**Mill Street Memories – Florence Watts by Linda House**

Linda: How and when did your family come to the area?

Florence: How and when? All I can remember is Shorts Lane. Dad died when he was 35. My mother was a widow at 33. She was expecting my brother. The year before that she lost Billy, that was my brother, I didn’t know him. I was about 10 months when my dad died. I didn’t know him anyway. We were brought up on the Parish. Do you know what the Parish is?

Linda: The poor wage.

Florence: Yes, you couldn’t get any poorer than that. We used to wear boots. We would go round to Mr Parsley and he used to put steel things in the heels to make them last longer.

Linda: So how did your mum survive? Did she go out to work?

Florence: Yes, she was taking washing in. Stringed up with washing everywhere in the kitchen. I used to help her with the ironing when I came home from school.

Linda: What was your mum’s name?

Florence: Hellard. Annie Hellard.

Linda: And you were down in Shorts Lane?

Florence: Yes.

Male unknown voice: Where did your granny live?

Florence: I don’t know the name of that.

Male unknown voice: Wasn’t that by Gregory’s buildings?

Florence: Yes, at the end of there, there was a road going up there that was where granny lived. When my granddad.... every now and again, he had to go into hospital for you know, something or other and I would go and sleep with her. The first night I slept with her, she said “oh, you mustn’t get into bed”, I had to kneel down and say my prayers. I always had to say the Lord’s Prayer with her. She wasn’t pushing the bible or anything; it was just the way you were brought up see? Like Sunday school, I had to go to Sunday school like I did school.

I can remember going up and getting my present, your mother had a dress that shrunk when it was washed. I said to our mum, I was about 11 “can I have a new dress to go to the party with at Mill Street Mission”, “I can’t afford that” she said. She said “put one of the others on”, that was Malcolm’s mother, my sister. It was an ever so pretty turquoise dress, it was down to my ankles, she said “that’s alright, tie a bit of elastic round the waist”. I was ever so pleased with the dress. I had to walk up for my ordinary prize and I had one for full attendance for Sunday school; by the time I walked back, my dress was down to my ankles.

I was in a play at the Mission, they got a play up, they were good with things like that. It was called Aunt Belinda’s ........ I was the builder and I come in on a motorbike, they thought that I was somebody burgling the house and it was me see?

Male unknown voice: Where did Mr Edwards live?

Florence: Who?

Male unknown voice: Alfie Edwards, where did he live?

Florence: I can’t remember

Male unknown voice: I always remember him coming down Mill Street with a big Humber car, big grey Humber car.

Florence: He didn’t marry me though. Mr Jackman he was something to do with the courts, he had a licence to marry me. We were signing the register and he couldn’t speak, he was on the verge of tears. He said “you must excuse me, this is the first wedding I’ve took”. He felt a bit emotional. I always remember that.

Male unknown voice: You’ve got that photograph of Mill Street Mission there.

Linda: So you would say that you were very poor then?

Florence: Yes we were. When we come home from school, we had to go up and get the stale bread and cakes and our mother would say “ask for cream cakes if they’ve got any left” and we.... people today don’t know anything about it.

Linda: What shop did you use?

Florence: Virgins, the bakery up High East Street.

Male unknown voice: You remember where Phoenix was? The pub.

Linda: On the corner of Pound Lane, there was a shop there.

Male unknown voice: That was Popes. Sophie Popes.

Florence: No that wasn’t Popes that was Holloway Road.

Male unknown voice: Pound Lane, on the corner.

Linda: Did you ever use that shop?

Florence: Yes.

Male unknown voice: where you’re talking about – Virgins.

Florence: She had a great big earphone, she was so deaf.

Male unknown voice: We used to ask her if she had any paraffin....

Florence: We used to go and get paraffin for the lamps, she would go out and come back and somebody would come in wanting cheese, she would cut off a piece of cheese she would.

Linda: When people bought food, was it ever put in a bag?

Florence: Sugar was in a sack and they would weigh it out in bags and sweets, they would do a cornet like that.

We lived next door to Mortimore’s shop.

Male unknown voice: Virgins was... you know as you go up through town, High East Street, you know where you turn off to go up Icen Way, you know the Indian restaurant, next door to that is a bridal shop, that was Virgins.

Florence: We used to go into the fruit shop just below it, to get the pecked fruit.

Linda: Your mum took in washing then and then she was also on the poor relief. Did you ever go hungry?

Florence: No, she went hungry herself to feed us.

Linda: How many of you were there? I know that there was Malcolm’s mum, you and a brother.

Florence: I had a sister, she was blind, she was at blind school, she had one eye out and the other went totally blind. She died when she was 19 but when she came home from the blind school, we used to sleep top to tail. We only had two rooms.

Linda: So on this money, your mum was keeping 5 of you?

Florence: Well, Malcolm’s mum, she’s ten years older than me, she got married when she was 18, 19 or 20, something like that, I think it was just before she was 21 I know as she had to have our mother’s consent. Of course, she left and then it was just my brother and me and my sister when she came home.

Linda: Your mum, on what she got was feeding all of you and you never went hungry?

Florence: We didn’t go hungry; we would have our roast dinner.

In the summer instead of lighting up the fire, we used to take it up to Jack Wakes place up Holloway Road there and they used to bake the dinner for us for some much.

Male unknown voice: Who was Jack Wake?

Florence: He was a baker, then there was Sid Norman, who had a shop up top of Holloway Road by the infant’s school there. He used to do faggots and peas, they used to be beautiful. Wednesday’s I used to go up Market and you know, pluck the chickens.

Male unknown voice: What age were you when you plucked Chickens?

Florence: about 11 or 12. I left school at 14. It wasn’t only me, we were all alike.

Male unknown voice: Did you take that money back to your mum?

Florence: Yes. Tuesday’s or Thursday’s, we used to in chapel, it was called fellowship and we would go and do... I remember having first prize for embroidering.

Male unknown voice: You always did embroidering didn’t you?

Florence: Yes, I got first and second prizes for that. I had first prize for drawing. We used to learn to do all that.

Linda: You had to darn your clothes.

