

BOLTON REMEMBERS THE WAR

Transcript of interview with Maurice Kobelt (MK) • Schoolboy Evacuee

Interviewed by Ken Beevers (K) 07.07.2005

K: Could you first begin by telling me your name?

MK: Yes, well it's Maurice Kobelt and I was born in Woolwich, London in 1931. And I came to Bolton a week before Christmas, 1940, after being evacuated.

K: Which part of London were you living in?

MK: I was living at Lee, SE12. It's in-between Eltham and Lewisham, just outside London. We were in the direct path of all the bombers going over to bomb London, so we had our fair share. I missed school for a year, because they had to close our school, because we used to get machine-gunned going to school and on the way back, and we used to dive for the ditch at the side of the road, because, we had a long open road between the sports fields... and the young German pilots, would just put back the hoods to their cabins and just lean out and laugh and wave to us... and they weren't much older than we were really, they were in their late teens.

But at the beginning of the Blitz - I don't know if people realise today - but there was no such thing as the Battle of Britain, there was no defence at all. It wasn't until later in 1940 that that began and the Spitfires and Hurricanes went up. At the beginning the Nazi's had the skies to themselves, apart from barrage balloons and the odd anti-aircraft gun. There was an anti-aircraft gun that used to come into our street at night. And, the first time it came, the following day the officer ordered all these men to go round knocking on the doors, apologising to the ladies for their language. Because when they were firing the gun, they got very excited and they used to say 'bloody' and that was a dreadful thing in those days! (laughs)

K: So do you remember how you felt about being evacuated, when you were told you would be leaving?

MK: Well, my Father had left London to work for the ROF, the Royal Ordnance Factory in Euxton, so we were left with my Mother and sister in the house, spending every night in the Anderson air raid shelter in the garden, because of the raids. And, at the end, with the land mine in the next street, we lost the roof and all the windows and doors on the house, and so we couldn't go in and make a cup of tea or anything, so my Father came down to rescue us, and brought us up to Wigan and then when we found a house in Bolton, we came to Bolton.

K: What was your Father's job before the War?

MK: He was with the Woolwich Arsenal.

K: He was, so he an important person in the..?

MK: Yes, he had been a library steward on P&O liners, until he came ashore, around about 1936... something like that, and went to work in the Arsenal.

K: What were your first impressions of Wigan?

MK: I can remember it as vividly as if it was yesterday, because, we'd had an horrific journey up from London. The train had been machine-gunned twice, we'd had to lie on the floor between the seats while the bullets rattled on the roof, and we came out into Wigan, my Mother and my sister and I, and we stood there and this most terrible noise - clack, clack, clack, clack! ...so loud, and I thought it was some kind of gun or something. We were standing outside Wigan station, which was all cobbled in those days, and my Father put his hand on my shoulder, and he said 'It's alright, it's the mill girls.' I didn't know what he meant by 'mill girls' but all these women went by wearing clogs and with shawls over their heads, held tight, and chattering away, in what seemed to be a foreign language, because I hadn't heard the Lancashire dialect before. And when we went into the house where we were evacuated and the Father was saying 'boook' instead of 'book', and 'look' instead of 'look' - and we were laughing, we thought he was having a joke with us (laughs) it seemed quite strange, but I soon got used to it.

And I went to school in Wigan for a few weeks, and I absolutely loved that school, that was All Saints, in Wigan and they taught book-binding and music - actually how to read music. I was fascinated, I thought it was great! ...so I was rather disappointed when I came to Bolton.

