

BOLTON REMEMBERS THE WAR

Transcript of interview with Edith Kay née Hayston (EH) • Schoolgirl

Interviewed by Ken Beevers (K) 26.09.2005

K: If I could begin then, by asking you your name?

EH: Edith Hayston.

K: And where were you born Edith?

EH: In Bolton, in Townleys Hospital, as it was then.

K: And what date?

EH: 1934.

K: And what did your parents do?

EH: My Mother worked in the mills and my Father was a miner.

K: Do you know which mill and which mine?

EH: I think he was at Mosley Common, my Dad, and my Mother worked, Musgraves, up Chorley Old Road, yes.

K: And did you have any brothers and sisters?

EH: I have a younger brother. He was born in 1938.

K: And where did you go to school?

EH: Brandwood Street.

K: Oh, so where did you live at that time?

EH: Well, at that time, we'd gone to live up Deane, on the new estate. They'd got a new house. And it was lovely, it was tree-lined, a lovely avenue at that time. (laughs)

K: Which street?

EH: Hibernia Street, we all had big gardens and it was a lovely place, before the War, you know, I can just about remember how nice it all was.

K: Well Brandwood Street's a big school isn't it?

EH: It is, yes. But it was a very good school, very strict, but a very good school it was, and they opened your eyes to music and the theatre. Things that people like me had never sort of come into contact with really and it was excellent. We had a teacher called Miss Jones, and she was really lovely, she was great. Very strict, but she was a musician and I always liked her. (laughs)

K: You were born in 1934, do you remember the day that War broke out?

EH: Erm, I don't remember listening on the radio, or anything like that. My Mother must have done, but I remember going down to Garside Street Barracks, where my Father was, and he hadn't been able to come home, because he was in the Territorial Army as well as the mines, sort of thing. And he hadn't been able to come home, because they must have thought that War was imminent really. And we went down and I remember all the sand bags were being filled, and piled up all the way round on Moor Lane. So, I'm imagining that was the time the War started. I wasn't very old, only five, and my brother was a baby, and I've a photograph somewhere of us, but, I can't put my hands on it, stood with my Dad and another friend and his children and we were all in a row at the barracks.

K: And do you remember feeling, that, you know, that your Dad would be going away?

EH: I don't know, as a five year old you can't really pinpoint things like that can you? I knew there was something different, you see, something wrong, and then he went in the Forces, but, you see, I was used to seeing him in a uniform. It was the Loyals - he was in, the 5th Loyals, and they had these uniforms when in was in the Territorial Army you see, so I was used to all that.

K: Did you go down and see him off?

EH: No, no, I remember, he went, because I remember he had his kit bag, and another young man who lived near us, he was going too, and we all sort of used to wave them off from the corner of the streets. I can just more or less remember doing that.

K: Were you at school then?

EH: Yes, I must have been at school, yes. And for a few months, we didn't go, because the air raid shelters hadn't been built. They weren't finished, and we couldn't go to school until they were

finished. I was only an infant. I don't know whether the older children went, I've no idea. But I remember when they were finished and we all went to school then.

K: Where were the air raid shelters?

EH: They were underneath Willows Park, and we used to go down a slope, into the air raid shelters, and there were all passages when you got down. All different passages, with forms either side, and you used to sit with your class. And it was our school, Brandwood Street, and St Ethelbert's used to come as well.

K: So, it was a big air raid shelter?

EH: It was quite big, yes, because St Ethelbert's was a small school, and they just joined us, you see.

K: So about how many children could you get inside?

EH: I don't know, (laughs) I'm sorry, I don't know, because everybody didn't come in. If you lived in Brandwood Street, or round close by, they used to go home, they used to run home when the sirens went, you see, and those of us who lived a little bit further, went in. If you parents didn't come to pick you up, pretty quickly, you went in with the teachers into the air raid shelter. But sometimes parents would come and take you home, you see.

K: Was there anything else down there? Any other facilities at all?

EH: No, no facilities, we just used to sit on these forms and sing. The teachers used to start us all singing.

K: What did they used to sing?

EH: Ten Green Bottles! I can remember that, I've never forgotten singing Ten Green Bottles, we sang it every time we went down! (laughs)

K: Do you remember any other songs, you sang?