Florence: For our Sunday school outing, every Friday, I used to run errands for next door and next door again, I used to have sixpence a week for that.

Linda: That was quite a lot of money.

Florence: Yes, I gave mother three pence and then I put three pence in the club in chapel every Friday for our Sunday school and at the end of the year I had 10 and 6 pence. That was a lot of money. I used to love it.

Linda: Did the rent man come round to your house?

Florence: Yes.

Linda: Do you remember seeing him.

Florence: Yes, 5 shillings a week.

Linda: What did you have for that, how many rooms did you have?

Florence: a small room, one room downstairs, toilet downstairs.

Linda: Did you share the toilet with anyone or did you have your own?

Florence: No, we had our own toilet.

(They go on to say some more but I can’t hear as the kettle is on the boil).

Florence: I had to do the cleaning.

Linda: So there was one room downstairs...

Florence: and one room upstairs with another small room....

Male unknown voice: the landing was partitioned off, that was all it was.

Florence: With one little window, my brother used to sleep in there.

Linda: So you and your mum were in one room, your brother in the other room.

Florence: When Lin came home there were three of us in the bed. She was at the bottom and I was at the top and we used to take it in turns, you know.

Linda: Did you have sheets and blankets on your bed?

Florence: Yes.

Linda: You were warm in bed were you? Because there wasn’t any heating was there?

Florence: No.

Male unknown voice: it was cold when you got out.

Florence: I remember once, our mother was bad and I said that I would light the fire for her, she was upstairs, I was only a kid, oh dear, the smoke... literally filling up the room and she said “whatever have you done”. I had to put it all out.

Linda: Did you ever have a chimney sweep?

Florence: Oh yes, Mr Rancliffe, what was his name back then?

Male unknown voice: I can’t remember.

Linda: Can you remember what he charged?

Male unknown voice: about 2 bob wasn’t it.

Florence: Not much, about a shilling I expect.

Linda: I expect he had lots of cups of tea.

Florence: Yes. As poor as we were, mother would never let us eat margarine.

Linda: You always had butter?

Florence: Always had butter, she used to say “no, you’re really poor if...”, we couldn’t get any poorer mind and she always said “no, if you’ve got to eat marg, then you’re really poor”.

Linda: When you were a child, did you feel poorer than your neighbours? Did you feel that you had less than them?

Male unknown voice: No.

Florence: No, it was all the same. Apart from when you went to school, you would get a couple. One I sat next to, she said “I don’t want to sit near you because you come from Mill Street”. Teacher didn’t half tick her off. She said that the ones from Mill Street are cleaner than some of the others.

Male unknown voice: I think the stigma to Mill Street was more than was actually warranted.

Florence: It was a slum clearance place, that’s why.

Male unknown voice: It was built unofficially in the beginning; those houses were chucked up willy nilly.

Linda: It was the cheap rent wasn’t it? I don’t know what it was comparable with but.....

Florence: Our rent was 4 shillings and tuppence, but then going back to when I was 28, just before I got married, it went up to 5 shillings a week.

Florence: We got 10 shillings a week to keep all of us.

Linda: that was from the parish was it?

Florence: Yes.

Linda: Do you have any idea what she charged for doing the washing?

Florence: I don’t know, not a lot. It did help. I can remember coming home all stringed up, no mangles or you know.

Male unknown voice: Miss Marchant, she used to always take in washing.

Florence: They nearly all did to get the money.

Male unknown voice: She used to do all the Exhibition’s washing. Sheets, I remember that.

Florence: it didn’t hurt any of us.

Linda: Wash day was usually Monday but did your Mum wash every day?

Florence: Yes because she was taking in such a lot. Even when the war was on, she was taking in the soldiers washing. I used to do the ironing because I knew how they like the crease in their shirts by the pockets.

Linda: What sort of irons did you have?

Florence: Flat irons for the fire, spit on them. If the spit ran off, they weren’t hot enough.

Linda: How many irons did you have?

Florence: 2.

Linda: So you were using one and heating one on the fire, and that was your job when you were able to do it.

Male unknown voice: They were still in fashion when I joined the Navy. I used to go home on leave, I used to use a flat iron and when I went back on board, we had electric irons.

Linda: So did you ever have new clothes or did you always have hand me downs?

Florence: Oh, hand me downs, I can never remember having anything new.

Linda: Can you remember the first thing new you ever had?

Florence: Yes, when I left school it was, I saved up my pennies and pences, I don’t know if you can remember Astrakhan clothes. I bought an Astrakhan coat.

Male unknown voice: that’s the fur collar isn’t it?

Florence: similar to lamb’s wool, brown. I was out earning. When I first left school, I went up the laundry to work; I got 6 shillings a week up there.

Linda: Up where Sainsbury’s is now?

Florence: Yes. I fainted first day I was up there. Splinters everywhere in my hand. I was up there for a bit and then I went to work cleaning. My mother worked there and your mother – Mrs Creech in Victoria Road, she was awful, I walked out on her. He came down and gives me half a crown to go back for his sake mind. I went back and she used to drink a lot and then she would be awful. I used to cry every night when I come home because she was so awful. You daren’t chuck in see; you’d get a clout on top otherwise.

Linda: There would always be someone else who would do it....

Florence: Anyway, I was scrubbing our mother’s step one Saturday and Mr Hearst, the milkman, you remember... He said “do you know anyone who wants a job up Almons”. “She does” she said. He said that “we want someone down the farm to work”. Well our mother came down with me to make sure. So Miss Wallis she said “I don’t know, you look frail”, because I was only about a size 10 then, you know skinny. Our mum said “oh, she aint frightened of work, she can work”. I was in the dairy, I loved it, I was there about 15 years. Found her dead.

Male unknown voice: You found Miss Wallis dead?

Florence: She was ill

Male unknown voice: How old was she when she died?

Florence: 69

Male unknown voice: Oh, no age. I remember her being a big, fat woman.

Florence: Yes, she was lovely to work for; she taught me hell of a lot. I ended up.... I mean, I use to wash between 400-500 milk bottles a day as well as doing all the cleaning, in the milk house and everything. My hands were all cut and chapped from the soda water you see.