And we came to a house in Russell Street in Bolton, which is near Queen's Park, and Carter Patterson was supposed to deliver our furniture and goods, but due to the air raids they got held up until after Christmas. So my Mother just had ten shillings in her purse and she went out and

she bought a few loaves of bread and some butter and a pot of jam, and loads and loads of Bolton Evening News copies. Not because we liked the paper, but it was a big one in those days and we'd no furniture and we'd nothing in the house, but by putting the paper on the floor and covering over us, we were able to lie down. And the funny thing is, that first night, we actually went up to bed, we all lay down on the floor, in the upstairs room - which seems strange, but it's just out of habit. And we had a wonderful experience when we were lying there fully dressed, except Mother made me take my shoes off ...but we were fully dressed and St Luke's choir came out under the window, singing carols as they used to go round. And they sang 'While shepherds watch their flocks by night' and they sang it to the tune of 'On Ilkley Moor baht 'at' which I've never heard before or since. It was fantastic! And then on Christmas Day... It was heavy snow then, Christmas 1940, and my sister and I went for a walk round Westwood and Chorley New Road and we found a kitten. There were allotments there and a kitten came out of one of the allotments, little huts, and followed us home. We'd got in the house, and we were just playing with the kitten, and my Mother was putting a bit of butter, our precious butter, on it's paws, and there was a knock on the door, and it was Mrs Podmore. Some people might remember her from having a shop on Deansgate - 'Podmore's Garden Supplies' and so forth. And she said 'I can't see any smoke from your chimney, would you like a bucket of coal?' and my Father reluctantly agreed, and she said 'Are you alright for anything else? Do you want anything else?' and my parents said 'Oh, no, no, it's fine, we're ok, but we'd be pleased with the coal' and well my sister and I would have liked a change from the bread and butter and jam. But my parents were proud people, they were Victorians, if you think back, and it was their way not to be a borrower or a lender. But we had this fire in the lounge, which worried my Mother terribly as it was getting dark early, in case an air raid warden should tell us about the glow, because we had no curtains. So the Bolton Evening News came in handy again to stick up on the windows, and that night, we lay on floor, in what was to be, the sitting room, before the embers of the fire. And that was my Christmas Day, you know. But it was good, because I was with my Father again and my family and we were a family again and there was no air raids - we didn't have to go down the shelter, and so it was a happy Christmas in a way.

K: Which school did you go to in Bolton?

MK: Gaskell Street, which I absolutely hated. I had to go down Gaskell Street, with a huge mill on one side. You see, people think of London as being built up, but where we lived it was fields and orchards, and I went to what was called a Garden School, which was a bungalow school - very new - and we had most of our lessons by radio, which was quite modern, and then coming to Gaskell Street I absolutely hated it at first, but I got used to it after a while.

K: Obviously you didn't have much food at first, but were there shortages?

MK: As a child through the War, you were always hungry, you know. My Mother was a great provider and in the house we only had a gas ring, we didn't even have a stove, but, she used a biscuit tin on top of the gas ring to use as an oven, and she cooked for us. And later on we had soldiers billeted with us, and so forth, and she cooked for an enormous number. Throughout the War my Mother kept open house for the Free French Navy and they used to come up and stay with us. And I remember one night, about one o'clock in the morning, there was a great bang, bang, bang on the door, and my Father went down in his pyjamas and we crowded over the banisters to look, and it was Pierre, a sailor who'd stayed with us before and he had this huge sack on his shoulders, ditty bag, they used to call them in the Navy, that they carried their clothes in. And he came in and he asked for newspapers, to be spread on the floor, and then he turned it upside down and this bag was full of sugar. And we'd got this huge pile of sugar on the floor and this was rationed, it was like gold in wartime, and again my Mother was terrified - she thought there would be a knocking on the door and we'd all be arrested. But all the French sailors had clubbed their ration together, to give her... which was nice. But as I say, we used to go into school. We might buy some candles and try chewing candles as there was no chewing gum, and also we'd eat apples. Kids would be round you if you had an apple, 'Bags me your core us' and, you know, they'd chew the core of the apple, which nowadays you'd throw away.

K: Waste not, want not, kind of thing, yeah.

MK: That's the way it was, yeah.

K: So have you got some stories or memories from those school days, that you'd like to talk about?

