter past 5 you know. Mum used to get us up, and the train used to come down from Welwyn of course, never stopped, they used to get the quires of papers you know what a quire of papers is? They used to flick them off like this all the way along the platform, and the train just used to go through, you see. And then there was no traffic about so we used to fling them over, 'cos there were quite a lot of steps there to carry them, and they were heavy. We used to lob them on the street, nobody was about at 10 past 7, no 5, and be down at the paper shop by half past 5, and then do them out, used to deliver a couple of rounds I used to do before I went to school this was.

TP Did you have a trolley to take them from the station to the paper shop?

MM Do you know I can't remember that. But I know we must have had something because when a quire of papers is....you got The Express and The Mail, and that, and they were quite big. But I used to open it for her, 'cos it was Mrs Pearce and Mr Pearce, and they didn't always used to want to get up in the morning, and they used to give me the keys, so I could get into the back sheds and open it up, and count them out all ready, before we went out.

TP How much did you get paid for that?

MM Quite good money there, I forget now, but it was a lot of money. I saved that up actually and bought myself a bike when I left school. £14 the bike cost. And I worked at Murphy Radio, this was in the War, in Welwyn Garden City down Broadwater Road, I worked down there.

TP Was it one of those restricted occupations, or War work?

MM Yes, it was all radios you see, Murphy's, and moving on to 18 when we were called up, if you wanted to dodge the call up, you could go on the railways as a fireman, you know, which helped the driver, and quite a few of the lads used to do that over on the old trains.

TP Going back slightly to your childhood, would you, did you use the railways as a child, would you go places, go on holiday?

MM To Luton, mum used to take us to Luton on it, we used to go there shopping, you know. It was quite exciting really getting on the train, and the Sunday schools and that, the Church used to run days out to Hunstanton and Felixstowe, and the train used to be packed, you know what I mean. There used to be, if you went to work by train, there were 3 trains in a morning, the 20 to 8, the 10 past 8, and the half past 8 for different workers. The office workers went last and the early ones, and of course 3 came home at night, and if you got a bike then it saves you going right there, you're half way to Waterend on the bike. It was quite a bike ride, 5 miles and new work wasn't it.

TP Did you ever go on the train on holiday?

MM No, the only time I went was on these outings, you know.

TP Did you not have any holidays, did you ever go to the seaside?

MM No, I did never had a holiday, no, no.

TP Presumably at that time Luton was the furthest you travelled really.

MM Yes, well dad worked at Luton you see, at Laportes Chemicals, and Luton was the place, you know, and they had a football team. Watford, no we don't like Watford, (laughs)

TP What about St Albans, which is quite close to you?

MM Yes St Albans, quite close.

TP Did you go by bus?

MM No, no.

TP How did you get there?

MM I never went much to St Albans.

TP Was there a bus service from here to St Albans?

MM I can't remember one much. What you going into my teenage now? No, I floated to Harpenden and that, that was my....

TP Hatfield, did you go to Hatfield on the train?

MM Yes, I went to Hatfield occasionally, we used to take the children swimming there, because they had a lovely swimming pool at Hatfield, an indoor one.

TP So what do you remember of your teenage years then?

MM Teenage.....well I played a lot of football, you see, that was my...

TP Was there a youth club or anything like that?

MM Yes there was a youth club, yeah. And I forgot to tell you about the Home Guard here, haven't I?

TP Yes.

MM Well as you turn into the Gardens here, Rectory Gardens, there used to be an old stables on the left, and that was the Home Guard HQ. And there was about 30 of them. And I joined the army cadets when I was young, and they had a football team, you see. I would rather play football as well, rather than the scouts. And I was in the cubs, you know, and then you go to the scouts, and I went into the army cadets. We used to take part in the manoeuvres with the Home Guard, you know, like down to The Nelson at night, and they sent you as a runner, you know, back....it was exciting because it was at night, wasn't it.

TP They practised at night after work I suppose.

MM Yes, this was when I was still at work then, when I was young, in the army cadets.

TP The Home Guard would meet in the evenings?