EH: Well, mostly the songs from school, you know, the little hymns and things that we used to sing in the infants. Old McDonald Had a Farm, that type of thing - the sort that children sort of all join in I suppose to keep our minds off what might be happening.

K: No Wartime songs?

EH: Oh probably, probably, now then, there was one about hanging Hitler on the Siegfried Line or something like that, wasn't there (laughs) I think we used to sing that one, Hang Out Your Washing on the Siegfried line, yes, that was it!

K: Do you remember when that photograph was taken, of you coming out of the air raid shelter?

EH: No, I don't. I've no memories of any photograph at all, so that was why I was very surprised when I saw it. And the first time it was in the Bolton Evening News, my Mother was still alive and she'd seen it and cut it out and we'd already seen it, or course, here, but it never said where it was, they didn't seem to know where it was, you see. But we recognised it straightaway.

K: So, did other people use that air raid shelter, at other times, you know, at night times?

EH: I don't know, I don't know, because, of course, we had our own air raid shelter. We had an Anderson shelter in the back garden.

K: It was simply because it was near the school so that during the day, you'd all go down?

EH: Yes, I think it was built for the school.

K: Was it cold?

EH: I don't remember feeling cold, no, but I suppose it must have been, because it was underground and damp. (laughs)

K: Did you ever go down there during, shall we say, an actual air raid?

EH: We never went down unless the sirens went. Apart from practising at first, you know, but once you were down you couldn't hear anything outside anyway, so, I doubt if there were any air raids, because the one I remember the bombs dropping was at night, when it dropped on Punch Street. We were in our air raid shelter, at home, and there was an enormous bang, and my Auntie used to come down and stay with us when there was an air raid on because she was expecting her first baby, and so she used to come and stay with my Mother, you see. And I can remember it really startled her and she fell off the step ladder near the... you know, we used to go down a couple of steps, you see and she used to sit there and she were always a very jolly person and when that bomb dropped she just fell off (laughs) you know! And she always used to remember it by 'That were when I fell off the ladder' sort of thing. (laughs) But, it was, very...very

frightening, very loud, we thought it was in our street, we didn't realize it was further down Deane Road, you see, because it's about half a mile away, Punch Street, if that, I'm not quite sure now.

K: So did you talk about that at school, the next day?

EH: Oh yes, everybody talked about it, and the man next door to us, was the Air Raid Warden, he'd come running round, to make sure we were all right, when the bomb dropped and he checked on us, and then went further along, making sure that everybody was ok, because he didn't know where it had dropped, you see.

K: You don't remember any other air raids that took place?

EH: I suppose I did. We did hear bangs, and did one drop further up Deane somewhere?

K: Yes, there was one, I was told on Wigan Road, near Chip Hill Road.

EH: Yes, that would be the one then, because we always used to say, they were looking for De Havilland, as the aircraft factory was up there, or I don't know what they made then, did they make munitions up there? We always said well, that's what they're after you see. And there were a barrage balloon on Haslam Park, you know on the field, leading down to the brook at the bottom, there was this big barrage balloon there, we used to go and have a look at that. (laughs)

K: Do you remember the activities of the Air Raid Warden and the Home Guard?

EH: Well, he was always coming saying 'You've got a chink of light', on the air raid shelter it was you see, because we always used to light a lamp, and then you had to cover it, you see, with a piece of cloth or a carpet or something. And he used to come round, and he was always coming saying 'Out your light out!' (laughs) But he was a friend, you see (laughs) we used to play with his children, so we never took him too seriously, apart from we did put the light out and make sure. He seemed to love being an Air Raid Warden it brought him into his... I don't know.

K: What was his job, do you know?

EH: I don't think he worked, he'd been quite ill which is why he wasn't in the Forces, and he'd had TB, that was it, so he wasn't working at that time. So he was, more or less, full-time being a Warden, you know. They used to go and meet in Deane Memorial Hall and that was where the headquarters was. It was near Blackshaw Lane, a little red church wasn't it...that was it where they used to go .. yes. And we used to go to... they must have had jumble sales and things and we used to go to the jumble sales.

K: Did you do anything, for the War effort in terms of saving money, or raising money?