MK: Yes, yes, there's one specifically, well two, about the school:

(reads) 'You see in 1943 the War was taking its toll as far as materials were concerned. Everything was in short supply, and one morning in assembly, our headmistress, at Gaskell Street School, announced that the school was taking part in a nationwide drive to see which school could collect the most waste paper. What interested us the most, was the fact that there would be a prize for the boy or girl that collected the most paper, and there was much speculation at playtime as to what form the prize may take.

After school I hurried home and made a start gathering up any newspapers that I could find. I then had to make an important decision - should I add my precious collection of comics to my bundle? It may seem strange to you that I consider my comics precious, but during the War, you could not go into any newsagents and buy a children's comic. If you had ordered one to be delivered, then you might be lucky enough to get one, but they were only ever published every two weeks. Finally I made up my mind and included all the comics that I'd been saving to swap with my friends.

My Mother suggested, after I'd eaten my evening meal, I should go round to the other houses on my street, and explain that I was collecting paper for the War effort. This I did, and was able to add a considerable amount to my pile. The next job was to find some string to tie them - not an easy task as string was also in short supply, but my Dad has a box that he put all bits of string in and he gave me a hand, tying bits together until we had a length long enough to go round. The following morning, I set off for school and soon found that my bundle was far too heavy for me to carry. I had about a mile to go, but fortunately it was down hill all the way, so I dragged it behind me. I'd not gone far before I'd met up with others doing just the same, and some of the bundles looked bigger than mine. Sure enough when the piles of paper were weighed, there were four that were heavier than mine. 'Never mind' said Miss Wilde, my teacher, 'It's only Tuesday and you have another three days to go.' That night, I gave it a lot of thought. I was determined to come first. Then a thought struck me: before the War, my Dad had been the library steward on the big ocean liners and our house was full of books, and you don't have to be a genius to work out that a book weighs more than newspaper. Even before I was dressed, I ran downstairs to ask my Mum what she thought of the idea, 'You will have to wait until your Father gets home, and ask him.' As I trudged back upstairs, the less likely it seemed that my Dad would let me have any books. My Dad got home from work at 6pm, after a very long day, as he left home at 6am, so my Mum had told me not to bother him until he had eaten. As soon as he was settled in his favourite armchair, I said 'Dad, can I ask you a big favour?' And so the story of my collecting salvage tumbled out. To my complete surprise and delight, he told me that he was pleased that I was doing something so useful and that he would sort out a few books that he wanted to keep and then I could have the rest. The following morning I found that my Mother had borrowed two Army kit bags, that were made of canvas so they would be better for dragging she said. When they were full of books, they were very heavy, so we fastened them together with a leather belt, which went round my shoulders. I must have looked a strange sight as I struggled off to school, more like a cart-horse than a school boy. When I got to school the headmistress was already in the playground weighing in bundles of paper. On seeing all my books, she came over to me and had a look at some. My heart fell, when she said 'These are too good for salvage' but then she went on to say 'They would be sent overseas for the soldiers and airmen to read.' She then said it would be only fair to weigh them as salvage. This brought a smile to my face - although some of the other boys and girls did not appear to agree with that. The winner was to be announced after school, so for the rest of the day we were all on tenterhooks. One boy was going round at playtime saying that he knew for certain that the prize was going to be a gun to shoot at Germans with but I don't think anyone believed him. After the bell had rung, signalling the end of the school day, we all lined up in the Assembly Hall. I've never known a hall full of children to be so quiet, as everyone had made a great effort and most of the older boys and girls thought they had a chance of winning. It was then announced that as everyone had made such an effort, the prize would be divided into first, second and third, three names were called out and I was relieved to hear mine among them. All three of us were given an envelope with our name on, and on mine it said 'First Place' so I was delighted by that, but we were not so pleased when we opened them to find we each had only sixpence. While six pennies were worth a lot more than they are today... as most things were rationed, there was very little in the shops you could buy without coupons, so on the way home from school I went to the greengrocer's and bought some apples and carrots to share with my friends. In Wartime we used to chew a lot of carrots, raw carrots, as they were supposed to improve your eyesight, so that you could see better in the blackout! We all went on collecting salvage until the end of the War, but without expecting any prize other than doing our bit to help win the War.'