MM Yes.

TP Did you know well the men who made up the Home Guard?

MM Not much. I knew Major Warren, I remember him, he was in charge, from Gustard Wood way. I can't remember any of the others.

TP What did they used to do when they got together? Was it like Dad's Army, on the television? What did they actually do?

MM Well I can't really remember that, we were just the army cadets, the runners. They looked after us and learned us the drill and that, and we had a special physical training instructor who used to come with the army cadets, which was good, you know. And the Church room used to be there, can you remember the tin Church room was on the entrance to Rectory Gardens, on the left it was.

TP Behind the school?

MM Yes opposite side to the school.

TP Right, right

MM You know as you go in

TP Yes, yes

MM The opposite side there that was where we trained in there, special PTI he was from the army.

TP Did you enjoy that?

MM Yeah, yeah, yeah I did, yeah.

TP Tell me more about your teenage years, and what you got up to in the village, other than football.

MM Scrumping

TP Scrumping?

MM (laughs) pinching apples

TP What about friends, we have a degree of vandalism these days, what was it like in your day?

MM It wasn't like it is now, we weren't....you always remembered the headmaster, the number of his car, it was DAR 383, and you looked for that number, you know. You behaved yourself when he was about (laughs)

TP And there was a village policeman as well, you said.

MM Oh there was a village policeman. The 2 police houses, they were at the corner opposite The Swan, yes I remember those old bobbies.

TP And there was a pub next to the police houses too, wasn't there?

MM Yeah, yeah there was.

TP The Ship?

MM That's the one I was trying to... probably was,,, I couldn't remember that. I know it wasn't very much but there was one there. Well the organist from the Church used to live next door to him, I think. Where we used to go and get our money, you know.

TP And as teenagers what did you get up to in the village?

MM What in the evenings, we hadn't got anything in the evenings, there were no cinemas here or anything.

TP What about girls?

MM A few girls about. (Mrs Mayles – well he picked me up) I picked her up in Harpenden (laughs). That's where we used to float, to Harpenden, on our bikes (Mrs Mayles – used to float to the fish shop down Southdown and that). See the buses were...you couldn't really go to Harpenden on the bus couldn't get home, the last one was about 9 o'clock, well that's early when you're young isn't it, so we used to bike, and we knew some friends, leave our bikes there, then come home on our bikes later, you know.

TP Did you have a cinema in Harpenden then?

MM They did, they had 2 then, the Astral and the Regent

TP Where were they?

MM Whereabouts were they?

TP Mmm

MM On the Luton,,what's that... (Mrs Mayles – it's a garage now) well it's a garage now, next to the big hotel, what's that big hotel called, on the corner (Mrs Mayles – well it's changed, Glen something) oh yes Gleneagle, because Derby County stopped there when they won the cup, when they beat, when Docherty and Rhys Carter and all them played, they stayed at that hotel that day. And that used to be next door to it, that was the best cinema that was, you know, that was the one. The other one was a bit small and that, round the back, on the back side, near Waitrose, that's where the small one used to be (Mrs Mayles – that was an old one, rats in there, you used to see rats and that) and I was involved a lot over there quite a lot, playing football for them as well, you know, so I was over there quite a bit, on me bike and that. (Mrs Mayles – you used to meet your dad from my house) Oh yes when I used to go and see Daph and that me father used to work shifts 6 to 2, 2 to 10 and nights, and one week, third week he used to come along that road about half past 10, so I used to work it out just right to leave Daph's house and pick him up and go back home with him, yeah.

TP He cycled as well did he?

MM Yeah he had a bike, and he cycled over to the other side of Luton, that's where Kingsway's was, and he biked that, and he had one day off in 3 weeks, He was 61 when he died. He got wounded in the First World War, and um, it was tough for him really, going on nights and biking all that way. He got knocked over once in Luton, at a belisha beacon place. He was all right, you know.

TP What was his work?

MM He was in a chemicals place, I don't know what his work really was, but it was tough, because he got wounded and that.

TP And he was working in Luton?

