

## Winslow Oral History Project

### Interview Summary

<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Vera Bennett</b>		<b>Date of interview</b>	<b>21 May 2012</b>
<b>Maiden name</b>	Weller			
<b>DOB</b>	1921	<b>Place of birth</b>	Coulsdon, Surrey	
<b>Father's name and occupation</b>	Albert Weller, Farm labourer			
<b>Mother's occupation &amp; maiden name</b>	Edith Henley			
<b>Interviewer</b>	Mary Hunt			
<b>Abstract</b>	Vera talks about her childhood living with her grandparents in Granborough, school in Winslow, her working life at Winslow Hospital and the Manor House, and her family. She remembers the plane crash in some detail.			
<b>Key people</b>	Bert Weller, Edith Weller, William Henley, Annie Henley, Miss Chatteris, Miss Green, Miss Shepherd, Dr Leapingwell, David Bennett, Harry Bennett, Dr Rudd, Matron Burden, Matron Peat, Master Holmes, John Dale, Matron Beckett, Donald Painting, Arthur Askey, Duke of Edinburgh, The Queen, President of Yugoslavia, Miss Rice, Joan Guttridge, Mary Phillips			
<b>Keywords</b>	Coulsdon, Granborough, London, 2 <sup>nd</sup> World War, Granborough School, Winslow Hospital, Manor House Hospital, Royal Navy, Korean War, Winslow Show, Post Office, Western Lane, plane crash, Granborough Church, Buckingham Palace, Winslow Football Club, Chelsea Football Club, British Legion, Dicken's Farm.			
<b>No. of files (tracks)</b>	1	<b>Copyright status</b>	Cleared	
<b>File no.</b>				
001	Born in London but when she was a few weeks old she moved to Granborough and was brought up by her maternal grandparents, William and Annie Henley. Vera lived in Granborough until she was 14 and then went to London for 2 years as an apprentice in a shop. Immediately before the 2 <sup>nd</sup> World War she returned to Granborough. Vera's grandfather worked on a farm and her grandmother was caretaker at Granborough School. They lived in cottages on the main road near to the church. Vera's parents remained in London. Vera remembers playing with local Granborough children and going to school in Winslow where she met her husband. Her parents bought her a bike to cycle to school. She remembers the teachers: Miss Chatteris, Miss Green, Miss Shepherd. Vera hated school but loved sports.			
05.47	In January 1940 Vera started work at Winslow Hospital and she stayed there until it closed and then worked at Manor House in Aylesbury until that closed. Vera started work there by looking after the children of mothers who were unable to look after them i.e. they were in hospital or incapacitated for some reason, getting them up in the morning for school and giving them meals and putting them to bed at night. Later Vera started work on the wards, which she loved. She earned 19 shillings a week. Vera lived in once she started working on the wards. There were geriatric and maternity wards. Training was on the job with the Matron teaching them and examining them. Vera mentions Sister Copperwaite. Dr Leapingwell was the doctor there at the time.			
10.04	Vera was married in 1945 and in 1946 she had her son David. Harry, her husband lived in Coventry after leaving Winslow School and during the war he was in the			

