

Interviewee: **Pensioner's Group, Charter House**

Interviews conducted by Nicky Leap and Billie Hunter during research for the publication '*The Midwife's Tale: an Oral History from Handywoman to Professional Midwife*' (1993; 2nd edition 2013)

Date recorded: 17 June 1986

Duration of audio: 56:52

Collection: Special collections of the archives of the Royal College of Midwives

Archive Reference: RCMS/251/24

Description:

Transcript of an interview with a group of pensioners relating to their experiences of childbirth during the 1920s and 1930s, including details of social conditions and poor housing, home births, payment of medical costs and insurance, antenatal clinics, lack of sexual education, preparations for home births, working conditions, and childcare.

Topics include: Midwifery; Maternity services; Childbirth; Antenatal care; Homebirth

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[START OF INTERVIEW]

Transcriber's Note: The respondents tend to talk at once which has made transcribing the audio difficult; these instances are marked as ((overtalking)). Also, separate conversations are held regularly so only one conversation thread is transcribed, if audible.

Interviewer What I wanted to do is to try and get you to talk a bit about what it was like having a baby, when you had the children, those of you who had children what it was like in those days, because it's very different than it is nowadays.

Responder You're telling me!

Responder ((inaudible))

Responder You can have a baby if you want one! ((Laughter)) Len's going to have babies. ((Overtalking)) Len's going to have babies. It'll give us a rest. ((Overtalking)) Don't they look funny out here. ((Laughter))

Responder Some of them were out ((inaudible)) ((Laughter))

Responder That was on the TV, wasn't it, a few weeks ago.

Responder That's right. That was, er, ((inaudible)) with the, er, Michael Aspel Show, wasn't it.

Responder Yes, that's right, yeah. Can't see that happening, can you?

Responder They can do such wonderful things now.

Responder You're right, yeah.

Interviewer What was it like then though?

Responder Oh, we didn't have no wireless, did we.

Responder No.

Interviewer What was it like having a baby then?

Responder You didn't have the treatment like you do now.

Responder Having a baby?

Interviewer Hmmm.



Responder Oh well, er-

Interviewer You were at home?

Responder Yeah. Well sometimes you had, sometimes we had to go to the hospital, sometimes we had them at home. ((inaudible))...

Responder ((inaudible)) No.

Responder ... ((inaudible)) and things like that. So, ((coughs)) it's only just lately that our flats have been modernised. We used to have the water outside on the landing. So the only thing is we used to have to get kettles of, er, water and boil them all up, so ... whenever things happened, so-

Responder Used to lay in bed for about nine days, didn't you. ((inaudible)) now. They're out now.

Responder Marvellous, isn't it.

Responder Well, they, they had a baby at two and they're up at three.

Responder Of course, yes, yeah, in them days, yeah.

Responder Well like the gypsies, they have them in the roadside, don't they, ((agreement)) and get up and walk away.

Responder Yeah, that's it, they do.

Interviewer Did you use to stay in bed all that time or did you use to-? ((Overtalking))

Responder Nine days ((inaudible))

Responder You wasn't allowed out, was you. No.

Interviewer So who managed the housework and stuff?

Responder Well, anyone in the family.

Responder Oh well, you, er ...

Responder ((inaudible))



Responder ... had to get somebody else to help you. Like we didn't have home help then, did we. Didn't have home help then.

Responder You had to pay, pay a woman, didn't you.

Responder That's it.

Responder And they, er, listen to its heart and ((inaudible)) Marvellous, isn't it, what they do now.

Responder And the other thing, used to have the nurse come home to us.

Responder The district nurse.

Responder People who were going to have their baby at home, the midwife, she's a nurse, er, the midwife used to come here and see to and wash the baby and wash the ... and then she'd say she would call back, er ... sometimes, sometimes she'd come back the second time. I think it was two days so she'd come back a second time, but the third day only one. See, you had to learn ... 14 days I think it was and then you were-

Responder You had to pay for that, didn't you.

Responder Eh?

Responder You had to pay for that.

Interviewer How much did that cost then?

Responder I don't know.

Responder Don't know.

Responder A long time, wasn't it.

Responder Yeah. About, er ... oh I don't know.

Responder I know they had to pay.