Male unknown voice: No rubber gloves in those days.

Florence: Well the war was on look, I went there when I was 15 and I was 28 when she died. She left me some money in her will. £20, that was a lot. I had her pearls and a few other things.

Linda: Did the farm end when she died?

Florence: Yes, it got sold up; the old chap came to live with me for a bit. He had nowhere to go you see. He was billeted on them from the First World War. I didn’t know it until he came to live with me that he had a daughter my age, he said “Claire would never marry me, that was Miss Wallis because he was a divorced man. He would do Christmas and Easter, you know, she couldn’t get to church so Mr Jessop, he would come down and I would go in with her and take communion with him. Didn’t used to be wine because she was a tee totaller, but it was a bit of bread and we just had water because she wouldn’t have any drink see.

She had seen enough of it.

Male unknown voice: Mr Hearst drank didn’t he?

Florence: He had his tot of whisky every single night.

Male unknown voice: I was always afraid of him when we used to go round and get some milk.

Florence: He was kindness itself.

Male unknown voice: When we were kids...

Florence: The kids were frightened of him, yet he would give a child a sweet or when I was going to pick the apples, he would give them this, more than she would. Although I worked down there, if I ever had half a pint of milk, I would pay for it.

Linda: So what did they do on the farm then? Obviously, they had their milk round and did they do eggs?

Florence: Yes, send them up, you know where.....

Male unknown voice: the egg marketing board used to be up in Church Street didn’t it?

Florence: You know where the antique place is now?

Male unknown voice: Top market.

Florence: That’s where we used to take eggs.

Linda: Did you make butter?

Florence: Yes

Linda: And cream?

Florence: Yes

Linda: And if you took any home, you had to pay for it then?

Florence: I only took butter and cream home but if I wanted say half a dozen eggs, then yes I would have to pay for it. That was my job, collecting the eggs, washing the bottles, cooling the milk and all that. I was supposed to go down there as a domestic, cleaning. I had cleaning as well as all that. Sunday to Sunday.

Linda: How many hours a day did you have to work?

Florence: 7 in the morning till 6 at night.

Linda: And that was 7 days a week.

Florence: Yes, Sundays and all.

Linda: Can you remember what you earned?

Florence: Yes, 10 shillings a week. When I left, I had 11 shillings.

Linda: So out of your 10 shillings, how much did you keep and how much did you give?

Florence: A shilling pocket money I kept.

Linda: You kept a shilling and then your mother had 9 shillings?

Florence: Yes. She had 10 when I got 11 though. Miss Wallis used to say to me “I’m going to give you 2 shillings extra and you mustn’t tell your mother”. Our mother did get everything out of me.

Male unknown voice: Well we had to do that as errand boy. I would errand boy over at Fletchers. I used to get 5 shillings a week, well that was for Wednesday, Friday night and Saturday all day. We used to give our old lady out of those 5 shillings - 3 and 6. That was the price of 2 pints.

Linda: Did your mum do a lot of cooking?

Florence: Yes, when she could.

Linda: You only had the fire then, you didn’t have any....

Florence: Yes

Male unknown voice: Had a gas stove later on though, Gran Clark, didn’t she.

Florence: Yes, a gas stove later on in those years.

Linda: Did you have a range at all?

Florence: Well, yes, we used to have the oven by the side. The cakes she used to... mind you, instead of milk it used to be water. We used to love it; we used to like it all. We used to like her fried chips, all dripping... My brother and I used to squabble over the dripping, you get the bit of brown at the bottom and well, when I used to go to work, On Mondays, I always knew my sandwiches through bread and dripping but the rest of the week it was bread and jam. That was all it was in those days.

We were happy thought. I can remember when we were kids; we wanted to go camping...

Linda: In the meadows?

Florence: Yes, Opposite Hardye Avenue there. What were those meadows....?

Male unknown voice: You used to have Daubney’s on the other side...

Florence; opposite churchyard, that was Wallis’s where I used

Male unknown voice: What Wallis’s Meadow. The field up alongside opposite where the sweet factory used to be, where the steam roller now is, what was that field? Part of it was a tip; can you remember when it was a tip for Popes? A bottle tip because when they turned it into a football pitch, they had a lot of trouble with the glass coming up but we used to go camping over at Ten Hatches, the little bit of green other side of Ten Hatches, towards Cokers Frome.

Florence: I can remember going to school and I used to love cookery and my Christmas cake was the best one of the lot. Believe it or not, the milk was watered down because the cookery teacher she said “this milk looks a bit weak” and I said that my mother couldn’t afford whole milk, so she put half water and half milk. My Christmas cake turned out .... and I had a star and was chuffed to bits with that.

We used to get a star if we did it nice.

Linda: What age did you go to school?

Florence: 5

Linda: and you went to Fordington?

Male unknown voice: Did you start at 5?

Florence: Yes

Male unknown voice: We started at 3.

Florence: No, we all had to start at 5

Male unknown voice: Well, we started up at Fordington at 3 because we used to get little mats out in the afternoon.

Florence: You couldn’t go before 5 in my day.

Linda: Can you remember how many teachers you had?

Florence: I can remember Miss Vincent, Miss Parsons, Miss Kimber, she was lovely.

Male unknown voice: Who was the big lady?

Florence: Oh, Miss Jenkins

Linda: So there were 4 teachers.

Florence: Yes, I went from infant school round to Icen Way Girls School by the gasworks there. Then, from there I went to Park School and we used to walk from Mill Street to there with our bread and jam sandwiches.

All winds and weather, not like today.

Linda: So why did you leave Fordington to go round to Icen Way? Because normally you would go from Fordington to Maud Road didn’t you?

Florence: Not when I was a girl, that girls school got closed down didn’t it.

Linda: What did they teach you in school?

Florence: Oh, all sorts, more than they do know I think.

Linda: Did you learn to read and write?

Florence: Yes

Linda: Were they strict with you?