End 17.09	Navy where he was burned in an accident on his boat. In the military hospital Dr Rudd looked after him, although they did not know each other at the time. Harry wrote to Vera to see if she was single still and after that they started courting. Harry went back into the Navy after convalescence and was discharged in 1946, although he was called back later into the Korean War. Harry was Chairman of the Winslow Show for 10 years. He was a Scoutmaster in Winslow and also ran the Sea Scouts.
002	Harry worked as a telephone technician in the Post Office after the War. He was based in Aylesbury and enjoyed his work. After 12 months maternity leave Vera carried on working until she retired. She worked nights a lot of the time and cycled back and forth from Granborough to Winslow Hospital until they moved into her parents-in-law's house in Winslow (in the 50s), where Vera still lives.
	Vera remembers the matrons at Winslow Hospital. Matron Burden was the first she worked under, then Matron Peat, later there was a Master Holmes. Later John Dale's parents were Matron and Master. Matron Beckett supervised when they moved to Manor House. Winslow Hospital was a happy place to work although it was called 'The Spike' [Dr Rudd in his history of the hospital says this is a reference to the railings surrounding it].
06.58	Vera was on night duty when the plane crashed in Winslow during the war. She talks about the survivors and the victims and laying out the dead in some detail. Vera knew all the Winslow people who were involved and she had to identify them. She talks about how hard it was to lay out a friend of hers, Donald Painting, with whom she would have gone out socially the following night. Vera represented the Hospital at the funeral. Asked about evacuees Vera mentions that there were none at her grandparents as they were too old although there were some in Granborough.
15.10	Vera does not know where her grandparents came from. As well as her mother there was a sister and a brother. Vera's aunt came from London to look after Vera's grandmother when she was ill and died. Asked about helping out in the house when she was a child Vera did not feel that she had chores but she was expected to help tidy up. She had plenty of freedom as long as she was home by 8 or 9 o'clock. The family went to Granborough Church every Sunday and had their own pew. Vera was christened and married at the Church and her son was christened there. Her grandparents were not well off which is why her grandmother had to clean at the school. Her grandmother was a good cook and her mother was a very good cook who catered for banquets and dinners in London, including for royalty. She was invited to a Garden party at Buckingham Palace. Vera's Uncle was knighted. When her husband was in the Navy Vera attended a dinner, with Arthur Askey (a distant relation), when the Duke of Edinburgh was present. Vera also attended a cocktail party where one of the guests was the President of Yugoslavia. When she was at school Vera danced in front of the Queen and other members of the Royal Family as part of a school group. They were taken to this Wembley event by Miss Chatteris. Vera was then 8 or 9. Vera had dancing lessons every Tuesday. Vera's grandfather lived to about 94 and so did her mother. Her grandmother died in her 60s.
	Vera is a great sports fan. She enjoys watching football at Winslow club where she is well known and they presented her with a birthday cake to celebrate her 90 <sup>th</sup> birthday. Originally she went to see her grandson, Steve, play. Her father and Uncle were both involved with cricket in London. Vera talks about the sports she enjoys and particularly about being a Chelsea fan and how much she enjoyed the recent Chelsea win in Europe. Vera says that her honeymoon was in London.

	<p>Returning to her schooling, Vera went to Granborough School until she was 10 and then to Winslow School until she was 14. Her mother wanted her to go to Aylesbury High School but Vera did not want to go as she thought it would make her stuck up. At Granborough Vera thinks there was only one teacher, Miss Rice, who taught two classes in one room. Vera attended a nursery school before she went to Winslow.</p>
	<p>Vera's sister-in-law lived in Winslow. She thinks her husband may have been born in Newport Pagnell. Questioned about how Winslow has changed Vera thinks that it is less friendly now than during the war although generally speaking it is a friendly place and her neighbours are kind. Vera went to the British Legion at Christmas to take the mental health patients to the party. Vera's husband was Scoutmaster for 3 or 4 years. He took the sea-scouts canoeing at Windsor.</p>
End 44.50	<p>Thinking about the hospital Vera refers to Dr Rudd's book. Just before it closed they had moved the geriatric patients out and only the mental health patients were left and Vera says that some of them did not have mental health problems, some were unmarried mothers. Some of them then moved to a house on Station Rd.</p>
003 End 08.05	<p>Questioned about how often she saw her parents Vera says she went up for the odd Sunday and she went in holiday times, in the summer for about a month. When they were older her parents came to Winslow in the summer and at Xmas. Her mother made Vera's and her son David's clothes. When Harry and her Dad had died Vera sometimes went to London and did her mother's shopping. The latter came to Winslow for about 6 months before she died for Vera to look after her. Vera talks about her grandparents and how she loved them. Her grandfather never swore or uttered a cross word and Vera never heard them get cross with one another. She remembers going to church on a Sunday and then coming home, going for a walk with her grandfather before having a cup of milk and going to bed. Her grandfather worked at Dickens Farm in Granborough, now gone.</p>
004 End 02.10	<p>Vera tells a story about working in the mortuary at the hospital. She talks about dances and concerts at the hospital and says that friends have suggested that she write a book about working there but it wasn't something she felt she could do.</p>