BOLTON REMEMBERS THE WAR

Transcript of interview with Audrey Cole née Miller (AC) • Schoolgirl

Interviewed by Ken Beevers (K) 19.09.2005

K: Could you tell me your name first of all?

AC: My name is Audrey, Audrey Miller when I was a little girl.

K: Audrey Miller?

AC: Miller. Now it's Cole.

K: When were you born?

AC: 1935.

K: And whereabouts?

AC: 52 John Taylor Street. It's not there now, but that's where I was born. Then I moved when I was two to Venture Street and I lived there 'til I was 35, in the same street. Everybody knew everybody, and I went to school at the little school round the corner, which was St Mark's. It was a church school, the church was at the side, and it was a small school. It's still there and the headmaster was called Mr Brickles, and one of my favourite teachers was a lady called Miss Peeks - a petite lady, stout, very genteel looking but dealt with a rod of iron. Everybody liked her and, if you were good she would fetch you a treat, apples from her garden but she didn't tell us they were crab apples you see! There were more children with belly ache than anything but, it was the getting of the apples what was there. And we had school dinners... my Mother used to work.

K: What did she do?

AC: She was a ring spinner in the mill and my Father was in the Army.

When War broke out I was four and when he came back from the War I was 9. Five years was such a long time. The War started and that's when they'd started teaching us in school that when the siren went everyone had to get up quickly and quietly and march to the door, and everybody then filed out and down into the cellars which they'd made into air raid shelters. There were forms along each side of the wall and the children all sat there. We tried to talk or say poems or the teacher would tell us a story just to keep us good and not get upset. There were some children that use to cry, because they was frightened. Most children were frightened, but you just sort of had a laugh and a joke with your friend and that, and there you would sit until it came. Also you had your gas mask, put it on for so long and when there was no threat really of gas you took it off. But you carried it *everywhere* with you just to be on the safe side.

There were other teachers there, and where we lived there were a big works there and it was called Atlas Forge and there they made the metal for the guns and the things like that. It was like blast furnace there and a great, great big steam hammer that pounded these rails and sheets of iron and all that there were taken to the other factories to make the tanks and the guns and that. And every day and night, day and night this hammer pounded and pounded and people got used to it although it made quite a few of the houses 'belly out' the walls, you know how it's a double layer, well the front used to come away from the windowsills and things like that.

Also there were lots of children that wanted to go with their dads. When my Father went away, we all went down to the station, my Mother, me and my brother - I have a brother, he's called Henry and he's 3 years 26 days older than me - and we went to the station to see him off. Ladies and women, and young women were crying because they were going to say goodbye to someone they loved very much and fathers were holding children because they didn't know whether they was going to come back. And with that, when he'd gone, we have to start a life without him and that... My Mother was Mother *and* Dad and you had to behave and do good so that she didn't have too many worries, because the War was enough.

And she would look after us, and we had coupons, we got ration books and coupon books for clothes and for furniture. The point was there were people with money who could buy anything, but yet the people and the workers couldn't, so each one - it had to be fair - so everyone got their ration book so that they got their fair share, because, all the people with money would buy everything and the poor couldn't, so everybody had to be the same. And, from the rations you got one egg, one slice of bacon a week, you got potatoes, green things. The butcher - there was no meat in the butchers shops - it was all in the back, *if* he had it. They would only deliver certain times, and you would have to ration out a pound of mincemeat, or, you can't have a pound of mincemeat today Mrs Miller, you would have to have half a pound of mincemeat and

two chops, for that week. So, my Mother would make potato hash and when you eaten your potato hash, which was potatoes, onions and mincemeat, Oxo, she would make a big dish. So therefore, when you'd had your tea, tomorrow, you could have pasties and she would take the stuff from the bowl warm it up, put it in the pasties or a plate pie and you could have boiled potatoes with it or just vegetables, plate pie and gravy. Then there was rice pudding which was very hard to get sometimes, or sago pudding and, the sweets - there were sweet shops, but no sweets. All the jars in the windows, the boxes that advertised the chocolate and the sweets and the bullseyes and the aniseed drops - there were none. Everything was under the counter so that you got your share. My Mother would go to the shop when we found, out by word of mouth, they'd got sweets at Bainbridge's, so everybody went. But you queued, because you had to wait your turn, you couldn't just all rush in the shop, the gentleman behind the counter, Mr Bainbridge, could not deal with everybody like that, so you had to queue, and you got your turn. But, if you was at the back of the queue and the toffees run out before you got there, you didn't get any. So he would have to kind of try and remember that next time those at the back got served first. So that everybody then, got their share. And you could have, a bar of chocolate, a 2 ounce bar of chocolate, Cadbury's Milk Tray or Cadburys just plain milk chocolate, or Fry's Five Little Boys, as it had a picture of five little boys on it and barley sugars, and dolly mixtures and things like that. And you could get, we'll say - two lollipops, because that was equivalent to 2 ounces, a bar of chocolate and maybe two chewing gums, Beech Nut, and that was it. You got your share then, you had to go, you paid for them like everything else and he marks the ration book that you'd had your quota of sweets that time, and you could not go back, if you had millions, you could not go back and buy an extra bar of chocolate. Because it wasn't fair, everyone had to have their share. So you made it last. Sometimes, if you could manage to get some cocoa and a bit of sugar, you would mix them and put them in a paper bag and dip your fingers in them and you would have the cocoa and sugar. And also the fruit was not around when I was a little girl, there was oranges, but that was for ladies who was expecting a baby because they needed the vitamin C and the vitamins you see, and, sometimes, one lady that had a lot of children needed things what you had and she had got things that you needed, so - she would go and get the oranges for her children and then my Mother then would say, well what do you need, and she'd say well, I need flour and some sugar and so a bag of sugar went across and this and that, so each one helped one another by doing and sharing what they could. Most people, if they had a garden, they grew their own vegetables and some if they grew so much would distribute them or sometimes sell them you for a pittance really, it was just to keep him in seeds, a Mr Barlow he were called, and also the baker's shop and the pie shop, which you didn't get many pies, because they had the meat ration. And when you were at school you had school dinners, and they was quite good, and you got semolina for sweet with a dollop for jam in and you made it pink, you know!