Florence: Yes, sent outside, had the cane. I can remember one girl Molly; she had a sad life really because as you got older, I could understand why. She was pushed from pillar to post, parents didn’t want her, she was put in a home and she was terrible, she used to swear, awful. Miss Dufall, she was the teacher, she said “go outside Molly Jones and when you can behave you can come back in”. Molly would go out and straight back in again. She said “I told you to go out” but Molly said “Yes, but you said to me when I can behave I can come in, so I’m coming in”. She didn’t even shut the door, she was awful. I liked her, we got on alright.

Linda: Did you go to sleep in the afternoon?

Male unknown voice: Yes, we did.

Florence: No but some of them did, they had a bed, they used to lay them down on the bed.

Male unknown voice: We had mats.

Florence: Some of them, they had a little sort of camp bed thing and would go to sleep, that was at infant school.

Male unknown voice: I remember mother telling me that I used to go to sleep, I used to go off and they had to wake me.

Florence: When we moved to Park School, we used to have the little bottles of milk and I’m not boasting but I used to be pretty good with my sums and arithmetic and I used to have to do the milk money and all that.

Didn’t get anything for it but still.

Male unknown voice: We didn’t have to pay for our milk; did you have to pay for your milk?

Florence: Not in the beginning but they did at the end.

Male unknown voice: Our mother never paid for ours, paid for school dinners.

Florence: We never had school dinners. No, we had our milk free, sorry. I didn’t like milk to drink.

Linda: When you were young and living in Mill Street, what did you do in the evenings on light nights? Where did you play?

Florence: Well, we would come home from school and before we would do anything, we had to go and get the stale cakes and pecked fruit and then we would come home and this is when I was old enough, I had to do any sewing or patching to do. Then on a Monday night, we would go to... as I got a bit older, to Sister Cook’s, have you ever heard of Sister Cook? She lived up round North Square and she had about half a dozen, we would come home from school on a Monday and go up there. We would have a game or singing or anything like that.

Male unknown voice: What, like a girls club?

Florence: Yes, Sister Cook’s parties we used to call it.

Female unknown voice: How did she get the title Sister Cook?

Florence: I don’t remember, I suppose she was a Sister in the hospital or something. She wasn’t like a nun. She never used to wear a habit. She was alright. Then of course we had our Sunday school outing and that was exciting.

Female unknown voice: Once a year was that?

Florence: Yes. 6pm the night before, I used to say “Cor, we’ve got to wait right until next year before we go to Weymouth.

Linda: Was it always Weymouth?

Florence: Yes

Linda: On a bus?

Florence: On the train.

Male unknown voice: Bernie remembers going to Swanage from Mill Street Mission. I don’t remember Swanage. We always went to Weymouth.

Florence: I can remember going on an outing with our mother and remember as though it was yesterday. Years ago this was. I wasn’t very old and I know she took me with her. You can’t remember but there were these old fashioned buses and we were coming up that hill at Blandford, it was a very nasty hill.

Linda: Milborne St Andrew?

Florence: Yes, horrible hill.

Linda: Basin Hill.

Florence: We all had to get out and push. Our poor old mother, years ago, they wouldn’t take their coats off, no matter how hot it was, sweating like anything she was. We all had to get out and help push the bus because it conked out.

Linda: Did your mother always wear a hat?

Florence: When she went to chapel yes.

Male unknown voice: Hat and an apron.

Florence: Always wore a hat, you couldn’t go to chapel... so did I; I wasn’t allowed to go if I wasn’t wearing a hat.

Male unknown voice: That chapel is Mill Street Mission.

Florence: Not now. You can go without anything on, can’t you?

Male unknown voice: Well you’ve got to wear trousers.

Florence: No, on your head.

Linda: Did everyone else wear hats?

Florence: Yes, all the ones I know used to wear hats.

Linda: And men wore caps?

Florence: Yes.

Female unknown voice: Did they take them off when they went into the Mission.

Male unknown voice: Men did of course

Florence: In chapel, all the hats were taken off. They hung them up, in chapel, where you hung your clothes and all that.

Male unknown voice: Mill Street Mission was referred to as chapel, because everyone called it chapel, they didn’t call it Mill Street Mission.

Florence: I done all my Sunday school there.

Linda: Can you remember who your Sunday school teacher was?

Florence: Yes, Mrs Oates, Charlie Oates and his wife, they were nice. There were a couple of others. I remember Miss Golbier. I went right up to when I went down to the farm to work. Of course working Sunday’s then I couldn’t go.

Female unknown voice: So you were 14 then.

Florence: When I was about 13 or 14, when we got to that age, we used to have little ones that went to chapel and us older ones used to have so many and would read out of the bible, they didn’t understand what I was saying so I put it into my own words. They would look right up at you, little mouths open; they were only 4 or 5.

Male unknown voice: You were always good with children though, weren’t you? Even though you never had any, you were good with children.

Florence: Yes, I always liked children and got on with them... brother and sister, once they had their Christmas dinner would tap on my door and they’d sleep there see.

Linda: Your sister who wasn’t very well, who was blind, was she blind from birth? Was it something that happened at birth?

Florence: She was just born blind in one eye. It was a diseased eye and she had to have it out, she had a glass eye and then the other one went.

Linda: Did she go up to the hospital?

Florence: Down the eye infirmary she went at Weymouth.

Male unknown voice: Wasn’t she at Exeter?

Florence: Yes, she went to St David’s Hill Blind School. I remember when she was 11 years old; she had corns on her hand where they used to make them work. I would never give a penny to the blind, they don’t help them.

What a hill, St David’s Hill. It looked a horrible sort of building, way back, grey looking place. She got punished because... she didn’t tell our mother that she told me... she got punished because she used to do Braille you see, she was doing cakes and because she put a couple of currants in her mouth, she was punished and put in a dark room, not that it made any difference as she couldn’t see, she had to go without tea and supper until the next morning. I think that’s awful. They say its different now but I don’t know.

Linda: Did she have to go away because your mum couldn’t cope?

Florence: You didn’t have a choice in those days. It was the Doctors, mum had no choice. She had to go to St David’s Hill Blind school and that was that, whether you wanted to or not.

Linda: Did your mum have to pay at all for any of that.