MM Yes

TP And he cycled down through Harpenden

MM Yes, no well along the Lower Luton Road

TP Lower Luton Road

MM Yeah, through that way, and he lived at The Folly you see. There was one of his brothers, 4 of his brothers went in the army together, and actually I'm telling this, but we shouldn't have a y in our name, he put a y in my name, you know, when he registered me, and I don't know why he did it, you know. I used to have relations at The Folly with no y, you see, m a l e s,

TP Aah, interesting

MM Do you think that's how names change a bit?

TP Yes, I expect so.

MM 'Cos when I was in the army they used to say May les, well I never used to answer, 'cos I'm Males you see, May les who's he? You, you know, and things like that.

TP Yes. His name didn't have a y presumably?

MM His didn't. No. no. And he said, 'cos his other brothers went in, he put a y in, and another one did. When I realised that, I think that's how people change their names like that.

TP So at the start of your teenage years or just after, you must have got a job.

MM Yeah, I worked at Murphy Radio

TP Yeah that's right.

MM Til I got called up when I was 18.

TP And what did you do, obviously you made radios, but what did you do?

MM Small components of the radios, you know, transformers and things like that we made in certain departments you know. They had a lot of different shops in Welwyn Garden City, they must have had at least 5 splattered all round. They wasn't in one big building. The one I worked was opposite Nortons, who was a big firm there, but they were all different places, Murphy Radio was.

TP These were workshops, not shops where you buy them?

MM Sorry?

TP You said they had 5 shops, you mean workshops?

MM Well 5 different buildings, like you know, different places, done different parts of the radios, and set them up, and things like that. It's a funny time when you're young like that, you don't really know what to do, do you. If you're good at carpentry or things like that, you go for that, you know, but that's the way the cookie crumbles (laughs)

TP Mmm. Did you enjoy the work?

MM Yeah I enjoyed it, yeah, I used to bike home, skip home at nights.

TP You cycled home from Welwyn?

MM Yeah, it was quite a drag from Waterend up, well coming through Lemsford it was quite

TP Course it was a winding road then, wasn't it?

MM Yeah, but when you got to the last Waterend Hill, Christ when you got to the top.....I know one time in Welwyn Garden City it was raining, and I'd just left to come home from work, and this car come by and he took half of me cape off, he caught me cape and ripped half of it off as he went by me, never stopped, you know, 'cos it was getting dark I suppose, you know. That's a bit dangerous I suppose, isn't it?

TP Very.

MM I used to come up the bridge and over Valley Road there, do you know Valley Road? The builders used to be there and down through Lemsford. And then I joined up then, and I went to

Norwich, with the Royal Norfolks, for 6 weeks. Well I knew me basic drills you see, so I got on quite easy, shoulder arms and all that sort of thing. And I done a bit of football for them and that. After 6 weeks they post you out.

TP What year was this?

MM Er...1948 I went in.

TP Right, so you missed the war?

MM Oh yes I missed the war, definitely yes. I was pleased actually

TP Oh yes

MM It was very frightening really. It was enough when the bombers used to come over when we were youngsters. I mean mum used to put us under the stairs sometimes, you know in the little cupboard, or under a big table, which was another thing.

TP Expanding on your time in the war here, what else do you remember? Did you have plenty of food?

MM Not really, well we had a few rabbits, me uncle used to get a few rabbits, and things like that. But you had bread and dripping you see, that was lovely bread and dripping

TP I know

MM That was a treat that was. (laughs)

TP Were there many air raids here?

MM A lot...they used to do de Havillands quite a lot, and they done the Vauxhall works, you see. (*de Havilland was bombed only once in 1940. TP*).

TP Do you remember seeing the planes going over?

MM Well they done it at night mainly, you understand, they were quite high up. I saw that flying bomb I told you that. And the tanks used to go through on the railways sometimes, where they done them from the Vauxhall, all done up, tied up, you know. But the war was a frightening time really, with the air raids at night, they used to start up before midnight, just when you'd got to sleep. And they used to have Murphy Chemicals, you know where Murphy's used to be, they used to have an air raid shelter there, where that electric place is, you know where I mean, on the corner?