Would you like to hear some more? This is one about school

K: Yes, I love to hear a story about your school.

MK: (reads) 'As an evacuee from the London Blitz, I was most unhappy at the junior school that I was sent to. This was Gaskell Street, until a few weeks before the Royal Visit, when it was announced at morning assembly that there was to be an Art Contest and the winning pictures would be seen by the Queen. This made me sit up and take notice as I had won a children's art contest in London and I was determined to do my best. So imagine my delight, when a week later, I was told that my picture had been chosen to represent the School and after the Royal visit would be put on display with those from other schools, in Bolton Civic Art Gallery. On the day of the visit, along with all the children from other schools, we were marched into town, to take our place on the Town Hall Square. Every child had a flag on a stick, and when the King and Queen appeared on the steps of the Town Hall these were waved with such abandon that it's a miracle that no-one was injured. The Queen stood by the King as he took the salute at the march past. This was comprised mostly of the Home Guard, and as they were only enough to circle the Town Hall, they all marched round three times! Talk about Dad's Army. The following week my class was taken to the Art Gallery to see my picture on display, and my teacher, Miss Wilde, presented me with the princely sum of a shilling. I was much happier at school after that!'

K: Did you say what year that was Maurice?

MK: I'm not too sure, it's coming on towards the end of the War, possibly '44. I can't rightly remember when the King and Queen came to Bolton. But as I say, the Home Guard just marched round and round and you recognized the same people going past! (laughs) Did you want one more?

K: Yes, we'll have one more, shall we? ...about your adventures.

MK: I call this one 'The Parachutist' there was loads of rumours going around during the War and this was about one of them.

K: The rumours, did it make you frightened?

MK: I don't ever remember being frightened in the War - not during the Blitz, not when being shot at, we just accepted it. My Father said 'If a bullet's got your name on it son, you'll get it, but it's very unlikely' and we just carried on. I don't remember my Mother ever showing fear. On one occasion my Mother was doing the vac-ing and we hadn't heard the siren and the woman next door came knocking on the door, and told us the siren had gone and we came out and my sister and myself and Mrs Meyer next door. And a bomb dropped, probably in the next street, and the blast tunnelled right down past our house and we were all picked up, and we were taken about five or six feet on the floor, and pressed against the wall, and held there for what seemed ages - could only have been seconds. And all the dirt and leaves, everything was held there against us and then we dropped to the floor. And I thought it was very exciting, had a good laugh. It was like being something on the fairground, but then we got down the air raid shelter and just as we got to the shelter another bomb fell and we all got blown straight in! Fortunately, we had soft things, a mattress on the floor, so we weren't hurt. Right, this is The Parachutist:

(reads) 'My Mother opened the door in response to the eager knocking. Standing on the steps were three of my friends, Peter, Derek and Herbert. I was in the kitchen but I heard Peter ask my Mum 'Is Maurice coming out to play?' Grabbing my cap and blazer I went charging down the hall, saving my Mother the trouble of answering. Once the door was safely closed behind me I wanted to know the reason for their excitement, as Herbert who was the youngest of us, was jumping up and down, and Peter the oldest of our little gang, had a very serious expression on his face. The story came out in a rush as they all started talking at once 'A German parachutist has landed at Middlebrook, and there are crowds of lads up there, looking for 'im' We decided to look for re-enforcements, but soon found that all our friends in the neighbourhood had already left to join in the hunt. As Herbert did not have a bike, he said that it would be unfair for us to take ours, so we set off on foot up the Chorley New Road. It was a very hot summer's day and we were soon limping, as our shoes were very much too small for us. This was very common in the War, as with clothes rationing, most families did not have enough coupons to keep up with growing children. - and to this very day, I still have trouble with my feet! But on arriving at Middlebrook all our aches and pains were soon forgotten. Between two and three hundred boys were milling about the fields, without any apparent direction or leadership. Most were in groups of a dozen or so, quite a number were in Cub or Scout uniforms. Peter was annoyed that he'd not thought of putting his uniform on, but some of the scouts were in the same troop as Peter, and they ran over to ask us if we wanted to join them in the hunt. We were eager to do so and Peter, who despite forgetting his uniform, had appointed himself leader. He said we must have a confab. On meeting with only puzzled looks he went on to explain that meant that we have to decide on a plan of action. My first question was who had seen the German. It soon transpired