Florence: No, she couldn’t afford that anyway.

Female unknown voice: How did she get there?

Florence: They used to put her on the Royal Blue, its National now isn’t it? We always used to go and pick her up from there.

Female unknown voice: And she would get met at the other end would she?

Florence: Yes, there would be someone waiting at the other end. She died when she was 19. It was the week after she died and we had a letter come in Braille and of course none of us, we didn’t know what it was.

Female unknown voice: was anyone able to decipher it.

Florence: She had a boyfriend there though. She had a gold bangle in there and we don’t know what happened to that, I reckon one of the nurses....

It was a blind place that they help people get a job; she got a tiny bit of money a week in Swansea, South Wales. We had a telegram to say could we come; they wanted permission from our mother for her to be operated on. She had a burst appendix. Of course, the poison spread all over her and we had a telegram to say that she was dying. It was in June, the beginning of war, I was 17 at the time, I said to Miss Wallis where I was working, could I have the day off to go to my sister because she was dying and we got on the train, wasn’t it hot, it was packed with troops, we left at ten past nine in the morning and we got there just about quarter past six at night. We got to the hospital there and I said to the fellow there, there was a copper, I said “excuse me, could you tell me where this hospital is”. He said “Yes, just up that hill, you can see it from here”. We went in and do you know that Matron as true as I sit here, she had tears in her eyes and she said “I’ve never known a case like it, they just dumped her here, covered in bed sores, we didn’t know her name”. Of course, right opposite there was a college that had only been built before the war, that was flattened to the ground by the bombs, the Matron was kindness itself, she made us some soup and toast and we stayed there all night with Lillian and come back the next day. I didn’t want to come back, Matron said “it’s not worth you staying dear, she’ll soon be gone”. By the time we got mum, your mother had a telegram to say that she’d died. That Matron lifted her arm up like that... to wave to us, it was sad really. She looked like a little ragged doll when we saw her. I cried like anything. She had her eye out, she was bandaged up where she had these bed sores and that’s how they had dumped her – wicked.

She was buried on a Sunday morning, well of course, our mother didn’t have money for cars and things, and she was taken round churchyard on a pair of trucks – the coffin. You know the trucks...

Male unknown voice: What they call a pauper’s grave.

Female unknown voice: Back in Dorchester? Is she buried in Dorchester?

Florence: Yes

Male unknown voice: Did they bring her body back for you?

Florence: Yes, on a Saturday night because Alfie Edwards, we went round and she stayed in chapel all night. He said could she be buried straight away and your mother, she went for Alfie Edwards, she said “she hasn’t done anything wrong, no, she’s going to have servers and she’s going to be buried properly tomorrow”.

He said that he would have to do it tomorrow morning at 11.00am.

Our mother grumbled at me because Lillian always used to say that she couldn’t bear anything dark, I suppose from being in the dark all the time. “When I die”, she used to say “I want everybody dressed in pretty coloured clothes”. I always remember that I had a dress, bought on coupons, it was the only dress that I had and I wore it. My mother grumbled at me, she said “wear your ..................”, I said “No, Lily didn’t want it”. She said “haven’t you got anything darker to put on”. I said “No”.

Linda: Can you remember the names of your neighbours?

Florence: Yes, my auntie – Ethel Baskett lived next door.

Linda: Was she one of the.....

Male unknown voice: Yes, the Basketts.

Florence: Of course, she went down to Hardye’s Avenue, one of them houses to live when they were first put up.

Male unknown voice: They had flat roofs.

Florence: They left them like that because they were going to add on, but they never did.

Male unknown voice: Well, if you went down Hardye’s Avenue from say, Kings Road. The houses there where Auntie Ethel lived, Dappy Downings....

Florence: Mrs Sprules, the Brewers and all that.

Male unknown voice: They were all back to front because Mr Edwards was going to have the road come through the back of the houses, if you see what I mean, so that the front door was at the back of the house. If you went down there now and walked down Hardye’s Avenue to those houses and knocked on the door which you would think would be the front door, you’ll open up into the kitchen – it’s the back door. The main road was going to come where the flats are.

Florence: I always think you know where you lived down St Georges Road; I always think that they are back to front because you had your big window facing out the back and at the front you just....

Male unknown voice: You had the scullery window.

Linda: Who else lived near you?

Florence: Oh, then when they moved, Mrs Gale, I don’t know what her first name was. (They go on to say that Mr Gale’s name was “Navvy”).

Florence: He was a tartar he was. He used to beat her; he was horrible to his wife.

Male unknown voice: They had the little girl in the wheelchair, Lily Gale.

Florence: Ah, that was the granddaughter.

Male unknown voice: That’s who we’re talking about... Bill and Abigail who lived next door to you, it was his son.

Florence: He married Elsie, I don’t remember what her other name was, she came from the country. She had one daughter, Lily. She was in a wheelchair.

Male unknown voice: She got married, Lily did, didn’t she? She married a chap from..... he was a brummie I think.

Florence: She married her cousin.

Male unknown voice: He worked on the railways.

Florence: He was her first cousin. She was a horrible little thing. She used to give him a dog’s life they reckon. I don’t know, that’s just what you got told.

I know she used to be a tartar, wanted her own way all the time, was always doing her hair in ringlets, you know.

Linda: Was there much violence?

Florence: Yes coppers used to walk down in 2’s every single day. Not only at night during the daytime.

Linda: Was it mostly drink or.....?

Florence: Well, I think a lot of it was drink.

Linda: How could they afford drink?

Florence: Well, they used to go into The Swan.

Linda: Yes but was it a lot cheaper?

Florence: Well, yes, cheaper than it is today.

Female unknown voice: or did they go without food?

Male unknown voice: Well, someone went short. No different from now, you get people now, what makes me laugh is that you see people on television saying that they can’t afford this and that but they’re all smoking. They’ve all got big screen televisions but in them days, we could have had more because my old man always worked and he had a good army disability pension but they did like their skim. That was the trouble.

Florence: It was only once a week though wasn’t it?

Male unknown voice: Well, Dad was Wednesday’s as well, when he used to draw his pension.