Responder And if you don't pay you put something in a box, don't you. ((Overtalking)) Something in a box for that. Anyway, er, the first one I had at home, the next one I had at home. So as my son was born my girl was one year old, so she was born on the 1st of July ...

1st of June, and he was born on the 1st of July. So, um ... ((Overtalking)) Anyway, they both grew up together so ... ((Overtalking)) And, er, after that, er, he was, he was ... ((Paula's boy?)) was nearly getting, getting on for four, then I had the other boys. ((inaudible)) I've had them all in June and July, because one was on the 20th of June, and then the last one was just ((inaudible)) So I've got three sons and one daughter.

Interviewer Did you have them all at home?

Responder Pardon?

Interviewer Did you have them all at home?

Responder Did you have them all at home?

Responder Er, two at home and two in the hospital. Because, um, as the years ago so ((inaudible)) they would supply you with them.

Interviewer You had to book up yourself.

Responder Oh yeah. We had to go to the clinic. Er, it's the place we go now, isn't it. No. Where's the clinic now?

Responder Further up, um, past tower, tower block.

Responder Oh.

Responder Is it past the tower block?

Responder Oh. I know it's-

Responder Only in the Solomon's Centre been closed a long while.

Responder Yeah, that's right.

Responder Oh yes, that's right.

Responder Yeah.

Responder And the new clinic is further up just past the tower block.

Responder Oh I know where it is. I can't think of the name of it. I know where you mean.

Responder Yeah, we used to go and have one on the corner.



Responder That's right. Solomon Centre.

Responder It's a centre for, er, getting your hearing aid and that.

Responder Yeah.

Responder Like your, er ...

Responder Batteries.

Responder ... batteries there.

Responder Yeah, Solomon's Clinic that was called.

Responder I didn't know they were shut down all together though. Um, it only shut down for maternity.

Responder It's, um, oh, some special place now for urine and that.

Responder Oh I know, yeah. Yeah, that's right, yeah. That's right, yeah.

Responder For your water, see if it's cloudy or not. ((Laughs))

Responder The clinic is further down the ... just past the tower block.

Responder Down at ((Beach Pond?)).

Responder That's right.

Responder Er, I think ... although I don't think we went in Guys much, not for the babies. I used to go to St Olive's.

Responder ((inaudible)) there.

Responder Yeah. Well I know I had, er, I had to go back into the ((hospital?)) and I had to take the baby with me because she was breastfeeding. So, anyway, being ill I lost my milk so therefore I used to say to this nurse, "Will you make up the bottle?", "Oh we can't do that", I said, "Well I ain't got no milk so you've got to give it something". "Oh", she said, "Oh we don't do that kind of thing in this ward", she said, "You'll have to go in ((inaudible))" So, er, that told I thought to myself I'll be glad to get home, I could do what I like then.

Interviewer Did you prefer it being at home to have your babies or did you-?



Responder Pardon?

Interviewer Where did you prefer to have your babies, at home or in hospital?

Responder Well in, er, certain circumstances I think the hospital was more better because in our flat we didn't have, um, water inside, we didn't have the toilet inside, you had to go outside, so ((coughs)) that's er ... so it's best to go and have it in the hospital where-

Responder They only keep them in there for a day now, don't they.

Responder Yeah, they don't keep you long. As long as you, er, have like ... you're all right inside and things like that, so you go. And they, er ... I don't know whether they sent ... hello love, I didn't notice see you sitting there. ((Laughs))

Responder I don't make much noise.

Responder You look well. Where you been?

Responder Out in the garden.

Responder I thought you had. Anyway, er, what was I talking about now? ((Overtalking)) Oh, about the babies indoors. Er, people didn't have no, er, convenience like, so everything is out on the landing. The water was out on the landing, the toilet was out on the landing. So the best place would be in the hospital. So the last two of mine I had in hospital so ... and that. So I, er ... in the war, because I got bombed out, and, er, I got a flat that was an old factory, old factory converted into flats, I thought to myself I've come out of one lot of old rubbish, now I've gone into another one. ((Laughingly)) You couldn't get nowhere else because everything was being bombed, so I had to put up with that. It was an old factory which they had converted in flats in Leroy Street, I don't know if you know it.

Responder That's right, on Leroy Street.