that no-one in our group had, so we decided on breaking up into pairs and going round asking if any of the lads in the other groups had. When we met up again, we found that no-one had actually claimed to have seen the Hun, but some lads had uncovered the entrance to a land drain. This was a large sewer pipe, and they said that the parachutist was hiding in it. The bigger boys started daring each other to go into the drain, which was just large enough to allow a boy to stand upright and there was a lot of pushing and shoving going on. But by now it was getting towards teatime and groups of boys started to drift away, as pangs of hunger were felt. I did not believe that anyone, no matter how desperate they might be, would chose to hide in that land drain, as the stench was overpowering. As we walked homeward, Herbert said 'What do you want to be, when you grow up?' and not waiting for a reply he said 'I want to be a soldier.' Derek butted in with 'I'm going to be a professional footballer' and Peter, not raising his sights so high said 'I want to be a Scout Master.' All three then looked at me and when I said that I was going to be a teacher, they fell about laughing. Strangely, all four of us achieved our goals. Peter Curtis became a Scout Master, Derek Lythgoe had a long career in league football and Herbert Braithwaite went into the Army at seventeen. Sadly he was killed in Ireland four months later. As for my becoming a teacher, that too came about. It just took me a little longer. The story of the German Parachutist was typical of the rumours that spread like wildfire during the War. No-one knew who started them, or why, but at least on this occasion it gave us a lot of fun and excitement. Thinking of Herbert Braithwaite after all these years, I remember his funeral, which was attended by an Honour Squad in full dress uniform. After they had fired a salute of six guns over his grave, my Mother turned to me and said 'Herbert would have liked that.' 'Aye', I said 'He would.'

K: So when you were in London, Maurice, what experiences can you remember from the Blitz, before you came to Bolton?

MK: Well I do remember begging my Mother to let me go to a birthday party and my friend was going to be eight years old, and she seemed very reluctant to let me go and I thought 'Well, it's only four doors away.' And it turned out she was bothered about me giving a birthday present, because it would mean her going out to buy something and two days before she and my sister had been machine-gunned while they were standing at the bus stop. So she wasn't keen on going shopping for a while! Anyway she suggested that I could get one of my toys that looked fairly reasonable and she'd wrap it up... And we were all outside the door and we didn't need to knock, I think Brian's mother heard us all chatting, so she let us in and our eyes popped, because the table, absolutely full of blancmange and jellies, all in moulds in the shapes of rabbits and allsorts of things. And we were so excited, but we'd no time to enjoy it, because, the air raid siren went then, and we could already hear the rat-tat-tat, of the guns above us. So she took us all in the kitchen and she said she could only take us in two at a time, because any larger groups would be machine-gunned. So she got a raincoat from the back of the door and took us in groups of two, and each couple she put a raincoat over our heads. Now, it seems funny to me today, it wasn't going to be any protection against bullets but I think she wanted to stop us looking up. She took us all down the air raid shelter, and air raid shelters were only made - the Anderson shelter - was only made for four people and there were about eleven of us. So we were all standing up like sardines in a tin, and she kept us... asking us about holidays and things we remembered, and all the time bombs were dropping, and machine guns going. And eventually the 'all clear' siren went and we climbed out of the shelter, and the garden was littered with shrapnel, pieces of shells and bullets... But we were street-wise. We knew not to touch anything because it would be red-hot. You had to leave shrapnel for at least three or four hours. So we went in the house and... Mrs Avery nearly cried - Brian's mother - because everything off the table had bounced onto the floor, there were jellies and blancmange all over the lino. Fortunately, people didn't have carpets in those days, it was linoleum, which was smooth, and she was a resourceful women because she went to the kitchen drawer and she gave us each a spoon and said 'Tuck in!' so we had a wonderful time on our hands and knees going round eating off the floor! The only thing, the jellies tasted a bit of floor polish, but we didn't mind that too much. And all in all it turned out to be a great party, and we talked about it, well, I talked about it - well I talked about it - for years afterwards and called it 'Our birthday Blitz!' So that was something I certainly remember. But it shows the way things were. People just coped. I didn't go to school because we'd started to get machine-gunned on the way to school, and so had a year off school. The idea was, that teachers would come to rooms in different houses roundabout and we could go there, but... I only remember going once because we'd no sooner started then the air raid siren went and everyone had to dash off. There wasn't enough room in the... for the schoolchildren in that shelter. But everyone was quite cheerful. It's amazing really.

