

Winslow Oral History Project

Interview Summary

Interviewee	Mavis Dyson		Date of interview	28-3-12
Maiden name	Byford			
DOB	2 nd July 1926	Place of birth	Winslow	
Father's occupation	Shop worker			
Mother's occupation & maiden name	Bachelor			
Key words	Park Rd, Winslow School, Horn St, Burleys Rd, Corn chandler's, Winslow Mill, Midgley's shop, Navy, Buckingham School, Marylebone Central School, Ireland, Nelson St, Buckingham, Granborough Village Hall, Buckingham Cinema, Buckingham Nursing Home, Market Sq, Lowndes Way, Stoke Talbot, Oxon, Buckingham Old Gaol, First World War, Lambeth Hospital, Winslow Hospital, Second World War, evacuation, railway, vintage cars, servicemen, Magpie Farm , Avenue Rd, Turner's yard, Whaddon Hall, Winslow Station, The Elms Nursing Home Aylesbury, Cantell's shop Buckingham and Winslow, International Store Buckingham, Redfield, Bell Hotel, Meanwell's shop, Junior Air Corps, Congregational Chapel, Demoram Close, Horn St, Harry Turnham, British Legion, Chando Arms, Elmfields Gate,			
Key names	Mrs Jones, Derek Illing, , Parker twins, Daphne Vicars, Bill French, Bletchley Telegraph Office, King, Queen, Winston Churchill, Bletchley Park, Prince Charles, Camilla, Bachelor family, Sarah Aris, Doris Langley, Charlie Beane, Gibbs, Brian Tofield, Elizabeth Plant, , Illings family, Mrs Selby-Lowndes, Lady Cruse, Lady Fremantle, Price family, Mr Brudenell, George Gaylor, Ted Amos, Dennis Comerford, Mr McLernon, Levy family, Margaret Gordon-Dean, Charlie Beane, Beckett's shop, Doris Bacon, Fred Meanwell, Fred Young, Hilton's shop, Michael Medwin, Mr McDonald-Daley, Dr Rudd, David Eccles, Dora and Eva.			
Interviewer	Mary Hunt			
No. of files (tracks)	1	Copyright status	Cleared	
Abstract	<p>Mavis talks about her parents and grandparents who lived around Winslow and Buckingham and their trades. She outlines her education at Winslow and Buckingham and her working life in her grandparents shop, Cantell's and nursing. She talks about working at Bletchley Station during the 2nd World War and her boyfriends during the war.</p> <p>Mavis tells her story about the bomber crash in Winslow during the war in file 003. In 004, 005 and 006 she explains why her father moved to work on the railway, the people he worked with and his brief job as a chauffeur. Mavis talks about her mother at work and the evacuees and a succession of lodgers who stayed at their house during the war. After the war Mavis remembers her parents moving to a flat in the Market Sq. 006 concludes with Mavis talking about her father Ernie's involvement with the British Legion.</p>			
File				
File 001	Mavis was born on 2 nd July 1926. Her parents were Ernest Edwin Byford and Mary Edith Annie Bachelor. She was born at 6 Park Rd Winslow. Her early memories include her father taking her for walks over the fields and going to her grandparents shop and being weighed in the corn scales. She went on holiday to			

	Clacton aged 3. She also remembers being taken to relations – cousins at Stony Stratford, and her father taking trips to Navy Week at Portsmouth.
03.03	Mavis started Winslow school at Xmas instead of September because she had whooping cough. Her mother was always keeping her off school and her uncle, who was a School Attendance Officer, told her grandmother, who paid for her to go to a private school in Horn St. run by Mrs Jones and her daughter. Other children who attended included Derek Illing, the Parker twins and Daphne Viccars who lived on the corner of Burleys Rd. Derek had a donkey. Mavis learned poetry, elocution and sewing. There was only one class with about 12 children. The school was opposite the Crooked Billet pub. Mrs Jones retired and some of the children went to Brackley, some to the Latin, Daphne to a convent school and Mavis went back to Winslow, where she recalls being labelled a snob and where the teachers were sarcastic to her. Mavis failed her 11 plus as she was off sick a lot and went with a small group of pupils to Buckingham School which was newly built. She stayed until she was 14 and loved it. In the school holidays Mavis remembers going around with her father on his round in a motorised van to farmers and pubs delivering corn chandler products.
10.35	Mavis's father was born in London where his parents had started a corn chandlers in Stratford. He lived there until he was 8. His parents wanted to get back to the country (his grandmother was born in Winslow) so his grandfather became the Manager at Winslow Mill (now the Conservative offices). Later they had a corn chandlers shop on the High St. Her father was in the church choir and the Boys Brigade. His father sent him to Midgley's shop as an apprentice and he was there at the beginning of the first world war. Mavis tells the story of her father enlisting in the Navy. After leaving the Navy he went back to helping his father in the shop. He did deliveries with a horse and cart.
17.06	Mavis recalls going to back to school in autumn 1939 and being told that they only needed to go to school in the mornings because Marylebone Central School had been evacuated to Buckingham and were using the school in the afternoons. Mavis remembers that history and geography lessons were related to news about the war and how effective this was as a method of teaching.
	When Mavis left school at 14 she helped in her grandmother's shop at first but then Cantell's offered her more money to work there so she moved for 5 shillings a week. Bill French was the manager. Mavis worked there for 2 years and found the hours long. When she was sixteen her father suggested that she go to work on the railway and she obtained a job at Bletchley Telegraph Office as a telephone operator. She had to sign the railway secrecy act. Mavis describes what she did in her work reporting trains up the line. She knew when the King and Queen and Churchill were travelling and saw the large number of people coming by train to work at Bletchley Park. Mavis describes two vintage Rolls Royces that her son restored, one having been Churchill's and how they were used at Bletchley Park (including for Charles and Camilla) and as wedding vehicles.
File 002	Mavis's mother's family, the Bachelors, came over from Ireland during the potato famine and some of the brothers went into the building trade around Buckingham and Calvert. 2 brothers married two sisters. Mavis's grandfather William married Sarah Aris, from the Twyford area, and they lived in Buckingham where his brother had a laundry. They lived first at the laundry and then moved to Nelson St.. Her grandfather went into the building trade and some of his work includes: Granborough Village Hall, and the cinema at Buckingham. Her grandmother was a wonderful cook, having cooked at the Nursing Home in