Responder Yeah. There used to be a fac-, a factory down there. Mind you, we enjoyed our-self in there, ((laughingly)) ((inaudible)) Everything was inside this time, it wasn't out on the landing so, so that was all right. Because I had the children ((quite older?)) I had to move about to Harwood's Estate. We had a nice flat there and we had nice friends and quite nice, and all of a sudden I started ((inaudible)) nice flats, you see. Well, my husband suffers with



asthma so therefore we couldn't stop there because of the damp and ((inaudible)), so we had to move again. Where did we go this time? Oh, ((pauses)) er, Pete's Estate. You know that?

Responder Hmmm, hmm.

Responder Do you? Douglas Estate, Deptford.

Responder Oh Deptford.

Responder Deptford.

Responder Out there?

Responder Yeah, it would be, wouldn't it. Oh, I forget. Anyway, we had to go ((inaudible)) and, er, ((pauses)) we stopped there for a little while. Because the children instead of going out on the, out on the street to play, they had to go on our landing, because ((as they come out in the lift?)) so they had to ... Then all day I had to keep going out and telling them to go down the stairs and play. Not as if they hadn't got a park or anything, which they did have, but no they had to stop outside my door. I went and told the woman along the landing, I said to her, "Do you mind if your ... look after your child", I said, "I have to because you don't", so she said, "((inaudible))", "You take her out then", I said, "You're the mother, you take her down the park". Got a park and everything down there. No they wouldn't take them, they let them play on the landing. They didn't want to be bothered with them. ((inaudible)) So my son said ... because they'd got bombed out of ((Guinness')) building, see, ((inaudible)) He said, "Now they're remodelling them mum, why don't you ask them can you go back?", because they never re-housed you.

Responder No.

Responder So I goes, well I've been ... my son ... my daughter-in-law wrote and said I'll write the letter. ((inaudible)) me to write a letter couldn't but for the life of me. Anyway. Not them kind of letters anyway. So anyway, she wrote a letter. Within a fortnight I had answer and I was in it, the most beautiful flat you've ever seen.

Interviewer That's great.



Responder That's really love- ... so, um, it was worth waiting for, wasn't it.

Responder Course it was, yeah. Worth waiting for.

Responder I got a ... as I say, my living room is as big as this. As you come in you've got a long passage, there's a kitchen there and then there's the little room, and there's the bedroom, then there's another bedroom and a toilet. So-

Interviewer Going back to when you had your babies, did they used to do checkups on you when you were pregnant, like antenatal care?

Responder Yeah. You had to go and, er, be examined, didn't we.

Responder I don't know because I've never had any. ((Laughs))

Responder You had to go the, er, welfare, didn't you, every so often.

Responder Yeah. Agnes had to.

Responder Oh, haven't you had any?

Responder No. Agnes had a baby.

Responder Oh sorry.

Responder That's all right dear.

Responder Didn't we, we had to go to the ((inaudible)) Every so often you had to go to clinic to see how far the baby is or how ... whatever.

Responder After that I had to have an operation so I couldn't have no more.

Responder Oh sorry.

Responder That's alright.

Responder Anyway, um, some ... first one I think is the worst, that dread, first baby seemed to be the worst, because-

Responder She made ... they made way for the rest. ((Laughs))

Responder She makes way for the younger one. She, she was born on the 1st of June – that's why I called her June – the other one was born on the 1st of July, a year. So they said, "C'or,



that's quick mum", I said, um, "((inaudible)) I said, "Yeah, it's just one of those things", and I had to take back the pram and say, "C'or ain't they nice ... twins", I said-

Responder ((inaudible))

Responder Pardon?

Responder No pills then though.

Responder Oh no. So they said-

Responder ((You had to ignore it?)) then. ((Agreement))

Responder "Twins", I said, "Yeah", because they look like twins. ((inaudible)) because the boy, being a boy I think they grow bigger than the girls, doesn't they. So anyway, one was sitting up ((inaudible)) ((Laughingly)) I said, "Yeah", she said, "Oh", she said, "They're nice", she said, so I said, "Yeah". So anyway, as the years go on I've got ... well they're at good jobs, one, one went to, er, ((inaudible)) School, I don't know if you know it, and both ... so the teacher said, "((We're now going leave school?)), where would you like him to go?", so I said, "Oh that's ...", when they had to change schools, didn't they, at a certain age they changed schools. So she said, "Where would you like him to go?", I said, "St Oldham's", "Oh no", she said, "Can't go there". "Oh", I said, "We're not, er, what's the name enough for that, are we? We're not, er, middle class for that, we're not posh enough for that". She said, "No", she said, "It's not that", she said, "I don't think David's, er, qualified for it", I said, I said, "He is". ((Overtalking)) I only wished I could see that teacher because I should tell her he wasn't qualified but now he's the Chief Engineer in ((pauses)) Kensington and Borough, he's the Chief Engineer in there. He wasn't no good, was he, when he-

Responder That's what they said.