K: When you came to Wigan and Bolton and went to school, did the other children treat you differently .. because you were..?

MK: Not in Wigan, strangely enough. No bother at all with the children in the school, the teachers and everyone were great. But when I came to Bolton, they used to make fun of my London accent and said that I spoke 'posh'. And I wasn't at all happy at school at first. It seemed quite different to schools I'd been to before. But I got used to it and got accepted.

K: Can you remember any memories from when the day the War broke out?

MK: Yes, indeed. We listened to the radio, and Mr Chamberlain speaking, and my Father had a bicycle, and he was, well he was, an Air Raid Warden. He was riding about all over the place trying to find out what was happening and what we should do. And in front of our house, there was greenery - a field - and everybody got spades, forks and everything and they were trying to dig a trench as a shelter. And my sister and I sat on the stairs, and I don't know where, we had a box of chocolates from somewhere, and we were sitting on the stairs, eating the chocolates and watching everybody digging and wondering what was going to happen. But the War really began for us in 1938, when I lived in Woolwich... because War was expected then and I came home from school with a letter saying that my Mother had to get a blanket and sew it up with blanket stitch down the sides and the bottom to make, like a sleeping bag, and fold this up and my sister had the same letter and we were going to be evacuated, but... Mr Chamberlain, the Prime minister, came back from Germany waving a piece of paper saying that he'd signed an agreement with Hitler, and that Hitler wasn't going to invade Poland and there would be peace in our time. But a year later, Hitler invaded Poland and we were at War.

K: And how long was it before there was any air raids or..?

MK: There was a sort of strange War, at first, because nothing was happening. The sirens used to go and people were building shelters, and were coming round, we had a shelter put in the garden. Some people had a Morrison shelter which was like a wire cage that you put under your dining table, and you had to climb in there. But then if a bomb fell and your house came down, you were buried under it, so we preferred the Anderson shelter in the garden... But, as I say, once the Blitz started... I've said that I wasn't frightened, really frightened, but I did have nightmares for years, even now, occasionally I get the same nightmare. Because I remember going into the garden and looking up and the sky was black from one horizon to the other, whichever direction you looked there were German bombers, and fighter planes escorting them and it was just one mass of bombers and you know, I might never be thinking about anything and sometime I will have that dream again.

Oh, one thing when I came up to Lancashire, they used to test the local air raid sirens that were usually on the mills, on the highest buildings. And I remember one time the air raid siren went and I dived under my desk and all the other boys and girls they laughed themselves silly, wondering what on earth was going on. What was I doing, you know, but it was just complete reaction, it's what you did. They hadn't experienced the Blitz as I had.

K: You met some Germans Maurice...