There were no falling out, children would play in the street because everybody was the same. Mothers would go to work. Children would go to school. But, the point was, mothers, and sometimes fathers, that had a job that was essential and couldn't be taken into the Army, because their job was essential, they needed maybe worsted and that for the uniforms, people that made guns, people that made bullets, people that did all kinds of things, *they* were exempt – it was called, they didn't have to go to War, but they had to work. They might be students from universities and things like that, but, that was another time, they needed people to work now, everybody pulled together for a common cause, you see.

And we went to the cinema sometimes, and we had a radio. We used to like 'In Town Tonight' that was on a Saturday, because most times it was bed and work.

My Mother used to start work at half past seven at morning, we didn't go to school until nine so there was an old lady that lived across the road, a Mrs Collins, a wonderful old lady and she used to say 'Come in!' you know. At morning my Mother used to take us across and she used to tuck us up, on the couch, ready for school, take the coats off, get on the couch, cover you up with a blanket and talk to you and make you a drink of tea and she used to make the most wonderfully shaped bread you could think of. She used to bake, and if she had no more cake tins, she'd shove them in cups and they'd look like ice cream cones these breads, and she used to cut them and put butter on, if you could get butter, margarine or just jam - she made her own jam, she was a wonderful lady. And her husband, Mr Collins, used to smoke a pipe, and she laughingly used to call him Joe Boganny 'Come here Joe Boganny' she used to say and we thought this was wonderful you know, and when it came time, quarter to nine, it were 'Oh, come on now, you're going to be late' so me and my brother used to go to school and she used to say 'You're going be late, Run! If you fall don't stop, pick yourself up' but you had to be in school on time.

And if it came along that the air raid was coming at Manchester, you could hear the bombs dropping, and the sirens would go, and they'd built air raid shelters they were called, in your back yard, because we hadn't got a garden, we lived in a row of terraced houses, two up, two down, and so, it was like concrete, then a brick building with concrete on the top. A lot of people put doors on them to keep the cold out. They were cold and damp but every body had to go in them for safety. So, when the sirens went at night - you would get up, and put on the warmest clothes you could find. If you were a child you would put on a siren suit, it were called you had to hurry up quick, once you were wakened up in the night with the siren going, you just had to jump out of bed, get dressed quick, so the quickest way was to put on this suit, and it looked like a boiler suit. What's a boiler suit? Well it's what gentlemen work in and it's all in one from your neck down to your feet, with buttons or a zip and that kept you warm because it was made of woollen material and then you put your cardigan on or took blankets, a flask with hot tea in and butties just in case you were in that long you got hungry and were time to go to work, so there were many, many nights you spent in there, because like I say with living not far from Manchester you could hear the bombs dropping and the big explosions and the planes going over, you could hear them. In the sky you could see the searchlights looking for the planes and my Mother used to stand at the window when I was about five or six, watching, sometimes the sky, as we were going into the shelter.

And, there's other things. One time my Uncle Jack, he'd been at Dunkirk and he'd come home on leave and then he was going to Burma with his regiment and my Mother and Auntie Alice, that's his wife, we went with them to the station, like we did with my Dad and everybody was crying on the station and loving one another, and there was a young couple there, a young man, I remember it as though it was today, he was hanging out of the window and he had his arms wrapped round this girl so tight, and all of a sudden she started to sing - you thought how bizarre, you know, but nobody thought anything, they just watched them and she was singing 'We'll Meet Again, Don't Know Where, Don't Know When' and as she was singing she was holding onto him and the train set off and she was walking down the platform, holding him and holding him until it got to the end of the platform and she stood there with her arms holding him and singing, everyone was heartbroke on that station on that day, it really was sad, and the problem was - he got killed.

K: How, did you know who he was?

AC: Yes, he was a friend of a friend of my Uncle Jack and he got killed in Burma and he never came back and that. And I thought, how tragic - she loved him so much.

K: You don't know who she was?

AC: No I don't. I don't. Because like I say with being about six or seven year old, you know, you don't ask names you just watch, and like I were telling you everyone were crying and hugging one another and things like that. It were very sad.

K: Did your Father write often?