TP Oh yes.

MM A shelter where you could go, and mum used to take us there, you know, anybody could go there any time if you wanted.

TP Did you go there every night?

MM Not every night, and don't forget we had 3 extra children as well as me and me sister then, you know, I suppose it was quite a lot for her.

TP What about shelters in your garden? Did you have any of those?

MM No, no shelter in the garden. A lot of people had them, but we never had one, probably too expensive, I don't know. You got to dig a hole haven't you.

TP Can you tell us now what you did after your training on national service?

MM Yes, well after 6 weeks they call you in and ask you if you want, do you want to go in the service corps and that, and I hummed and hahed, and he said to me, he said would you like to stay here then he said and play football? He was the captain, and I missed out didn't I, I said no. Everybody said let's get away from here, and do you know where they sent me? Catterick Camp, and when I got up there, oh dear, it was murder up there. What a big camp. So we went to the Signals, I was a signaller, as a wireless operator, and I was up there til I qualified. You passed, you know, with a wireless, so many words a minute, and so many figures a minute, about 20 odd. Sit there all day with this sort of thing you know. And then they were just going to post us to Africa, I think, and I caught scarlet fever, 6 of us got it in one room, and they sent us to Middlesbrough Isolation Hospital. When I come back to the camp all me mates had gone, you know, so they sent me to Germany then. I went to Germany as a wireless op, and when I got there, I never touched a wireless after that I was just in the signals office, and played football and that you know.

TP Did they select you for the Signals because you'd been working for Murphy's, the radio people?

MM Well they probably thought I'd be interested in it you know.

TP And you went to did you say Berlin?

MM No I went to Dusseldorf.

TP And what was it like there immediately after the war?

MM Well you couldn't go out on the trams, 'cos they were bit you know, you were told not to go near them, you know.

TP Were the people hostile to you?

MM Yes they were, they were hostile to us. We used to have men come in the workforce, the men used to take our washing home, for a little bar of soap they'd do all our washing, and iron it all, and bring it back when it was done, you know. They used to look after us.

TP Did you learn any German while you were there?

MM Not much, ein zwei, and that's all. They were still on patrol there with live ammunition we were, I had one lot. I was lucky 'cos I was in the signals office you know, I got away with it for a bit. But you had live ammunition then, and this was 1949 you know, 'cos I suppose they used to try and get in, you see, and pinch things.

TP How long were you there for?

MM Almost...I was in the army for 2 years, 6 weeks here, and 6 weeks... almost 2 years, well about a year and a half.

TP Were there American soldiers there, posted with you?

MM Yeah, there were a lot of soldiers there.

TP Did you meet any of them?

MM Yeah I met some friends, one up north, quite a few up north and that, again they played football, and I was in the football with them.

TP No I meant Americans, did you meet any of them?

MM No, we was in the camp you see, so we didn't mix too much.

TP When you weren't in the camp what did you do?

MM Well we had our own NAAFI and things like that.

TP Did you not leave the camp, you were in the camp all the time?

MM Not much, no.

TP So did you move on from there? Did you see out your national service there?

MM I finished there. They asked me to sign on for another 6 months, 'cos of the football, but I said no I'm going home (laughs)

TP What did you do when you got back home?

MM As I walked along this road I felt lovely, you know what I mean, I was home (laughs)

TP Had anything changed while you'd been away?

MM No, not really, not in the village, but it has changed from years back, 'cos all the buildings up Conquerors Hill, they were never there, you see, you could cut along straight through the fields to Nomansland, they were all lovely fields.

TP Once you were back in civvy street, you then had to find another job, what did you do?

MM Yeah, what did I do next? Well I went to Ballito's in the end, stocking factory, that's hosiery, on big machines.

TP Where were they?

MM At St Albans down Fleetville, and when we qualified there, you had to do so many to qualify. You done all the needles, you had to plow them all level, the points used to come and transfer the nylon on your machines, and if any of the points were crooked they'd wipe out the needles, you know, and the machine wasn't working. And it was piece work, so if you were good at it you could earn a lot of money. And they built a new building there, I think Morrisons is in there now. While they built that building we worked up Leicester, where they put our machines. So we used to travel up every week up there, and then come back. As soon as they finished that we all came back. And that was just when I got married then, when we came back.