Responder That's what they said. But I knew differently. And he worked his way up to Chief Engineer, yeah. And the other one, he's a Manager of swimming baths and he's a painter as well. He paints gooey pictures. Every time it's my birthday so he paints me a picture, and all the pictures in my ... oh because you know ... did you see them?

Responder Yes.



Responder All the pictures in my flat are all hand painted from my son and that. And the other one, well, you've got to have one who's ... you know. ((Overtalking)) He's a bus driver. ((Overtalking)) But he can do, he could do three jobs, he's a bricklayer, he's in maintenance, and he's a bus driver, so if he ain't got one job he's ... ((Laughs))

Responder Something to fall back on.

Responder Yeah. As I say, he's got ((inaudible)) And my daughter, well, ((inaudible)) go in for anything like, er, a career, do they.

Responder No, not when ... some of them do today but not them days.

Responder She's, er, Sid's quite a nice girl, ((inaudible)) office and that. She's not ... she's up there as well, you know, and, er, good job she don't take after me, she's as dense as dunces as a don't know what.

Responder See in them days you didn't get the education like they have now.

Responder No they don't, yeah.

Responder That learn all sites and all this, languages. Never, not in them days.

Responder And they all live out in the country, all got their own houses.

Responder And they ain't done bad for themselves, have they.

Responder No. And, I'm, I'm very pleased that I've brought them all up to be like they are. So she said I could write a book about it and they're right. Yeah. I'm very proud.

Interviewer You know you were saying just now that you couldn't get the pill then, but was there any family planning clinics? ((Disagreement)) That was all.

Responder Not heard of. You just got what come, didn't you, take a chance. ((Laughingly))

Responder Do, do as the girl did, chance it. ((Agreement))

Interviewer Did women in those days know much about their bodies?

Responder Well not like they do today.

Responder Wasn't taught it, you see.



Interviewer It was a bit of a surprise sometimes when you got married.

Responder Yeah. Well you see, um, now I'll be such a prude now when I had mine, but when you used to say to people, "Oh, how does babies get where they do?", "Well, the same way as it went in".

Responder Or she's born under the gooseberry bush. That's where I found you, under the gooseberry bush. They'd never tell where you they came from.

Responder No.

Responder I never heard nobody.

Responder And you can never remember seeing your mother walk around ((inaudible)) Never.

Responder No. Because they had a big shawl, wouldn't they, cover their-selves up. ((Agreement)) And big white shirts.

Responder Our parents never used to tell us, never used to tell us what we ... when you're married because you'd generally tell you what size so-and-so ((inaudible)) but they'd never tell us we had to ((inaudible))

Responder ((inaudible))

Responder Yeah. ((inaudible))

Interviewer Must have been a bit of a shock, was it?

Responder It was. ((Laughter))

Interviewer I can imagine!

Responder Well that's true, isn't it. ((Agreement))

Responder Still, never done you any harm, did it.

Responder No. My husband's still here God bless him. I don't know what I'd do without him. ((inaudible)) you know, he suffers a lot really. He does suffer a lot with his asthma. He's annoyed, quite annoyed because he can't go out like he used to, you know.

Responder How about Gilbert ((inaudible)) you know.



Responder And I don't think this weather does him any good.

Responder No, they're worse in this weather, ain't they.

Responder Yeah.

Responder I think they're, they're worse in the dry weather than they are in the winter, yeah.

Responder I say to him, "Are you coming down the road with us?", he said, "Not in this weather".

Responder No, I've heard him say that before.

Responder I'd love him to come to ((Godleigh?)) with me, because she asked me to take ... but he couldn't have come. Couldn't have come.

Responder No. Long journey.