AC: Yes, he wrote and that, and like I say we had our pictures taken, special for him to take with him. He came home, I think, twice, during the War, but the last time he came home we got told as he would be at Manchester, Piccadilly, so like I told you my Mother bought me a new coat. It were a bonny one, and my brother a suit and we got ready and we were heading for the station, and we got to the station and we were going down the steps because we couldn't wait for him to come. We hadn't seen him for such a long time and as we were going down the station steps he were coming up, because he couldn't wait for us to go to Manchester to him, he wanted to come home. So as luck had it, as we were going down and my Mother was saying 'Come on, come on, we're going to miss the train' he was coming up. My Mother run to him, put her arms around him and that and he loved us and all that and then he came home and his friends came and he'd been in Italy and they had a very, very big party. Everybody was drunk (laughs). And the pub at the top, they couldn't get the beer down fast enough to the house, so they filled buckets, enamel buckets with beer and come running in with the beer and you just ladled it out of the... everybody was comatose after that.

K: Which pub was that?

AC: It was called Atlas Forge at the top of Venture Street, because all the workers, they needed to have a drink, with working in the blast furnace and all the hot metal and things like that, they sweat that much they had to go in the pub you see, they were allowed two pints a day, free, you see, (laughs) so they come running down with buckets full of beer and put them on the kitchen table and if you wanted one you just went in and got one. Everybody were drunk, everybody were drunk.

K: You can remember that vividly can you?

AC: Yes, (laughs) I can. And that young man and that young lady on the station, even now, you could imagine it in a film, you know, but it was real. And I think I were about six, six and a half, something like that. I can see it now as she was clinging to him as the train were moving along and that, and she was singing to him and he was singing to her, and as she got to the platform people grabbed her back because she was going to off the platform with it, and he got killed, there was a lot of sadness. And that, and people getting killed in their houses, and that, and we were told at school, you know, about people that had had family that lived in other towns that had been bombed out and things like that

And the gentleman next door to us, Mr Pickles, he worked at the blast furnaces in Manchester and they worked day and night and many, many times he's come home with all his arms bandaged because hurrying up that much to get so much out, and that, that when they poured the metal it used to spurt out of the big cauldrons and land on their arms and sometimes in their boots and burn them, very badly and that, he'd got big burns on him and on his arms, to the bone with red hot metal dropping on him, and he would go, even when he were ill, his arm bandaged up and everything, but he would still go to work as they needed them he said, the need it, they need the metal and that, Mr Pickles he was called.

And there was another family opposite us and their son got killed in the War, I don't know whether you know him - Ellis Bailey, well Mrs Bailey and her husband lived opposite us in Venture Street and they'd four sons, Ellis, Thomas, Fred and Walter, and I think it was Fred and he was in the, I don't know what regiment he was in, but he was in the War and he got killed and my Father did his best to go and take a picture of her son's grave and I have it somewhere and it says his name and there are two other pictures of other graves that are there and, he came home and told them that he had stood at his grave and said a prayer and he'd got a picture of it for them.

K: Did this make you frightened?

AC: Yes, because the longer your Dad was away you thought he was never coming back. And then you'd hear of somebody's dad being killed in the War and then you'd think 'Well, what if my Daddy doesn't come back?' You know, and you're telling people he's in the Army and most everybody's children had someone, uncles or brothers and that in the War, you, you couldn't meet anyone that hadn't got someone that was abroad, you were all worried. You'd write a letter to him 'Dear Daddy, you know, missing you, please keep safe, I love you, goodnight, Godbless' you know, and all that, 'Please hurry up home. Missing you very much' like all children do 'Please be safe, don't go roaming round and get shot' and silly things what you'd think today but to a child in them days, you loved your Daddy or your Dad or whatever you called him, you know, or your Grandad, sometimes if you were young enough there was in the Home Guard there was people that worked but they were in the Home Guard at night or whenever they were.

I had an uncle and he worked at Hick Hargreaves, because he wanted to go in the Army but his job was essential, working on making guns and I had auntie - Auntie Alice, that's Uncle Jack's wife, she worked at Hick Hargreaves making shells. So she did her share. My Mother worked in the mill, so we went to places, we'd have rummage sales and the proceeds would go to the Red Cross and things like that, so that you thought you were doing your bit, and other children that was upset, you'd play with them and try and take, you know, their mind off their sadness. And in the evening, when all the people had come home from work, with being in one long street where we lived, it was one block, a little back street, another block and then another block, but those in the immediate area, mothers and grandma's used to sit on the doorsteps talking. The ladies across the road would do the same thing on a stool at the door. You would talk. My Mother would be talking to Mrs Pickles, or Mrs Cain or Mrs Bradley and Mrs Mort and they would be talking, 'Have you heard from your son? How is he?' all this talking, while the children played in the street and then my Mother would say 'Come on - it's half past six' and you'd be saying 'Aw, Mam, no, I want play!', she used to say 'Now!' and you had to go no matter whether you were having a great time or whether you wanted to play any longer, when your Mother said 'Now' it was now. Because she was Mam and Dad and you respected her very much, and you loved her very much, because she was doing so much to keep everything the same for you, she would say 'In - now!' and you'd say 'Awwww' and she'd say no 'Awwww - now' so you would go and you would get at the sink, because there was no bathroom, so you would boil the kettle and you would have a good wash and you would put your pyjamas on and you would go to bed. You would stand at the window with the curtains, watching all the other children play, but you couldn't, you had to be up at six in the morning.