Florence: I can remember old Mrs Memry’s, I remember coming home once from the pictures, did you know where Elle Vallard lived opposite there? The Memry’s lived there and next door Ella White lived there. There was fighting like anything and all of sudden you’d see the coppers and do you remember a Jane Bull? No, you wouldn’t, George would, is your Dad alive?

Linda: Yes but Dad’s a bit confused; sometimes he can talk and really......

Male unknown voice: How old is dad now?

Linda: 90.

Linda: So they were fighting were they?

Florence: Yes and then the coppers would come down, further down there would be a couple more, you know.

Linda: When you were kids, when you were out playing or whatever, did you avoid certain men because you knew that they had been on the booze?

Florence: Well, we were frightened and if we went out, our mother used to say “anybody come up to you, a strange man, you tell them your father’s a policeman”. I told them that always, anybody who came up I would say “my dad’s a policeman” before the said anything. We were scared stiff.

We would go out bluebell picking and shirking . Primrose picking.

Linda: You went out Bockhampton did you? All along the stream out there?

Male unknown voice: Yes.

Florence: Oh yes, used to go out there and at the bottom, when you came to the end and the house was there, they used to sell apples, we would get a great big carrier bag for threepence. Tuppence or threepence.

Linda: Did you ever grow any of your own vegetables?

Florence: No, couldn’t afford to buy the things to put in...

Linda: You didn’t keep chickens?

Florence: My brother; when he got older, yes, we used to have a couple of chickens. He was awful, any animal – ferrets, he would bringing home stray dogs. We took one, he wouldn’t let me in the house this dog and I said to Cyril, my brother’s name was, I said “I’m going to sleep down Wallis’s, you’re bringing home these strange dogs and he won’t let me in the house”. Well, Dan and I we took them all out to Slyers Lane and we let them run loose, when we got home, he was waiting out by the door, he found his way back. Cyril took him out in the end because I couldn’t get in, he would be growling and showing his teeth.

Male unknown voice: and yet, you had one of Cyril’s dogs.

Florence: Ah, not this one. Only a little one, only 6 weeks old, it looked so frightened, we called her Trix because she was full of tricks, she used to take the buttons off.... we used to do the ironing see and fold it up and put it on the stairs, ready to take upstairs and she would get out there and rip the buttons off. We didn’t know what to call her, so I said “this little dog’s full of tricks” so we called her Trix ever since.

Male unknown voice: You were upset when she died.

Florence: Even now I remember when we had her put down. I cried my eyes out. I dressed her up in a bonnet once and booties. She was a lovely little thing.

Linda: What sort of furniture did you have in your room downstairs?

Florence: We had one of these old fashioned sofas.

Male unknown voice: A Chaise-longue.

Florence: A gas cooker in the corner and hard chairs to sit on and a table. I remember having to scrub the table and she said “scrub the way of the grain”. We had to do it all properly, it was all clean though and the toilet.....

Male unknown voice: My gran had a dresser, didn’t she? Right opposite the fire, a welsh dresser you call them now.

Florence: I can remember a photo, it was a real good painting on our wall but I never knew what happened to it. I know that our mother wouldn’t get rid of it. I often wonder if Lance... your mother and father had it? I don’t know.

Male unknown voice: I don’t know. The only picture I remember in Gran’s house was on the wall of the stairs, going up, was a picture of Lily and she had a little blue dress on.

Florence: I gave it to you.

Male unknown voice: Yes, I remember that in Gran’s. I remember at Grans’ somebody must have given her some paint because the cupboard above the....

Florence: well, we didn’t have any brushes.....

Male unknown voice: We did it with a rag.

Florence: With a rag, we used to do the painting of the cupboard. I remember going out blackberrying and mother had our dad’s walking stick because he was a drover, a cattle drover to different markets every day and he used to have this stick. She had it in the corner cupboard we called it. She had his black leggings he used to wear and now and again she would get them out and clean them up.

Male unknown voice: Well, they all wore leather gaiters.

Florence: I can remember having to hide them because, we were going out blackberrying and I said “can I have dad’s stick to reach the blackberries see, to pull them down because I couldn’t reach them and we got caught. Did she moan.

Linda: What did your dad die of?

Florence: He had meningitis. My brother died of the same thing the year before. He was only 6.

Linda: Did your mum have to pay for the doctor to come?

Florence: Yes, we had to pay then, but we didn’t because being on the parish, you didn’t have the money pay. I remember because Dr Day was our doctor, he was what you would call the poor man’s doctor. Everybody had Dr Day. I can remember he wanted to examine me, he was pulling my knickers down, I was pulling them up, I wasn’t letting him examine me. I thought he was being rude. “Mother” I said “I don’t want him”, then he said something else and I said “I ain’t lazy”. I didn’t like doctors.

Linda: Can you remember where Dr Day’s surgery was?

Florence: You know Weymouth Avenue, in one of the houses along there. He used to catch butterflies because when you went in on the wall, he had a case of all different colour butterflies, he would go out with his net and catch them

His wife was nice too because when I worked on the farm, they were friends with Miss Wallis. She would come down for tea.

Linda: If he was a poor man’s doctor then, he wasn’t as well of as someone.....

Florence: He was a poor man’s doctor he was.

Male unknown voice: Did the state pay him?

Florence: He had a car but he would always come everywhere by bike. He was Miss Wallis’s doctor as well. I said “aren’t you hot with that coat on doctor” because I was sat, after cooking breakfast for the men and that and I did a crossword and he came out to help me with the crossword and he said “always remember Florrie, what keeps the heat out, keeps the cold out, keeps the heat out” because he had a big coat on which was ever so hot, he didn’t look a bit hot see.

Linda: Did you have the tin bath on Friday nights?

Florence: Yes, not the bungalow bath, we had that when I first got married. A bath that we used to do the washing in. I said to our mother “I don’t want one after our Cyril, I’ll have one first”, we’d argue see. She would go first and then she would drop in another kettle of water and then he would come in after.

Male unknown voice: I remember our Lance saying to me and pointing to the water behind our mother “I’ve peed in there”.