Responder I feel so selfish sometimes that I go out and he don't, you know, I really ... But anyway, be going away for the weekend. My son's coming up to pick us up and we're going away, going down his place for the weekend.

Responder That'll be nice.

Responder So that'll be nice.

Responder That'll be a change for him, won't it.

Responder Yeah.

Interviewer When you were having your babies at home – just go back to that – did you have to get stuff ready for the midwife?

Responder Oh yeah.

Interviewer What sort of things?

Responder Like nappies, powder, baby soap and all that kind of thing.

Interviewer So when you actually had the baby, for the birth, did you have to like buckets and jugs?



Responder Oh yeah. Well you have a midwife, don't you. It's either the nurse from the hospital or you get your own midwife, don't you.

Responder That's right. Well, some of them had their own doctor, didn't they.

Responder Some did, yeah. But, er, most of the doctors come from Guys. So you have a nurse come home ... once she comes home for about two or three days, but then she comes over about three days until the end of the time that you're well enough to get up and see to the baby, see. I think you're in bed about 12 days. I think it is about 12 days you're in bed.

Interviewer Was it more expensive to have a doctor than a midwife?

Responder Oh I couldn't tell you really because, er, we didn't have any money away.

Responder It's such a long time ago, wasn't it.

Responder We didn't have any money to pay for these, er, er, ((overtalking)) If your nurses come from the hospital we don't have to pay, but if you have private, like certif- ... private doctor, and he gets a midwife out, then you've got to pay. But I don't think we, I don't think we paid, unless it's something to do with the insurance, see, probably like, er ... Because when you get your ... you get so much, don't you, with every child you get-

Responder The Lloyd George's Scheme. ((Agreement))

Responder Yeah. Yeah, I think you get so much money. ((Overtalking))

Responder Maternity grant, wasn't it. About fifty bob, wasn't it.

Responder I'm talking about a couple of years after, I know, you know, and er, I think you get a grant, see. Not a lot of money, but it wasn't, wasn't a lot of money it helped.

Responder I know as Elsie said, if you went to the doctor you had ((pay the doctor?)).

Responder I know, you do. Yeah.

Responder And if you wanted a certificate for work it was three and six. That's right.

Responder That's right, ((inaudible)) if you haven't done the work and you was off sick, you had pay to do it, then you had to pay when you ((inaudible)) two certificates.

Responder Yeah, but don't you think in ... I mean even though you paid in them days don't you think it's more expensive under this National Health? I mean you've got to pay £2 now for a bloody prescription, ain't you. But them days you never had a penny from anywhere, did you. ((Agreement)) And if you never had home you went in a workhouse. That's right. They wasn't mollycoddled ((inaudible)) ((Overtalking))

Responder I think they had a new scheme out, didn't they, oh long ... talk about a long time ago, about the, er, the la-, the wives or the ladies that, er, liked to pay extra money to get extra insurance. ((Pauses)) Well, um, my insurance man said to me, er ... where did they do it? I think it was, um, something to do with the insurance like, when you was off sick.

Responder An endowment policy.

Responder It's something like ... when you were sick you didn't get about £6 or whatever it was, you'd get a bit extra.

Responder They gave it because of insurance then.

Responder Yeah.

Responder And he gave you 10 shillings a week. ((Overtalking))

Responder That's what I've done, see. When I left work I, er, got more pension than the others.

Responder That's right. Because you paid extra on your insurance while you were working.

Responder Yeah. Well now I get more pension than my husband do.

Responder That's right, because you paid extra while you was working. That's it.

Responder Yeah. So that's, that was ... I wasn't going to go in for it first, so my insurance man said, "You go in for it", he said, "It's a good thing". And it was.

Responder ((Sneezes))

Responder Bless you.

Responder I know, because when I got married when I went up Marshallsay Road to change my name, the woman said to me, "Still carry on with your insurance money because you'll, you'll

be able to retire work at 60 and get your pension, state pension", and that's what I did. So ... because I never had it so I never missed it.

Responder No, you didn't, did you.

Responder Didn't miss it, see.

Responder I don't whether you paid each week, because when I got married-

Responder You pay your full stamp, did you?

Responder I paid full-

Responder Yeah, so did I.

Responder Paid full, yeah. ((Overtalking))

Responder Those who worked who didn't pay stamp I think they get about £21/£22 state pension.