She had to be at work at half past seven and she had to get you ready, so, you had to do as you were told. And like I say in the mornings she used to kiss you, and 'Have you got your gas mask? Have you got your two biscuits?' or toast and that was for your lunch. At break time you either took two biscuits because there weren't many biscuits about, so, you'd wrap them in greaseproof paper and you'd put your name on them, and when you went into school there was a tray at the side of the door and everybody put their lunch on the tray, sometimes it was a biscuit, sometimes a couple of arrowroot or Marie biscuits. There were no McVitie's milk chocolate wholewheat! There was plain biscuits or toast. Some children would fetch toast. At playtime there were a bottle of milk. I don't know whether it was half a pint or a quarter, but it was a little bottle of milk and you got your lunch, you went to the tray and got it and sat down. If the siren went off everything was left. You just grabbed your gas mask and you queued at the door and then down into the cellar whether you were hungry or not. Because most children didn't have time to have a breakfast. There were no cornflakes, there were porridge if you were up early enough or if you could get it, because there were no sugar, because the sugar was needed for other things. And if you wanted a cake, say, it was somebody's birthday in the immediate area, or friends, everybody used to give a little bit, one would give two eggs and one would give flour and would one give a bit of flavouring or whatever, just to make one cake so that you could enjoy your birthday. Jelly was like raspberry pop with gelatine, you know, it didn't taste so good but it was a jelly, and they were good times, although you were worried all the time, frightened most of the time, they were good times, because you had good friends, and people helped one another more. Someone was ill, a neighbour would come, she would take you to school. Another neighbour would look after your mother if it was your mother. Another neighbour would come and do her washing. Nowadays it's not like that. There's no neighbourliness like there used to be.

Another time my Mother used to go to the wash house, because we had no washers in them days, so you went to the Public Wash House which was on Shaw Street cum Rothwell Street. Now when you went in, your Mother used to go and you used to collect all your clothes that were dirty for the week, because when I were a little girl, my Mother used to take them, come back, and she would iron everything. And above the fireplace, you know, in the front room, there was a line, we called them lines, and you could let them down and put them back up and each line on this thing, mine was the front one and I had a clean outfit for every day, socks, underwear, skirts, jumpers, blouses, dresses and they were all in a row each one was for the day of the week because my Mother didn't have time to keep washing, so, then it was my brother's and he would have boys trousers and jumpers, v-neck jumpers and shirts, socks and underpants. And then my Mother's, and then at the back was her mill aprons, because you always had to be nice and clean, everybody was clean in them days, it would be flowered material and you worked in it and if it got oily and things like that, each day you changed so that at the end of the week you got six of everything and you would then put it in a pram, a baby pram in big bundles overalls, whites, towels and coloureds and things like that and you would then have already booked to go into this washhouse and you went in and there were sinks in a row, spin dryers and in rows they were and there were big iron zinc sinks and a rubbing board, a scrubbing board at the side and at the bottom of the room were these like long, narrow cupboards and as you pulled them out, they were on castors, on runs and it were hot air inside these runs to dry your clothes. Bedding and towels, you did them first and them you put them in to dry, when you'd done that, you'd then come back and you'd scrub the overalls and things like that and then you'd took them in buckets to the spin dryers, only there they called them 'whizzers' you see 'Put 'em in t'whizzer!' so you did. And the children was outside in a special room because they know there were nobody to mind them so you got took to the wash house and there were little forms round, and toys so that you could play safe while your Mother was doing the weekly wash and then when she came out, half way through, it were cup of tea time, so she could come out and get a cup of tea and a biscuit for a penny, and she would sit down and they would all be talking all these women and children would be playing and then they'd go back and finish off. And it was washed, dried and ironed in two hours. The bedding was ironed, the towels were ironed, things like that, but dresses, skirts, my Mother ironed when she went home. She did washing for two other people, other nights as well as working in the mill, so you see, she worked very hard.

K: Which mill was it?

AC: She worked in two or three, she worked at Marsden's, down St Mark's Street, she worked at Mill Hill, she worked at Donald's (?) I think I'm not sure and also Crosses and Winkworth's, she worked. I used to work in the mill.

So other times it would be to go out and you could go to Barrow Bridge on Saturday or Sunday, your Mother would take you, and there were a boating lake at Barrow Bridge and posh - we thought they were - posh houses along the side of the river. And you could get a tea, bread and butter, we're talking about a salad, either cheese or a little bit of boiled ham, on rare occasions if they could get it, and you could go in these houses and you could have a tea, and it would be like a pot of tea, bread and butter, and these salads, you know, sandwiches, and it would cost you two shilling for everybody - me, my Mother and brother. It was two shillings, that's ten pence now, and we would think it was absolutely wonderful, because to get on the bus and go somewhere where it was a beautiful little village, still is, and then come back through Moss Bank Park and see the beautiful trees and everything, because where we lived, the park was quite a few streets away, Bobby Heywood's park, I used to go to church, we went to St Mark's Church and every Friday we used to clean the brasses in the church to get out of arithmetic. (laughs)

K: You used to have something called 'Holidays at Home' which were during the Bolton Holidays in the park, this was during the Wartime. Do you remember those?

AC: No, I don't think so. I know we used to have sports days and things like that on the park, and, like I say rummage sales, I remember rummage sales and school fetes and I remember the children walking and things like that. Sunday School, because I were a singer, they were called singers when I were a little girl, and the Mission was called the 'Out and Out Mission' and you wore a white dress and a veil and you used to sing the hymns so you were called a singer. And the Sunday School used to walk and the grown-ups used to walk at the back, and that, and that was your little Sermons Day it were called, Sermons.