Linda: What sort of soap did you have, did you have carbolic?

Florence: Yes, carbolic. Didn’t have no scenty stuff. Coming home from school and looking for nits in the head. “I saw you scratching” she said “come on”. Summer this was, outside the door making sure we didn’t have any nits on our head. You would get them there some of them.

Linda: What sort of work did the men do who lived down there?

Male unknown voice: Eddison’s was a big employer; the brewery. Eddison’s employed a lot though didn’t they Florence?

Florence: My uncle, he worked on the steam rollers, it was one of Eddison’s steam rollers, my cousin Gladys, you know that bit of slope opposite The Swan? She was 5 she was and she was walking up there and the steam roller didn’t see her and went right over her. He came round and it wasn’t his fault really, he couldn’t see her. He picked her up and took her up... my mother always reckoned that’s why my Auntie Cissy....

Male unknown voice: She was a cruel one wasn’t she.

Florence: My mother always said that she never used to be like that. She went like that when she lost her daughter.

Linda: You would have thought that the little girl would have run?

Florence: They don’t think see.

Linda: Accidents happen.

Female unknown voice: it probably hit her before she knew it.

Florence: I was telling Jill, our Jill, she likes to hear about years ago and when I told her about Lily, she said that it’s like one of these Catherine Cookson films.

Male unknown voice: They always say that truth is stranger than fiction.

Female unknown voice: I always used to love dripping and salt, you had to have salt with it.

Linda: When the American soldiers came, they were all round there weren’t they?

Florence: Yes

Linda: You got to know them?

Florence: Yes quite a few.

Male unknown voice: Remember that letter you had?

Linda: Did you have a sweetheart?

Florence: 2 or 3 yes. 4 or 5 – don’t go on. I never got serious with any of them. I was about 28 when I got married, I didn’t want to be tied down. Now, this little sailor, I had the mayor come up one day, of course, we used to tell him different names see, these fellers we used to go out with and he came up and said “Are you Mrs Watts”, I said “yes”, he said “Did you know an American sailor in the last war?” Well I only knew a couple of course and he said “what was the one you went out with mostly?”. I said “oh yes, there was one, ever such a nice one”, he said “do you know his name?”, I said “Yes, Al Reigher”, I don’t know what the Al was short for. He said “I’ve been trying to trace you for a month”, and you know Jo White? Well, he went down that way looking for somebody and he said “gosh, I know somebody Watts, her name was Florrie Watts”, I had told him my name was Glenys. I used to say the first name that came into my head. I told one I worked at Judge Jeffrey’s and he went in asking for someone called Margaret.

Anyway, this one, of course, he was looking for someone called Glenys see, but what I liked about this sailor was that he was very honest. I said “Are you married” because that was our first words with them, “no” he said “I’m engaged to my childhood sweetheart”. What was her name.... Isla. Well a letter was sent, he had been trying to trace me and he was filling up 30 years of his life. He was married; he lost one daughter and has two sons. He was going to invite me and my husband to go over to the states, he was coming to London because, well he used to say to me that what we went through with rations and everything and how good we were, kind like to the troops and all that and he thought it was lovely see. He wanted to pay back... he was very lonely, he was homesick, he told me. He was coming over to London for a month and going around the places, Weymouth and all that and he wanted to come to meet me and my husband and go back to the states, he was going to pay for everything and we could stay for as long as we liked.

Male unknown voice: This was about 15 years ago wasn’t it, 15-20 years ago?

Florence: No, 30 years ago.

Linda: Do you remember if the Americans were mostly nice?

Florence: They used to put on Christmas parties; they were ever so good to the children. I went to one with a Sergeant in the Army and his mother sent me a lovely petticoat and knickers to match, she owned a beauty salon and she used to send me all her makeup. I was never short. Our mother’s cupboard was tinned fruit, steak he used to bring down.

Linda: Their rations were better than your rations?

Florence: Definitely.

Linda: But they didn’t mind sharing them with you?

Florence: No.

Male unknown voice: No, they were very good, the Yanks. The Yanks were kind. They had a camp over by Grey’s Bridge and their Officer’s Camp was out Kingston Maurward. They were kindness itself.

Florence: They felt sorry for us because we were on rations see. I know our troops didn’t like it because they use to say that they had come and taken the girls but it wasn’t that.

Linda: So on a normal day, when you were a child, what would your meals consist of?

Florence: Bit of toast for breakfast with butter. Some mornings, if you didn’t want it, she would say that was the main thing, you must have it even if just a biscuit, she always insisted we have something in the morning.

Monday’s we would always have a roast, there would be some left over the next day with a bit of fry up and then if there was a bit left over, we would have a stew made with that, you only had about six pieces of meat, she used to put the veg and stuff in and we used to like it.

I can remember our dinner, not Sunday’s dinner but our dinner’s we used to have on a tea plate, not a big dinner plate. She had dinner plates but we had no dinner to put on them other than Sunday’s.

Linda: What sort of things did you eat after the meat ran out?

Florence: She would get sausages one day and perhaps bacon.

Linda: And you had faggots sometimes?

Florence: Yes, faggots and peas.

Linda: They were cheap

Florence: You remember Sid Norman, best faggots in town. I don’t like faggots now. If I’m out, I’ll eat one.

I used to make them down the farm and black pudding.

Linda: How many times a week, do you reckon you had meat?

Florence: Well, we used to have bacon and sausages; only on Sunday did we have a joint. Sixpence a joint of beef. If I come home and it was a bit fat, she would chuck that at me and say “take that back, I want something lean”.

Linda: Where did you buy your meat from, was that Norman’s?

Florence: No, down Durngate Street, used to be Voss, the butcher. Mr Wright worked there, Mr Voss was the boss and then there was Mr Watts. She used to say “go to Mr Watts”, he’s good.

Linda: Was it mostly the children who were went to buy the......

Florence: Oh yes, we all had our jobs to do. It would be all of us going on up to get the stale cakes. We’d come home and our neighbour would say “you got any cream cakes in there?” I’d go “I don’t know, I hope I have because our mother will clout me if I ain’t”.