MK: During the War, yes, quite early on in the War, when I came to Bolton. We lived in Russell Street, which was quite a decent street, mill owner's houses and so forth in years gone by, and all the gardens had railings and gates, and one morning... Our bathroom was at the front of the house and I went to wash my hands at the sink and looked out the bathroom window and I found myself staring at a German, in our garden! Full uniform. And there was a lorry full of German soldiers and I screamed 'Mum, the Hun's here!' - because we called the Germans Huns - and went running down and Mother opened the front door, and there was an English soldier in full uniform, which was more reassuring and he had a rifle. And he said that the Germans were prisoners of War, and when they turned round, they had patches showing on the backs of their uniform jackets, so while I'd seen him from the front and he looked like a fully dressed German, from the back he looked more like a clown with a big coloured patch on his uniform. And they had sledgehammers with them, and said they were collecting metal for the War effort, and so they knocked down our fence and all the other fences in the street and loaded it up into the lorry. But that was my first meeting with a Hun! Churchill, the Prime minister had ordered all this metal... That was roundabout I think, 1943, because he felt, after two years of War that people were getting a bit slow and not so keen on the War effort and so he decided to take all the railings and all the metal as a salvage effort and wake people up to the realization that we were still at War. We could hardly forget with the rationing and the blackout and everything else.

K: Apparently it was never used was it? But I don't know what proof there is of it.

MK: I've heard that it was dumped at sea, a lot of it, and the whole idea was to boost morale, I've heard that myself. But even Queen's Park - the gates and things like that and the railings... Everywhere they took, every bit of metal.

K: You would always have your gas mask with you at school?

MK: Always we carried the gas mask, yes. And sometimes, at school, if we'd go into a shelter, to... In Spa Road in Bolton, there was a massive air raid shelter built underground, on Spa Road on the recreation ground, and one time we were marched from Gaskell Street down to sit in this shelter, and we all had to have our gas masks on for half an hour, sitting down there. Well gas masks had a little ear piece at the front, and if you blew a raspberry it used to make a terrific noise, so, of course, all the kids were sitting there blowing raspberries at each other! Although it became very hot and stuffy... and being asthmatic, it didn't do me a lot of good.

K: So, what about when War ended?

MB: Yes, I remember VE Day, very well. I'd been ill during the night so I was late up. Everybody else, all my friends round Russell Street and Laburnum Street, other places roundabout, they were all out collecting wood and everything they could salvage to make bonfires. But across the road from us, we lived facing the corner shop, which was run in those days by Mrs Crook, and she came across and knocked on our door, and she said to my Father 'Could you and Maurice come across the road' she said 'I've been very, very naughty!' So we went across to her shop and she said to my Father 'Could you go down the cellar and give Maurice the boxes.' And my Father said 'Why have you been naughty?' And she said 'Well at the beginning of the War we were told to destroy all fireworks and everything, and I never did' she said 'and I've got boxes full down in the cellar!' she said 'I thought the War was going to be over in five minutes'. And my Father carried all these great wooden boxes up and then he brought them across the road to our house, and my Mother said 'What are you going to do with them?' and I said 'Well, I can share them out'. So she got, Bolton Evening News again, all the various pages, which she tore into strips, and then I divided up all the fireworks into... so many bangers and a rocket and bits of this and bits of that, Catherine wheels and so forth and eked them all out into various bits of paper which we wrapped up. And then Mother put them in a shopping bag for me and I made four or five trips going round the various houses where I knew children lived, knocking on their doors and giving them a packet of fireworks. So we were probably the only street, or the area in Britain to have some fireworks going on that night!. And it was a drizzly day, and we still sat round the bonfire at night, and I can remember some of the lovely furniture and stuff that was put on. Great Victorian oak chairs and sideboards and everything was burnt. And all the bonfires were in the back streets, and all the doors, the back gates, were all blistered with the heat from the fire. But we sat round talking. I've heard of other streets having street parties and food, but I don't know where they got the food from at that time. We certainly didn't have enough to spread around. But talking about fireworks, just after the War, just after VE Day shortly, there was a massive firework display down at Spa Road A terrific display with fighting battleships and God Save the Queen and so forth, and that was really great. That was a good display.

ENDS