And I once remember climbing over a wall and I fell, because my Auntie Florrie shouted me, you see, and I weren't supposed to be on the wall, but I fell, not this side where it was low, I fell seventeen feet or twenty feet down the wall of a lodge, and the good thing was they were drained at the time. They were shifting all the rubbish out to put more water in. I broke two bones in my foot, my Auntie carried me on her back to the infirmary and I'd broke two bones and they put me, it were like a Dutch clog, on me foot. And the sermons were coming up and I didn't want to be walking round, because I'd new black patent leather shoes. So I didn't want this pot foot on, you see. Anyway they said 'Don't worry, if the sermons come before the plaster comes off, well come and we'll put you some new white plaster on top' for't make it look... (laughs).

K: Do you remember the air raids that took place in the area that you lived?

AC: Yes, I remember, like I said before you could hear the aeroplanes coming across, and that, because they were heading for Manchester, Liverpool, anywhere where they were docks.

K: But there were some people killed in the Punch Street area, do you remember that?

AC: I remember it going round the town that people had been killed, and that, and everyone were very sad. You know, because you thought, well it didn't happen here. It happened at other places but not here. You know, so when it did happen it was quite a shock because then you knew the War was here, not only abroad or at Manchester. It was still *not here* and you could get away by thinking you knew all these things but it's not really here until it happened there. And they dropped bombs on Hick Hargreaves and that's just at the bottom of Bridgeman Street, where Sainsburys is now, and that. And there used to be a railway station, because they were trying to get the railway tracks and the station, you know, to stop the goods wagons and things like that, going and collecting stuff to move to other places, so they were trying to find those places.

K: Did you see the damage?

AC: No, I have seen pictures of it but I didn't go.

Like I say, with my Mother working all the time, it were more or less in the evening or Saturdays you were all together. She dropped us off at half seven and she didn't get home until half five. So by the time you'd had your tea, you'd had an hour playing outside it were bedtime. So it were all bed and work, bed and work, but also I remember my Mother queuing for me for a doll at Marks and Spencer's and she queued and queued and queued and it was one of these pot dolls and it had a wig what were glued on in three places with brown thick glue. Well once the beautiful ringlets were gone if you took the wig off, you ended up with a doll with big brown patches of glue. And also it used to be like the cigarettes at the Co-op, everybody down and you were queuing and queuing and you were only allowed so many. Well, my Mother didn't smoke but she got them for when my Dad came home, he could them take cigarettes back with him, and Uncle John, he smoked, so she would half it you know, and he would queue up. And like I say they would say to you 'Butchers has got meat, butchers has got meat' oh right, right, but when you got there, there were about seventy people in front of you and it were if there were

none there were none by the time you got there. People would say someone had sent them, got them a tin of corned beef, well that was, you'd never seen corned beef! Meat in a tin? My Uncle Jim come with some and some dried eggs, now we couldn't understand how they'd got the eggs in the box, because we thought they was just ordinary eggs in the box you see. And, you used to have omelettes made with them and we thought they were wonderful. My Mother used to cook with them she made omelettes. Sometimes she baked, she made the best cakes ever, when she made them. She'd save her flour up and she'd go on the market and when it were damsons, if there were any, strawberries you didn't get so much of, but apples you could go and get apples, people who had allotments a few had apple trees, and they'd sell them you so that they could keep buying other stuff, like leeks, carrots. You'd buy carrots off them to supplement what you got at the normal places. And she used to save it all up and then she'd bake, and as you came down the street, you could smell it, the pies, flat cakes, coconut loaves, which were very rare because you couldn't get the coconut. But they were absolutely wonderful, and I'm the same I bake now but I don't want them to eat them, I want it all laid out like my Mother used to do on the kitchenette, laid out, apple pie, rhubarb pie, damsons if there were damsons in season, flat cakes, it's pastry with currants, sugar, then folded over then rolled and then they're flat, flat cake and we used to enjoy that.

Well, and there were other times as you'd go to Harry (?) that were a little shop on Lever Street and he used to sell herb beer and if you needed any medicines or anything like that, all herbal stuff he used to sell, he were called Harry (?) and you could go with ha'penny and get half a pint of these herb beer and he used to, you know, more or less, dole out little medicines because you didn't go to the doctors very often.

And another time we used to go to the cinema. If the sirens went when you were in the cinema, well, it was up to you. You could sit and watch to the end or you could get up, go out.

K: Which cinema would you go to?

AC: Well there was about four around about us, on Fletcher Street, there was the Ritz Cinema, on Daubhill it was the Tivoli, and on Deane Road, near Deane Road it used to be the Regent and then further up Daubhill it used to be the Majestic. Now, if you were well-off you could go 'first house' - that was half six 'til eight - and you would get a big film, the news which you watched, hoping you could see your Dad, and when it showed, say our troops in Italy or El Alamein or wherever he were and you eyes were all over the screen, looking in case you see him, you know. Who was it that saw somebody, wan't it, who we were with, and she said 'Look, look, Daddy!' and it were it were her husband and they were in a truck going along holding on to the truck and that, and as I say everybody was looking in case you could see and also you listened to the radio at lot, there was no television so you listened to the radio and you listened for the news. And where all these things were happening and all that. So, you worried, you say there waiting in case they mentioned somewhere where you knew you husband is or your Dad is and if there's bad fighting there and things like that, well you're that worried more, so.