Responder They get it off their husbands then.

Responder I know, that's it, yes.

Responder They get more than that.

Responder No they don't.

Responder No they don't, no. ((Overtalking)) ((inaudible)) is about £21, that's all. ((Overtalking))

Responder My neighbour, she only use to pay tuppence a week. ((Overtalking))

Responder She said, "What do you mean?", she had to pay extra money on your insurance. I said, "They said you would benefit in the days to come", because you do.

Responder Because they do, yeah. Yeah.

Responder Well actually I mean, er, when we gave up the game my money will be nearly £40 a week.

Responder That's it, see, yeah.

Responder That's what I say, er, er-



- Responder You, you never had that money so you didn't miss it.
- Responder No, not really. I said, "That's what ... I shall save it". ((Overtalking))
- Responder ((inaudible)) when you get it, don't you.
- Responder You only get 25 of it. ((Overtalking))
- Responder And you only get 25?
- Responder Two or three our women they've had their new books through and they got 25p.
- Responder They're stopping the rest in tax, see, this is a new clause, yeah.
- Responder Oh, I didn't know that. Well I ... er, there's three of them, isn't it.
- Responder Now when I was at work I had so much took out my wages each week.
((Overtalking))
- Responder It's going to be 40 pence, isn't it.
- Responder 40 pence, isn't it.
- Responder No. ((Overtalking))
- Responder I ain't got my book here.
- Responder No, I'll have a look.
- Responder I'm sure it's 40p.
- Responder No, no.
- Responder It was.
- Responder It was. But now-
- Responder Three women in the club that we go to and all they've got is 25p.
- Responder How is it they've only got 25 then, they must be-? ((Overtalking))
- Responder She stopped it in tax.
- Responder She stopped it in tax.
- Responder What they call tax, yeah. ((Overtalking))



Responder Well they must be paying tax, mustn't they.

Responder No, no, no, no. It's just their way of working round things now my dear. They, they, give in one hand and take it out the other.

Responder I'll have a look at my book and see what I've got.

Responder If you get ... when we get 30p in about a month's time-to-time

Responder Or 40p.

Responder No, it wouldn't be 40. But those have already got their books are only getting 25p, so their ((inaudible))

Responder Those that stopped on further in work and worked until they were 70, they're getting ((inaudible)) those that finished at 60 are only getting 25.

Responder Oh dear.

Responder I'll have a look at my book then tonight.

Responder Yeah. Well I've got one more to come on mine. ((Overtalking)) I think mine's, er, in my book. I'll have a look.

Responder When does your book run out? Mine runs out the end of July then I'll have it in my new book.

Responder No, I, I ... no, I've only just got my new book, I've only had it two or three weeks. I'll have a look and I'll let you know.

Responder You have a look then.

Responder I will, because I knew what I got before.

Responder Did you work, did you work over 60?

Responder No.

Responder I finished at 60.

Responder No, I finished at 60. ((Overtalking))



Responder Well you'll be alright, because Jane, Janey Jeffries, she finished at 60, she worked under me Jane did, and she's only got the 25 in her book.

Responder Oh no, I've way more than that.

Responder And she's 80-odd, yeah.

Responder I worked until I was 70 but I don't get no extra because I didn't pay no stamp.

Responder Oh no, well you wouldn't, no.

Responder You won't get it, no, no.

Responder As I say, my insurance man told me, he said, "If I was you I'd do, er ... get it", he said, "You'll benefit by it". So I have benefit right until I think it was 70, I think. ((Overtalking))

Responder Them days if you was away ill and you went to your doctor, you paid him, and also you paid for a certificate, gave it to your insurance man and he paid you 10 shillings a week.

Responder Yeah, that's right, yeah.

Responder And your unemployment benefit, you had to like ((inaudible))

Responder Yeah. Well it's Post Offices now.

Responder That's right, it used to be Unemployment Exchange. ((Agreement)) Then from there when they closed that down you went into Branning Street church hall. ((Overtalking))

Responder The only time I went is up at, up, er, um, ((Bournemouth?)) Road, ((pauses)) I know because it was in Branning Hall and they sent me up to Snow Hill to get ((inaudible)) on Nugget Hill.

Responder Oh yeah.