TP What year did you get married?

MM August 1st 1953. It was out of the football season, you see.

TP And tell us who you married.

MM Yeah still married. Her name, Daphne Ashpole. She didn't want me to say that name, did she.

TP So you worked at Ballito's making hosiery, did you continue to do that?

MM I worked there until the fashion changed the job, women started to wear tights, and we were on the stockings. So of course they bought more tights and our stockings gradually faded out, so they made us redundant, this was in about 1968 time. And I got offered a job in Kayser Bondor which was at Baldock, which I thought was too far to go. That was in the same industry, and at Luton, in knitwear, you know, jumpers, but I didn't fancy that, so I went on the post, I was a postman. I saw the old postman going past, and I thought, well he looks quite relaxed, you know, finish at dinner time.

TP And did it work out that way?

MM Well it is relaxed, the post, I've always been used to getting up early see, and at Ballito's it's a 6 o'clock start, and when you bike from here you've got to leave fairly early.

TP Where were you based as a postman?

MM I started at Harpenden for a year, then they had a vacancy at Wheathampstead, so I popped in for that, and got that.

TP Where was the post office here at that time?

MM It was right near where the chemist is, you know that shop thing

TP At the back?

MM Yeah, and we done all the sorting just round the corner, in a little building, there was about 8 of us got in there. We had all the mail from St Albans brought there, and we sorted out all the different rounds.

TP The mail came by road?

MM Yes they used to drop it off in the van.

TP And did you go round on foot or did you have a bike?

MM On foot, cycle. I used to do Gustard Wood round, I used to do Station Road, a little bit there on the Luton Road, up Rose Lane and back, and then pick up the lodges to go up Gustard Wood golf course, through to Titmuss's farm and straight down to the shop, Braces', at the far end. And then down the Slype.

TP Brace's, the shop, where was that?

MM There was a little shop at the end of the Common, near the Tin Pot.

TP What did they sell?

MM Everything, they were like a little grocery shop, with ice cream and things like that. And then down the Slype, there was a place called the hog's plough, and that was the end down there.

TP The hog's end, what was that?

MM It was a....he had lovely bungalows with long grounds, and you had to go up, and they had one of these big dogs, and it was frightening if he was out, you'd just hope you'd hear him barking indoors.

TP Was it just the name of a house?

MM The hog's plough, yeah. And then come back from there to the crossroads, turn left, do the little bit by the church, down to Lamer, all the Lamer places up there. Come down, and come out at Wilson's the lodge, you know, the lodge halfway up, and come down there and that was the finish.

TP And did you actually finish at dinner time?

MM No, that was the first round, I used to be home at 9.

TP And you'd do another round I guess.

MM Actually it was a long bike ride out there. I used to pick up an old boy's pension every Monday or Tuesday. Bert Russell was his name. He lived towards the end of the houses across the common.

He didn't used to want to go down the village, so he used to let me pick it up, and I used to give him his money, when I went up there second delivery.

TP How many deliveries were there?

MM Two deliveries.

TP What time was the second one?

MM The second one used to come in here at quarter past 10, 10 to quarter past, there wasn't a lot of mail then, you know, we was out quick, and if you pedalled away, you know, we were off. And I used to help Sammy Collins in the removal bit in the afternoons, from 2 til 5, 4 days a week.

TP He had a removals business did he?

MM Yeah, he had a little van with Collins on it, can you remember the lovely little van. Yeah, poor old Sammy.

TP So in that period after the war then, what did you do in the village? Was there anything new you did in the village then? What do you remember of the village in the later years?

MM There was a youth club I think, but I don't think I got involved in that too much somehow. The army cadets were finished then you see.

TP I mean, you were married, did you go to any clubs or

MM No, no. We had a little cottage up the Hill, bought a little cottage up the Hill when we got married, and then I bought this in 1957.