K: Did you go to the children's Saturday morning cinema?

AC: Ohhhh, yes. The Ritz was called the 'bug hut' children called it, the bug hut, (laughs) when you went with your penny or your tuppence - tuppence you were in the good seats but a penny you were with the rabble, sort of thing. And we used to watch Buster Crabbe, Lone Ranger, Hopalong Cassidy, Johnny MacBrown and all those. If you were lucky, you still got some sweets left, and you could take, you know, a few sweets with you, because I don't think there were any ice cream in them days. Maybe after the War, yes, but not during. And also there were another one - Regent - and they called that the 'chatter scratch' (laughs) the bug hut and the chatter scratch it were what children called it you see.

K: And were you ever in there when there was an air raid?

AC: Err, yes, once, and everybody were up, there were quite a few die-hards that's 'oh, I'm watching th'end, I've paid me money' - you what? - but the point is there was nowhere to go, there were no air raid shelters there, no where around, unless you lived back to back with the cinema and then you could go in your own, but there weren't any, you'd just come out and you'd stand under the awning which was a bit silly.

K: Which cinema were you in when..?

AC: Err, The Ritz.

K: Right.

AC: The Ritz cinema - it went to Windsor Bingo. I once remember going in with my Mother and we were watching the cinema and I said like I wanted to go to the ladies, and when I got there the lights were very dim and I looked in the toilets, and as you walk in you look, and I looked and I

saw this thing and I run out and I run to my Mother and I said 'Mam, Mam, there's a kitten in the water and it drowning' so she looked at me, she said 'You what?' I said 'There's a kitten in the water Mammy and it's drowning' so she came with me and it was a rat. (laughs) And it's strange little things, and the manager said 'Oh don't worry, it's just come up the S-bend' and he kicked it like that - and it shot back down and he said 'See, everything's alright, with the War on who's mithered about a few rats' (laughs) and that's what he said to her, 'With the War on who's cared about a few rats' she very near hit him!

And then another time I went on walkabout again at the Ritz cinema and there was half six until eight, and then there were an interval and then there were what they called second house. That meant they showed it all again but to *new* people coming in, but if you didn't want go you didn't have to go, you could sit and watch it all again. But this time the door was open, a little bit, at the back and being nosey, as usual, out I go, and the problem was - I got lost. I walked that far I couldn't find my way back to the cinema. And I were walking along, and all that, and all of a sudden a policeman stopped me he said 'Where are you going? I said 'I'm looking for my mummy' and he said 'Where is your mummy?' I said 'Oh, she's in the pictures' because that's what we called them in them days, we didn't say the cinema we said 'Are you going pictures?' So, he said 'Oh is she' He came into the cinema with me, he took me back to the cinema (laughs) flashed on the screen 'Will Mrs Miller please come to the manager's office!' so, my Mother got up and came and I'm stood there, holding the policeman's hand. She said 'What's to do?' he said 'Do you know your child is wandering the streets alone?' she said 'No, she'd just gone toilet' and he said 'I've just found her in Slaterfield, that's three streets away from here' and she were going get into trouble for me wandering out, the policeman thinking I'd been left and she'd gone to the cinema and left me. So I got a very good shouting at! (laughs) I don't know...

K: Do you remember when the War finished?

AC: Yes, everybody was so happy and we had a party in the street, everybody did their bit, you know, giving, and all that. And flags across the street, and everybody at night time, they had dances, you know, dancing in the street, with records, wind-up ones, you know. Everybody was so happy and you thought your Dad was going come home. Yes, I remember, everybody was so happy. Everybody were crying and loving one another, so.

K: Did you think you'd see your Dad sort of in the next week?

AC: Yes, I thought he'd be home the day after, only he didn't it took them a good few weeks to come home and then he wasn't de-mobbed, he went back and like I told you he went back to Trieste and he formed this service so I didn't see him again for a long, long time. But we went living there, British Married Families, and I lived in Trieste for four years.

K: Your Father was a regular soldier?

AC: Yes, he was a regular soldier.

K: So you lived in Trieste from what date?

AC: Oh, '48 to '53 so I went to a British Army Secondary School there and also a convent school, Notre Dame de Sion it were called. It were an Italian school and I learned Italian I can read and write it and do all that. My brother, he came, although when the War had finished, he'd started an apprenticeship at Jackson's Wharf Foundry to learn to be a loose pattern moulder that made wrought iron fireplaces, Victorian ones, well, they made them and they made all sorts of things - things for guns - they made the pattern for them and then poured the metal in, and that, and made them. And my Dad was head of the mounted section of the military police, the Venezia Giulia Police Force it was called. And we lived in British Army accommodation in a hotel and then two or three years later we went into a flat and so I liked it, very much.

K: And you had an uncle in the services as well didn't you?