EH: Oh, well, yes we did. We went round and had a fancy dress parade, all round the area and collected for the Red Cross... and Bolton Royal, because somebody's Dad had just been in Bolton Royal and they wanted to give them some money as well, you see, and we collected quite a lot. It was a successful day, a nice party afterwards. The Red Cross ladies came and made, well someone had made, little woolly golliwogs, because you couldn't get toys so much, and they'd made all these little woolly golliwogs and they were the prizes for the fancy dress, you see. We nearly all got one (laughs) and then we had a party. And someone had made a lot of jelly. I remember we were all having jellies. We had the end house, so it was a big garden, and we all went on there and they put tables out.

K: Do you remember what year that was?

EH: It was either, let me see, '40 or '41. It must have been quite near the beginning, I think.

K: Were there anything you remember about school that was particularly different in Wartime?

EH: Not really, because I started school in Wartime, so it was all the same, wasn't it?

K: What about food?

EH: Oh well, food. I hated dried egg. (laughs) The fish and chip shop was still open, and my Mother used to bake. I can remember you had to go on a list at the butchers and you just got certain things one week, because you could only get, you know, a few points, and you used to go on a list if you wanted half a shoulder of lamb (laughs) and you got one about every six weeks, something like that. You could get liver quite easily, so I became quite fond of liver because we had it so many times, you see. There was a shop, a nice bakery, on the estate actually, Mrs Graves, she was called, this lady who kept it and she made absolutely lovely custard pies. So we used to go up there and get a custard pie when she'd made them.

K: Where was the butchers?

EH: The butchers was on Deane Road, and my Mother worked for the butcher, until our John was old enough to go to school and then she, you know, she looked for a job. And I was old enough to look after him, you see. Because there were no nurseries or anything or child minders or anything like that during the War. Everybody wanted to keep their children as near as possible didn't they? So, she used to work for the butcher, and she could take John with her, you see. (laughs)

K: Did you have a school uniform?

EH: No.

K: What about vegetables, did you grow anything in your big garden?

EH: We didn't, because my Mother would have had to do it, wouldn't she?

K: You don't know if she ever felt that she should?

EH: Well, I don't think she got much time, to grow vegetables. And it was a big garden, but it hadn't been cultivated, because they'd no sooner got that house and my Father was in the Forces. I remember we dug round like, the smaller parts of it. It's not there now, I went up a couple of years ago, and they've taken it off and put a pathway and the Council look after it now, but then, it was fenced off and it was us and the next door neighbour that had the big gardens.

K: What number was it?

EH: 67, yes.

K: So meanwhile, your Father was abroad?

EH: Yes, yes. He was stationed in England at first. Doing, you know, various things, training, and it was after Dunkirk that they sailed abroad. They didn't know where they were heading for or anything. I mean, we got one or two letters en route, but it cut out where they were, it was just a letter to say he was all right. And we heard nothing, and when Singapore fell, he was on one of the boats that were sailing into the harbour, along with the rest of the Loyals, I suppose who where there. And he was taken prisoner.

K: How long was it before you knew he was a prisoner?

EH: Oh, it was quite a long time, you know, we didn't know anything, at all and that was when, we used to go to Watermillock to try and find out. I can't remember whether it was once a fortnight or, once a week, I can't remember. But the WVS, I think it was or the Red Cross, used to be there. I think it must have been the Red Cross, because that was why my Mother wanted to support them with this fancy dress thing, you see. And sometimes they had little bits of news. If anyone came back on leave from anywhere, they'd try and find out as much as possible about other people, you see, where they were. So we never did find anything out actually, but we used to go up, and they used to chat, all the women and children and they used to serve tea and cakes. It was a lovely place, it was really lovely. But, we got to know all the other women and children who were in a similar position to us, you see. And I can remember one particular week, one of the organizers had said that a man, he must have escaped or something, and he was a Captain, and he lived at Walkden or Worsley, or somewhere like that, and he may have heard about, you know, other men. So I can remember my Mother took us up to Walkden to look for this house, where he lived. They gave her the address, and we went in to ask him did he know anything, but he didn't know, he didn't know my Father, he wasn't in that unit at all, so he didn't know him. But little things like that, you tried all the time to find out where they were you see. And then we heard that he was a prisoner of War, and so that's when we used to write to him at this particular camp, you see, but we never really got much back, on those little cards, yes, you were allowed so many words and...

K: Twenty five.

EH: Twenty five, yes.

K: And did you ever write on them?