TP This was new then I imagine?

MM No, no, This was, I'm not sure when these...me mum's house was built in 1932, I think, you know, me mum might have moved into a new one. Mr Beech used to live here, years ago, and we saw it up for sale. Do you want to know how much it was? £2650 but that was a lot of money then, wasn't it?

TP It was.

MM I mean it sounds like nothing now, and I was very lucky because me mum, I made money with the house up the road, I had a little bit of redundancy money from Ballito's, and me mum lent me the rest of the money. So I never had a mortgage, and if I hadn't got the money she'd let me ride it, and I paid her later.

TP Ideal.

MM Yes I was lucky, no mortgage, before children it's a bit...and we had Daph's father living with us, when they were going to put him away, 'cos he'd lost his mother and he was living on his own at Ayot. And we had him with us for a long time until he passed away, and she had her father here for quite a long time, so we had quite a houseful here. Not the 2 men at the same time, me uncle came later, that was me mum's sister from Ayot who came here.

TP So you've always had quite a houseful one way and another.

MM Yeah, we've always had a houseful. We used to play football up here, I had 2 proper goals

TP In the garden?

MM Yes, I could get in the goals, with big railway sleepers, and the kids used to come round. They used to get undressed in here.

TP A football team.

MM Well it's what interests you've got, you know.

TP Was there a team you played for?

MM Yeah, I played for Harpenden Town, and when I got older I played for Wheathampstead. And I played in the army cadets. I was only 15 when I used to play with the under 18s, they used to knock me about a bit.

TP But you enjoyed it anyway.

MM Yeah, I did, oh yeah, that was me life, wasn't it. I used to run the young team, when I was younger, when I lived along there. When they played on Garrard Way the young ones as well.

TP Did you continue in the Post Office?

MM I did right to my retirement yeah, I think I must have been 65, I'm not sure.

TP And were you all that time a postman here in the village?

MM Well other than me year at Harpenden, when I started, yes.

TP Now you've got lots of pieces of paper with notes on, is there anything on there that we've missed that you want to tell us about?

MM Oh yes, left of the Swan yard, England used to play quoits there.

TP Who did?

MM England played quoits there, do you know what quoits is?

TP No, tell us.

MM Well they hurl this big thing, and it sticks in the mud, and we had internationals there. You know when you go into the Swan, at the back there's some little steps there, well up them steps England used to play there, when I was young. There was an international bloke from Batford, I think, named Anderson, I'm not sure.

TP It's now part of the school's grounds I imagine.

MM It could be, there's the little steps as you go in there. I mean it was quite exciting, England, you know.

TP How often did they play?

MM Not very often, but it was in the summer mainly.

TP And there was a national team?

MM Yeah, must have been. It probably wasn't so widely known as other things. And you know Parkinson Close, that used to be tennis courts there. That ground belonged to Dr Parkinson, who lived up the Hill. That's why it's Parkinson Close. We used to play tennis on there some time or other. Oh, and in the railway there used to be the usual thing in the railway yard, coal merchants and everything, where the workmen's club is now. Ah. I can tell you something now, when we were footballing in I think it was 1939, there was this tiger moth, he used to be always going about, it

crashed at Gustard Wood, he was going over and come down and they bailed out, and in it was Cat'seyes Cunningham and Geoffrey de Havilland. And we run up in our football kit, and I had a little bit of the plane. It was a silver tiger moth. One of the boys lost it, and I saw Cat'seyes in Harpenden, he died about 4 years ago. I saw him and stopped him and questioned him in Harpenden. I said to him, can you remember when you crashed in Wheathampstead in 1939, he said 1938, you know straight away.

TP They bailed out with parachutes?

MM Yeah.

TP And they weren't hurt?

MM No, Well Geoffrey he was one of the boys, one of the top ones wasn't he, Geoffrey and John I remember were the test pilots, and Cat'seyes was with Geoffrey at the time. 'Cos he was wearing Cat'seyes Cunningham, was shooting down supposed to be wearing cat's eyes.

TP Yes, hated that name.