AC: Yes, Uncle Jack, he was in the Royal Artillery. And after Dunkirk, which he was there at Dunkirk, he came back home and after a few weeks they then sent them to Burma. And he never came back until the end of the War because it were too far for them to come. I would think, from Burma, I don't remember him ever coming back until the end of the War. And he fought with Slim and the Chindits he fought with them and also with the... he must have come home on leave once or something like that because he used to tell us. He was in a trench that everything was so quiet and he thought 'There's something up here' and as he put his head above the trench, a Japanese were there and hit him with his gun, broke two teeth out of his mouth, anyway he said he didn't walk away. And the Ghurkas were with them, and he said they are wonderful people, really, really nice people. And he said they would go out on patrols on their own, quiet, he said and when they'd come back they'd have strings, with ears on and you wouldn't hear a noise anywhere. He said they'd creep up behind a Japanese soldier or a soldier

as they saw in the jungle and they'd feel his boots, and if his laces weren't laced up proper, the English way, they killed him, (laughs) it were God help you if you didn't put you right laces in, and it were how they felt, they felt at his boots and if his laces were like that, it were either he were a Japanese or then over like that, the English way, he left you alone, because he knew you were English. But otherwise you were dead he said and whoosh you were dead. And they would go in these camps, Japanese camps and in the morning they'd been in and killed a lot of them and come back and one of two they left alive. He said they were wonderful people he said they were, I said 'Yeah, they sounded like it' he said 'Yes, but one has to do what one has to do' he said at a time like that.

K: And he got the Military Medal didn't he?

AC: Yes, he did. He got the Military Medal and I don't know whether it was the DCM as well. That's Uncle Jack there, like I told you, he was at Dunkirk and while they were going and all that, they were helping the French people, and that, and people to get away and one lady, because he helped them... I think there were three ladies and two children and he helped them to get on a boat, and one of them she shoved some things in his hand, and he said 'No, no' and she said 'God Bless' as the boat were going, and it was a watch, a ladies watch, a cross - it was opal stones and a red ruby centre, now I don't know where that's gone but I've got the watch, the watch is an old one.

K: That's a good story.

AC: Yes, and he helped them and they went on to get to the beaches and he were there on the beaches while they were pounding them and he managed to get on a boat and then when he came home they were here for only to long and then they were shipped to Burma and that, and that's where he got his medals.

K: In Burma?

AC: Yes.

K: And your Father won something as well.

AC: Yes, he won the MBE

K: The MBE?

AC: The MBE

K: Was that for after the War?

AC: No, it were during the War. I once went to Preston and the Military Museum there is for three regiments, one of them my husband went to first and he told me about them, that in the Duke of Lancaster's Own Yeomanry Section, there was my Dad's medals and I didn't know. And it said 'Displayed by the courtesy of Regimental Sergeant Major Miller, Henry Miller' and that, and they were his medals there. So when I went it were maybe a couple of years later they'd gone, now they'd either been put back in the archives or my brother had come and taken them back, but, my Dad won a lot of silver cups, when he was doing his horse riding in between the police duties. We have that cabinet, that was my Mam's and he were full of silver cups, he ended up with them and the medals and it's no use saying anything else... But.. he wanted to join the Army while we were in Trieste my brother, my Father knew that many people, big people, they was going to stop a frigate going from Cyprus to England to come all the way up the Adriatic to pick my brother up for him to join. He knew a lot of people, he really was somebody over there, and he could never, ever, quite go back to being the riveter at Walmsley's Forge. He didn't quite make it back.

K: But couldn't adjust...

AC: No, he came back and he tried for the British police, mounted police. Well, we only had two/three horses here, so to try Manchester, so he tried there, they hadn't any vacancies, so somebody said try London they have a lot of mounted police down there so that's where he went afterwards, and that, and he never come back...

K: Oh right, he went to London.

AC: He went to London and never came back.

K: He stayed there.

AC: Stayed, stayed. But like I say when you've been and done so many things, and a War and things like that, he just couldn't come back and be the riveter, like he was before, because he'd seen a different life, and that, and so.

K: But as a family you'd lived in Trieste?

AC: Yes, my Mother, me and my brother.

K: And it was after that, that he..?

AC: He came home in '53 and he came back in '57, I think or '58, or something like that and then, like I say he went down to London and he stayed down London, he worked for Customs and Excise, but he never came back to live up here.

K: But you obviously stayed in the same house didn't you? Was it, you said Venture Street.

AC: Yes, we lived there, yes. But when we went away, the gentleman who owned the house, we paid rent, he said if you can get somebody to live in the house while you're away, I'll let them, but whenever you come back they've got to go, which they did. We walked out of the house one morning, we'd packed big, big trunks and we sent them on and we had suitcases, big suitcases. My Mother knit pixie hoods for me, scarves for me brother, gloves and everything, because it was winter time when we went. And we went, we set off down to London and as we walked out of the house, just like now we left everything bar all our treasures, you know, we put in a cupboard like that, locked, that was not to touch. Anything they broke, they mended or they bought another one. So we went off, and as we were going we went from Bolton to London, from London to Harwich and from Harwich to the Hook of Holland and then we went from Holland, Germany, Austria to Italy. It took us five days on the train. And we used to stop at borders, and at the train stations there used to be children begging. It was after the War and they were still very, very badly off, and I ended up with no gloves, no scarves and no pixie hoods and no sweets and no biscuits, because we'd given them the children and we hung out the windows and give them. They'd no socks on in the depth of winter, and no, you know, gloves, no scarves, hats or anything and, you know, you'd give one one thing and one another. We'd taken sweets, boiled sweets and biscuits to help on the journey, only we'd give them away, and that, to the children. They used to be begging at the trains 'Please, please' they used to be saying. So, you took the hat off and the gloves and got out of the other bags everything we could, blankets we give them and everything and so.