EH: Yes, we used to put messages on them, yes.

K: Do you remember anything you put?

EH: No, not in particular, no, but yes we used to put messages on. Because when, before he was taken prisoner, he always used to write letters to my Mother, and very romantic, when we look back. I have one or two somewhere now, and you can't imagine him being romantic, but the letters were very romantic. And he used to call her 'My dearest wife' and 'The best girl in the world' you know, and he used to put little notes in for me as well 'Look after mummy' and things like that, yeah.

K: So your Mother would be relieved when he was found?

EH: She was, she was quite relieved.

K: So, he was on the Railway?

EH: He was on the Railway.

K: So he was in different places, was he, do you know?

EH: I think it was one particular camp that they kept...

K: Do you know which one that was?

EH: No, I don't, I know the cemetery, what was it called? Something Kanga Cemetery, yes it's one of the main cemeteries.

K: Does it begin with a 'K'?

EH: Yes.

K: Kanchanaburi or something?

EH: Yes, something like that.

K: Is that it?

EH: Yes, we only found that out recently.

K: What's his first name?

EH: John Hayston he was called.

K: John Hayston.

EH: So, actually, he died in 1943, but we didn't know, so we kept on still sending the letters and we never knew that he'd died. And then when we were getting ready for VE Day, we put all the flags out and made bunting, and they'd had to *make* it, because they probably couldn't buy it, but I remember sewing all these triangles onto pieces of string (laughs) and we had it all out, all ready, and the bonfire was built up, further up our street, and my Mother went to work, at the butchers. She'd gone to give a couple of hours work and our John, he was still in bed, he was only a little boy, and I was eleven, well about eleven, I think on VE Day. And there was a knock on the door, and it was the telegraph boy, and he said 'Is your Mum in?' and I said 'Oh no, she's at work' and he said 'Oh, I have to take an answer. I have to wait' he was only fourteen, because they were only fourteen weren't they, these little telegraph boys? And he didn't know what to do, you see, and he said 'I've got to take an answer back, I've to wait for an answer' so I said 'Well, I'll have a look at it' so I opened it and it was to say that my Dad had died in this camp, so I said to him 'There's no answer' and off he went. I can remember him to this day. He were just stood staring at me, and I were sort of staring back at him, neither of us knew what to do, you see, because he was so young, too young really, to take that sort of a message, wasn't he? So I went to my Auntie, who lived higher up, at the top end of Hibernia Street. I got our John up and took him with me. And she said 'Well, you stay with Dorothy' that's my little cousin, 'and I'll go and get your Mother.' So she did. She went to the butchers. And I always remember my Mother, she was so angry, when she came in, she was so angry, and she said 'I don't believe it' and she just wouldn't accept it at all. We stayed at my Auntie's... We didn't go to the party or anything that day, so that was it. And it was true, eventually... You know, she wouldn't believe it for years, and she kept hoping he was going to turn up, and there was, sort of, nothing that came back of his, to show that it has been him really. You know, how sometimes, they send things to you. There was nothing, and she kept hoping really, she was hoping all the time. But, we moved, because the estate went really downhill, immediately after the War really. It wasn't the same place, to live, sort of thing, I don't know why. So I said 'Let's move onto Deane Road', they were building these nice new houses near the Saviour's Church, it's still there, a row of Council houses, and she said 'Oh no, no, what if your Dad comes back?' (laughs) I mean I was a teenager by this time, you know, anyway we talked her into it. And we moved then.

K: Did you ever find out the circumstances of his death?

EH: Cholera, he died with Cholera, and, years later, he had a friend who came back, and he was never the same, this man, he had nervous breakdowns and he was very ill for the rest of his life. But he told my Mother, he said 'It is true, because I was there with him, when he died' so she had to believe it then, didn't she? But it was a terrible time for them, more for them than for us children.

K: The Red Cross, well they sent parcels, you know, but they didn't always reach the men quite often.

EH: No.

K: But they were also the people who tried to find out.

EH: Yes, yes, they were the ones that we used to collect for, and then we had sixpence a week stamps at school. You know, the savings stamps, that was for the War effort, and collected paper (laughs) we used to collect paper, yes. We all used to go round and collect the paper.

K: At school?

EH: From the street. From the street, yes.

K: And where did you take it to?