Male unknown voice: They don’t sell stale buns and broken biscuits now do they? Remember at Fairs stores, you could go and get broken biscuits.

Florence: When Sunday school opened, we had to go to Boon’s in South Street. There was a Mr Smith, he was ever so good, she said “get three pennorth of lean ham, tell him you’re going on your own and you want it nice and lean”, he would give us a load of lovely lean ham for our sandwiches.

Female unknown voice: Is it where Robert Dyas is?

Florence: Yes.

Male unknown voice: I always thought Boon’s was opposite where Corn Exchange was, or is that County Stores.

Florence: County Stores.

Male unknown voice: Down the bottom was Dyers.

Female unknown voice: What about next to Wetherspoon’s? That was also a grocer’s shop.

Male unknown voice: Spinning Wheel.

Female unknown voice: No, above it Malc. Where Steve Banes is now.

Linda: Wasn’t that County Stores.

Male unknown voice: That was Fairs Stores.

Linda: Where were the slaughterhouses to?

Florence: Next to Wallis.

Male unknown voice: Sid Lear had one in Kings Road.

Florence: There was Bellingers. That one was where the big house was. I used to go round there with milk. I used to go round with the milk as well as serve milk. When I got married, I got a telegram from Milk Bottles and Jugs.

Linda: Where did you meet your husband to?

Florence: In town, at the Exhibition. He was in the Army.

Male unknown voice: Little Bombo

Florence: In the Dorset Regiment. He had been out of the Army then, he had done his 12 years.

Linda: Is there anything else you can remember? Can you remember the names of any more people who lived down there?

Florence: I know a lot that lived down there, there was Alf Vallerd, Alice Vallerd, the Memry’s, Jane Bull

Male unknown voice: Randy Legg

Florence: Old Mother Legg in Raybrook House next to chapel. Nobody liked her.

Male unknown voice: Miserable.

Florence: We were frightened of her, we daren’t go near her. She didn’t like children. We used to have in the Mission, a big square, a pole in the middle and May Day, it had ribbons and we would go round there. Whitsun – dressed in our whites. I was a tom boy when I was a child and the boys would be going birdnesting and I wanted to pick flowers, the water lilies, down Bockhampton Path and of course, I had my white plimsolls on and my white dress, I fell in the mud and I got a clout when I got home.

I wasn’t flavour of the month.

Male unknown voice: How many houses were round Lester Square? There was Dosher Lock in one.

Florence: No, Dosher Lock didn’t live in Lester Square.

Male unknown voice: Where did he live then?

Florence: You know going round to where Lance lived, that first house going round there, that was Dosher Lock’s house.

Male unknown voice: Yes, then he moved round to Lester Square, I’m sure. I remember going with Colin Didyard, going round to his granny. You know as you go up Leicester Square, you come into the square and it was there at 2 o’clock – their house.

Florence: I remember Mrs Lester used to live there. I used to think she owned Lester Square. Her name was spelt Lester. You know Ron Lester, that was his mother.

During the war in the Mission, they had the one room where we used to go to the Fellowship and then you had a bath for sixpence, you could have a nice bath every Saturday for sixpence. Then they had a room where evacuees come down and our Dolly, my cousin, of course, they were all lousey see, she was going nit-picking and cleaning and washing their heads – the evacuee children.

Male unknown voice: I took over to the Mill Street Mission that photograph of the commemorative stone that was of the bath house of the Mill Street Mission. I don’t know if you’ve seen that. It was laid in 1928 for Mill Street Mission Bath House. I found it, I had to go and survey a job down at Bradford Peverell and you know as you go from Dorchester and you go over that little humpety back bridge, to go back on the main road, well there used to be a little school there on the right, that was converted into a private house and I was walking around it looking and there were some steps leading down to the mill pond and down the bottom step was this commemorative stone, so I took a photograph of it.

Florence: I remember when they used to come and grind the flour in the Mill, where the flats are. They used to come up there, I forget his name now. They come round – horse and wagon to bake the bread, I can remember, Ethel Bugler, she had two children, a boy and girl. The boy was born stone deaf and she married a Lieutenant in the Army. They lived in Little Britain next to the farm, well when I was coming home, the boy was running out in the road and the baker was shouting and shouting. I went and grabbed him because the horse would have gone over him, not a shire horse; it looked like a racing horse. I said “he’s stone deaf, he couldn’t hear you”. He was cussing like anything.

Male unknown voice: Remember the bakers van had a little horse.

Florence: That’s who I’m on about.

Male unknown voice: I remember him running away down over Fordington.

Florence: You know Ralph and they, they had a pony and trap. Sometimes, he would go and preach in the Mission – Uncle Ralph.

They used to say he could heal.

Male unknown voice: Well he done our Bob didn’t him?

Florence: Yes and Hazel

Female unknown voice: What relation was Ralph to you?

Florence: He was my uncle. It was funny, there were three brothers, one married my auntie, one married my cousin and one married my sister.

Linda: What was your mum’s maiden name?

Florence: Hellerd. I liked granny Hellerd, I didn’t like granny Sykes much. Well, we come out of chapel and we always had to go up and see her, I used to stand by the door and that was it.

Granny Hellerd, I used to like her. When Christmas and birthdays came round, I would buy her a quarter pound of Bulls Eyes, they were only a penny a quarter. She loved these Bulls Eyes and she wouldn’t have a small hanky, it would always have to be a man’s hanky and it had to be white.

I got her a white hanky from out of my pocket money here I had saved it all up, well it was only about a penny. She was crying one day when I gave it to her and I said “you’re not supposed to cry gran, don’t you like it?”

“No my love, out of all my grandchildren, you’re the only one that gives me anything”.

I wouldn’t let anybody see me cry when she died. I went on up the “Hype” as we called it, round the back garden I believe, you couldn’t grow anything there.

Jane Bull, it was awful down Jane Bull’s, because you would pass by the door, open the letterbox and go “quack quack” and run on. She would have the door open and she would have chickens and ducks going in her house, that’s why they called her quack quack. She lived on the corner house there.

Door was always open for all the animals, the chickens and ducks, tame as anything.