	Buckingham where she met William. They had three children and a very happy married life. Mavis recounts a story about her grandfather and home-made wine.
	Mavis's home in Park Rd was rented from the Langleys and eventually they had to leave because Doris Langley was retiring and needed to live in it. Her parents went to live over Charlie Beane's shop in the Market Sq and then into a council house on Lowndes Way. When her grandfather, William, died her grandmother went to live with one of her children and then to a pub in Stoke Talbot, Oxon, owned by her sister, for a while. She then lived in a small almshouse in Buckingham opposite the old Gaol. She died in her mid 60s. Mavis's father was an only child. His father died when Mavis was about 9. Her father rented a bit of land from the Gibbs on the corner of Avenue Rd, where Brian Tofield lived, and he kept his van there and grew vegetables. He also erected a tent where Mavis and her friends played.
14.58	After the war Mavis went to Lambeth Hospital to train for a year. Her parents encouraged her to come back to Winslow Hospital. When her grandmother was ill Mavis helped look after her at her home. She died aged 84. Winslow Hospital had a maternity ward, service people from the war, 2 female medical wards, 1 male ward, epileptic sufferers and people with mental health problems, some of the latter also helping out in the hospital. Mavis recalls her grandmother dying and helping to lay her out.
19.48	During the latter years her father had started selling light groceries on his round because farms had asked for them. Her grandfather was a good baker and Mavis recalls going to her grandparents once a week for tea. Mavis remembers Elizabeth Plant, one of her grandmother's friends, whose husband had worked at Magpie Farm but the Illings had sold it and they had nowhere to live so her grandparents let them live above the shop and Elizabeth helped out sometimes. Eventually they went to Canada and bought their own farm. Grandmother Gibbs was strict and Mavis's mother was more free and easy. Her grandmother sometimes took her to church, where they had their own pew. Her parents went out on Sundays once they had a car.
27.50	Mavis talks about her boyfriends during the war and tells the story about meeting and losing one in particular.
003 End 08.30	Mavis is asked to recall the time when the bomber crashed in Winslow. Mavis was aged 17 and she tells the story of going to her grandmother's shop, right next to the bomb site, and seeing the devastation and the bodies being taken away. Mavis mentions Turner's (drapers) yard where her father stored some of the chandler's products.
004 End 01.11	Answering a question about why her father left the corn chandler's business Mavis explains that it was difficult to obtain supplies during the war and the firm was unable to support two families any longer.
005	Continuing from file 004 Mavis says that her grandmother stayed at the shop and her father moved on. First he had a job as chauffeur to Mrs Selby Lowndes which he enjoyed. He drove the car to Whaddon Hall where Mrs Selby Lowndes, Lady Cruse and Lady Fremantle were helping to run a canteen. Ernie moved on from that job to portering at Winslow Station and this meant he could help out at the shop sometimes. When her grandmother died Mavis was asked if she wanted the shop but she didn't so it was sold to the Price family. Ernie won prizes for his gardens at Winslow Station. He loved working there, staying until he was 70 and he saw the last train out of Winslow Station. Mavis describes the free passes and discounts for railway workers and their families at this time.