EH: I think someone used to come and pick it up from our garden. We used to get it all piled up and then, whoever was, had the transport really, used to come and pick it up. I don't know where it went. We never thought about that part. We enjoyed going round and collecting it, you see.

K: Were you ever asked to donate metal, like teapots and pans?

EH: Yes, oh yes. Pans it was. And I remember the few that we had left, we used to be able to repair them (laughs) with a little disk, go and get one from the ironmongers and you could repair your saucepan with it. It's a wonder we weren't all poisoned, isn't it? (laughs)

K: What did you do for entertainment?

EH: The radio. We used to go to the Windsor, that was our local cinema, although we had the Majestic and the Tivoli on Derby Street as well, but the Windsor was the one we went to, because it was only fourpence if you got there early. First three rows were only fourpence. (laughs)

K: Can I ask you, do you remember any particular films?

EH: Laurel and Hardy, we used to go and watch Laurel and Hardy.

K: You'd be watching children's things really, wouldn't you?

EH: Yes, and I remember, we used to go to the Majestic on Saturday afternoons. Flash Gordon (laughs) and I went to work at the Majestic later on, when I was a teenager, in the evenings. I was an usherette. (laughs)

K: What about Christmas?

EH: Well, I always got a sewing set off my Auntie. Always, I always knew what I were going to get, it was going to be a box with either embroidery or sewing and a new doll's head off my Mother (laughs) and a set of clothes, you know. Because the doll I had, had a rag body, and a pot head, and it always got broken during the year you know. She'd take it to the doll's hospital and it had a new head for Christmas, I'll always remember that. (laughs) And a book, books, if we could get a book. We used to get these second-hand ones like Bev was saying.

K: Do you remember VJ Day, or because it had so much meaning to you as a family... You wouldn't?

EH: No, I don't remember VJ Day. It was VE Day, VJ Day no. I think we were sort of all haywire at our house by then, so, I didn't... no celebrations.

K: You'd see your friend's fathers would come back, and yours didn't...

EH: Yeah, yes. And my Mother's brother, he was in the 8th Army, and he didn't come back immediately, he didn't come back straight away, they had to go to Italy or something. And it was a while after when he came back, because I remember going to wait for him at the top of the hill, because he was coming. He wasn't married so, he was, you know, very close to us, you see. Wasn't married at that time, I mean. And I remember waiting and spotting him at the bottom of the hill, coming up with his uniform on, you know. He got the Croix de Guerre he was called Arnold Fitton. James Arnold Fitton, but they called him Arnold.

K: Is there anything we've not mentioned that..?

EH: Well, I can remember we did go on one holiday during the War, and it was to Blackpool, and it was to a lady, who my Grandmother had always gone to stay with, before the War, you see. And she worked on munitions, this lady, at Preston, and she wasn't supposed to take in visitors, because she said 'If they know I'm taking visitors, I'll have the Yanks allocated, and I don't want to' she said, 'so I'm working' she were on munitions, you see, so she said 'If you want, you can come, but you'll have to look after yourself' (laughs) So, I can remember us going to this place and it was above a cobblers shop and I can remember us all being in these rooms, you know, and my Mum and my Auntie and all us children, and they did the cooking and everything you see, and we just used to go down on the beach, and have a little walk. But there wasn't anything really going on, in Blackpool, because it was more or less taken over by the Forces.

K: What about the blackout?

EH: I can remember the black curtains that my Mother made, and we used to, you know how they put sticky tape over the windows? We had that up, so that the glass wouldn't shatter if we were bombed, so all this criss-cross was on the windows. Everybody took it very seriously, the blackout. There was no lights whatsoever outside, you know, when we went to the pictures. As I got a bit older, my Mother got an evening job, as well, and I used to take John and Dorothy (our cousin) to the pictures, you see, and we used to come home with a torch. (laughs)

K: Did she work because there was a need for, I mean she needed the money...

EH: She needed the money. Yes.

K: But also they needed people to work, didn't they?

EH: Yes, they did, yes, they needed people, and working in the mills was a necessary job, yes, she worked at the Merton for quite a while and then she went to the Eagle. She was a jack frame tenter. (laughs) She were quite proud of her job.

K: Is there anything else?

EH: Not that I can just think of.

K: Well, thank you very much.

EH: You're very patient. (laughs)

K: It was very good, that!

ENDS