MM Did he really. But how he said, 1938, you know (laughs)

TP Have we covered most things on your list there?

MM Yes. Oh, I remember when the war started, we was up Ayot, I think it was a Sunday morning, at the church there. Me auntie used to live at the church, and mum used to send me and me cousin up there, and she said to us, go home quick the war's started. And we really hustled home, it's quite a way from Ayot St Lawrence, 2 and a half miles, you know the proper church there, she lived in the one of the cottages round the back. It's quite worrying. You know, get home quick before the war starts.

TP And you walked all the way?

MM Yes. Oh, and you know Bulls butchers shop was in Church street

TP Bull or Ball?

MM Ball, the man's son it was, Ball.

TP That's where the little cottage is now, just by the restaurant?

MM Yes, there's the restaurant and then the barber's shop, and then the cottages, and it was just there.

TP Yes, just set back slightly.

MM Yes, they were the 2 main butchers, and Simon's was just down in the middle, you know where Simon's used to be, down the bottom they were the 2 butchers, you know.

TP We never asked you about your family, you bought up a family here, so how many children did you have?

MM 4, 4 boys.

TP Names are?

MM Tony, Paul, Ian and Gary. And 3 of them are in the building, as bricklayers, Paul and Ian; Tony the eldest is a roofer, and the young one runs a gentlemen's hairdressing shop.

TP And they've all got a y in their name?

MM Yes. I haven't told many people about that, it's a bit embarrassing.

TP No it's not at all, it's rather nice.

MM I was annoyed, you see, you know, it should be M a l e s.

TP More distinctive, more posh

MM May les, you know when you get called that in the army, it's not good.

TP Are we done? I think so, unless there is anything...not really. Well thank you very much for being interviewed.

MM Was it all right?

TP It was fine, I've just got to hope it recorded properly, I'm sure it has.

MM Well I don't think there's much else, I kept jotting people's bits down. They used to have odd dances at the school, when we was in our teens, at the top school, you know, not Butterfield, the top one down the bottom here.

TP Yes, on the other side of the road.

MM Yes, St Helen's, but that is all to do with the church in the village.

TP Yes, and the top school was whereabouts, in relation to the old one?

MM Well where there's building all now, and the Queen Mother come.

TP Yes, it was at the top.

MM And she opened that didn't she.

TP Yes she did.

MM Planted a tree.

TP Yes, so it was at Butterfield, but not the one the school the Queen Mother opened.

MM I think they should probably have pulled down a Hilldyke School, and built in there, and kept Butterfield school, it could have been a junior and senior with plenty of room there. And now they've put in a lot of houses.

TP Yeah, and all the children have got to go elsewhere, 'cos there's not room in the village for them.

MM Yes, it's not good is it.

TP No. And all these houses they've been building they'll be short of schools.

MM See I know Lattimore Road and that, I've delivered up there sometimes. What number are you?

TP Number 6.

MM 6.

TP It's the new ones on the corner, and there was a bit of rough land on the corner of Wick and Lattimore.

MM Yes, it's the first on the right, isn't it?

TP It is, yes, if you're coming from Wick.

MM Yes, they are different from the rest.

TP Yes, I'm in one of those. I've got an old postcard which shows just a bit of rough ground there, looking towards the school, it's just rough soil, they built them in 1977.

MM That church there has shut down now hasn't it?

TP Yes it is, they are talking about demolishing it, and putting something else up, with houses and flats above. I think they're going to keep the church, and they're going to fund it by selling the remaining land for housing.

MM You know opposite, by the church, next door, they used to have a Village Ball there, where they had functions. I remember going to a 14 year old birthday party there.

TP That was opposite the church on the same side?

MM No, not opposite, by the church, you could go straight in and it was just there.

TP What behind it?

MM On the same side, it was like a hut, you know, you could get quite a few people in. We had boxing there once, I went up there boxing a little bit.

TP You did boxing or you watched it?

MM No I didn't do much, they put me in with too many big old boys, you know they just paired you off, trying to get you interested weren't they?

TP Better to stick with football.