	<p>Questioned about other personnel at the station Mavis remembers that Mr Brudenell lived at the Station House, George Gaylor had been a groom before working at the station. Ted Amos had the portering job before Ernie Byford, Dennis Comerford was a signalman as was Mr Mclern (father of Amy). Towards the end of the time the station was open a stationmaster came from Bletchley but when he wasn't there the porters ran the station.</p>
	<p>After retiring Ernie was not in particularly good health. He spent the end of his life at The Elms nursing home in Aylesbury and his wife joined him there. He died when his wife was 90. She lived there until she died two months before her 100th birthday.</p>
10.24	<p>Questioned about her mother's work, Mavis said that she left school and went into the dressmaking trade. Her first year was unpaid and then she earned 1 shilling a week. She moved on to work at Cantell's shop in Buckingham and then to the International Store in Buckingham. She met Ernie and they were married in 1924. She didn't work again until after the war.</p>
	<p>During the war Mavis's mother had a number of evacuees at their house in Park Road. Because they had a spare room with a double bed they were required to take two evacuees. The first were Pauline and Olive from Bayswater. They only stayed until around Xmas because they thought London seemed safe and their families wanted them home. During the Blitz a Jewish family of 4 asked to stay with them, Mr and Mrs Levy and their two girls. The older girl slept with Mavis and the others had to go through Mavis's room to their own. Mr Levy was a corsetiere and brought material from London and sewed it at a Jewish friend's house in Winslow. Their shop in London was bombed and they eventually bought a shop in Northampton. The family fitted in well and Mavis enjoyed some of their Jewish food. The next lodgers were two RAF men who were then posted. There were later two RAF special police and a succession of WAAFs and others. Mavis's mother fed them all using rations, they had eggs from their own chickens, knew farmers, and Ernie had fruit trees and a vegetable plot.</p>
23.48	<p>Asked about the number of people living in Winslow during the war Mavis recalls officers at Redfield and the Bell Hotel, and WAAFs, some of whom slept at Redfield in the stables, there were some of the signal corps' partners and then there were all the evacuees. Mavis's grandmother also had evacuees and some of the forces at her shop/house as she mentions in her story about the plane crash. Mavis talks about Meanwell's shop which she remembers was taken over by Dora and Eva as a teashop. People who were fortunate enough to have an egg could take it there and they would make them egg on toast. There was a canteen at the Congregational Chapel in Horn St.</p>
29.11	<p>Mavis joined the Junior Air Corps which was run by Margaret Gordon-Dean. They had lessons on morse code, how to repair car engines and made a trip to a Wellington bomber.</p>
	<p>Returning to Mavis's mother's work she went to work at Cantell's shop in Winslow sometime after the war. She then stopped work for a while and when her parents moved out of Park Rd first they went to a cottage near to the Nag's Head on Sheep St and then rented a flat over Charlie Beane's shop in the Market Sq. The Becketts (bakers) took the ground floor over as a sweet shop and Mavis's mother worked there part-time with Doris Bacon. Mavis believes that her parents moved out of there because Charlie wanted to sell the property and they went to a bungalow at Demoram Close. Her mother had stopped working and the grandparents looked after Mavis's children, a girl and a boy, during the school holidays. Asked about whether Mavis was given chores as a young girl she</p>

End 36.02	had no particular duties although she had a little garden of her own and occasionally was asked to shell peas.
006	Mavis is asked about the Becketts . They rented the Market Sq shop [narrow three storey house with bay windows next to what is now Wilkinson's estate agent's] from Charlie Beane and ran a cake and baker's shop. Mavis's parents had the two floors above. The Becketts had a bakehouse in Horn St. Originally the shop was Harry Turnham's photographic and sweet shop. He took photos on the top floor and Mavis remembers photos developing outside the front of the shop.
End 12.47	Questioned about her father's social activities Mavis outlines his involvement in forming and running the British Legion. Her father and other ex-servicemen including Fred Meanwell, Fred Young, the manager of Hilton's shop & others started it. They had no meeting place and used a variety of locations including the iron room (near to Plough Cottage), Ernie's house and cottages near Brook Hall in Sheep St. They ran whist drives and dances. Mavis recalls being put to bed after school and being allowed to get up later and go to the dances. Her father booked the Dagenham Girl Pipers for events. Later, when Mavis had a young family, her father booked an American band and Chatham Siemens Band. Her father liked organising events and also helped with the Church Fete and the Conservative Fete. At first he was secretary of the British Legion but later resigned this position, although he was still very much involved. The British Legion needed a proper home after the second world war and the new hall was built on land where the Chandos Arms had been. It was a prefab with a brick front and her father and others helped to build it. This building was later demolished when the present hall was built on Elmfields Gate. Mavis remembers that the Chandos was more or less where the shops including the chemist are now. The British Legion held an Any Questions at the prefab hall and Mavis remembers Michael Medwin coming. Mr McDonald Daley, the zoo-man, knew famous people and they were invited for events. Dr Rudd, an ex-serviceman was also influential at the time. Ernie wrote to David Eccles and obtained a flag used at the Cenotaph.