K: Is there anything else you'd like to talk about that we've not mentioned, about Wartime? You've covered a lot things haven't you?

AC: Yes, also when I was little I once had my face burnt. It was the Ritz cinema, there was a film on and it were called The Vigilantes. So this night, being very curious, I was about eight.

K: This was still Wartime?

AC: Yes, and I was about eight and we were playing in the shelter, like we used to do, Mrs Pickle's children next door, Sheila and Freda and Roland and we used to play together and that, and this night I hears this noise coming up the back street and being very noisy, I opened the gate and I stuck my head out to see what was happening, because it was pitch black.

K: It was the blackout.

AC: It was the blackout, yes. And the point was, there were some lads, they were about twelve or fourteen and they'd been to the cinema and they'd seen these cowboys with all these torches, so some bright spark figured out about making torches, so they wrapped old bike tyres round this wood and set them alight, you see, and as they were coming up the back street, shouting and being vigilantes, I stuck my head out. One of the boys put the torch down and it went right across my face, you see, with burning rubber. So, I run into the dancing my Mother was at work and I threw cold water on my face, anyway, I had a weary, weary face, I couldn't eat and I had to drink out of a straw and things like that. My Mother took me to the school, to show everybody what had happened, that these lads, misbehaving, watching too many War films and all this business. And she took me to the doctor, because I peeled all the rubber off and me face were weary and this lad who'd done it, he didn't know he'd done it really, but he got a very good hiding off his Mam and his Dad.

But the point I'm trying to say is, I went to the doctors and the doctor said me face was going to be marked and he said 'But I'll tell you what, I've got something here, I'm told it's wonderful. It's a brand new thing that's out' he said 'and it's helping our soldiers, kills infection, helps to heal' he said, 'It's a wonderful new thing' he said. 'Here' and he gave me a little jar like that, and it were like ointment, brown ointment, clear brown ointment. 'Put that on' he said 'it works wonders, it cures everything' he said, 'the soldiers swear by it in the field, it's called penicillin' he said, 'Put it on, come back to me in a week, and it'll be right' and it was. And I put this cream on, and there's no mark you can't see anything.

K: No, there's none.

AC: No. it were all down here, and me nose, I have a bit of a funny nose, but, otherwise, he said 'yeah, it's working wonders in the field' he said 'soldiers, Army doctors swear by it' he said. 'I'm telling you it's wonderful, try it, it's called penicillin' and I never forgot that 'It's penicillin'!

K: And really that was partly The Vigilantes and partly the blackout.

AC: The blackout, love, you couldn't see anything at all. Everybody had torches, but say if you had a bike, I've got one upstairs somewhere, and it's a bike lamp, it has a little hood on, so that it just shone down and not up. You daren't have your curtains open at night time and when I were a little girl, there were a little gentleman that used to come round with a 'Stop Me and Buy One' bike and everyone knew him, he were called 'Old Bill' I think. And he used to make crumpets and flour cakes and he used to ring a bell, because he daren't have his lights on during the War, so he used to ring a bell and everyone knew who he were and you used to grab your torch, because you couldn't see anything outside, because, the black curtains... you might have ordinary curtains but you had black curtains as well, so it was absolutely pitch black. And you would have to go out with your torch. Don't shine it about, there's aircraft, they can see the tiniest light, don't do this, always down, so we'd put it down and go to him in the street and you could buy flour cakes. I think they were a shilling for four and four crumpets and people used to go any buy. I remember the milkman coming and he had a horse and cart, well, a dray, and he used to have two big milk churns and his name were Mr Russell, and he had a brown coat and Wellingtons on and these two big milk things, it was like a chariot thing but big and a horse and cart and you used to go with your jug to him and he would ladle you out a pint of milk in a jug, or a half pint and his name was Mr Russell and he had a farm somewhere up here, up Plodder Lane way. And then another man used to come along and he used to sharpen knives and scissors and if, you know, you'd got knives and things like that, that you needed, he would come and you would give him sixpence or a shilling and he used to stand there with his wheel and doing knives and all kids round him and if you wanted to go anywhere you couldn't find the streets and if you were going say to Blackpool, you had to find your own way, because there was no notices anywhere to say this road to Blackpool or A58. Everything had gone, so you just had to either remember, from years before the War, or, you just got lost!

K: Did you ever used to save metal things and...

AC: Oh yes.

K: Bottles and things

AC: Bottles, I remember them coming taking all the park railings down and we have at school, take things, metal things, a truck would come at the end of the week. You know, you'd take as much as you could get off aunties, uncles - spoons, and allsorts..

K: Teapots...

AC: Teapots, and everything to a... it were like a Victory Drive or something like that, 'metal for metal' sort of thing, they'd say and you'd take your pans and sometimes bike tyres, car tyres, and rubber for them to melt, we thought to melt down and make more tyres, so we used to take them. We'd take them off peoples bikes, you know, 'Have you got a puncture?' 'no, not yet', 'Oh well, when you get a puncture, tell us, because we need rubber at school'. And we had bring and buy sales and that, to collect money for the Red Cross, so, they were good days.

K: What about VJ Day, was that any different to VE Day as far as you can...

AC: Well, it were very quiet, love.

ENDS