Responder And if you didn't take a job that was offered you they chucked you off.

Responder They stopped your money.

Responder Yeah, they stopped your money. If you, if you didn't take a job they stopped your money. Not like they do today, they can ((preclude?)) it. ((Overtalking))

Responder Six weeks when you got your money back.



Responder So you had to get to like your job.

Responder Yeah, whether you liked it or not. I don't know if you listened to that man, there was a man on the television about four or five weeks ago, got some business or the other, and he was talking about the unemployed and he was talked about people getting jobs, and he, he applied, er, you know, for ...

Responder A job.

Responder ... No. He was applying for some- ... to employ someone.

Responder Oh, employing.

Responder Yeah. He ... and he ... what was his? 100 and something pound a week he was saying. He said he couldn't get no-one to do it, he said he, he had a chap in, he stopped one day, he said I still can't get anyone to do it because they're getting more out of work than they are in work. Well you know why, don't you?

Responder They're all out in Mexico.

Responder Yeah.

Responder On holiday on the DHS money. ((inaudible)) as well.

Responder Well look what they're doing, they're on the DHSS, ain't they, and they're moonlighting of a night-time, they're getting office jobs and all that. Well you take it, time they get it off of the social security and then they get these jobs in the night-time, they're getting more than people that work all day long. ((Overtalking)) And, and even the social security know that it's being done because the bloke was on there, he said that we can't do anything about it, we can't catch them.

Responder No, but I'll tell you one thing what I think is paying, these students learn to study like ((inaudible)) let's just cut all their grants down. I mean so the cost of living, by the time they've paid their rent, I reckon it's disgusting.

Responder Yeah, I reckon it's disgusting.

Responder Yet these other people can, can get this money and, and get these sideline jobs, and they're earning more money ((inaudible))



Interviewer Did people used to do jobs on the side in those days when they were on the dole?

Responder There was a terrible lot out of work when we was ... ((overtalking)) Because if ((inaudible)) job, somebody else was in there, so you got the sack.

Responder Do you know what, I bet the worst job I ever had was Brazil, cracking Brazil nuts. My poor fingers! ((Laughs)) ((inaudible)) And yet time I was there I could crack them like a what's the name. Once you get used to them.

Responder That's right. You just don't know where to hit them.

Responder I think I used to lose more nuts. ((Laughs)) ((inaudible))I said to him, "Don't eat no more of them!". Oh. And look, I'll tell you where the place was, you know ((Newgooder?)) Street.

Responder Yeah.

Responder On the corner.

Responder That's right. The nut factory.

Responder Do you remember? Called Murrays.

Responder That's right. My sister worked in there.

Responder Did she?

Responder Yeah.

Responder My poor fingers. I think I had more ((inaudible)) ((Laughs)) Still, it was a job. ((Overtalking)) ((inaudible)) them days, could you, you've got to take whether you liked it or not.

Responder You've got to take it and enjoy it, yeah, get to like it.

Responder Yeah.

Responder Because all them flats wasn't there then.

Responder ((inaudible)) you daren't take a day off if you had a cold or headache or backache.

Responder Oh no, otherwise someone would step in and take your place.



Responder Especially if they said she was better than you! ((Laughs))

Responder She's quicker.

Responder Yeah.

Responder And she's got it. Or he's got it.

Responder Them days you didn't have no tea breaks then. ((Agreement)) Had them while you're working.

Responder And you didn't have no holidays.

Responder You had, you had to eat your lunch and drink your tea while you worked.

Responder Sometimes they wouldn't let us have tea.

Responder No.

Responder Used to do it on the sly.

Responder I know when I first worked ((inaudible)) sterilised milk bottle, and I used to fill that with tea and put a woolly top round to keep it warm and have a cup of tea while working. Yeah.

Interviewer After women had their children, did they go back to work afterwards quite quick?
((Agreement))

Responder ((inaudible)) and office cleaner.

Interviewer So who used to look after their kids then?

Responder ((Overtalking)) ... office cleaning and go out first thing in the morning. Some used to go in the morning, some used to go every night.

Responder Some used to go twice ((inaudible)) ((Overtalking))

Responder I used to give them their tea there, yeah, ((inaudible)) so I said to them one day, "Are you going to work today, you can come home to tea", "Oh no mum because ((inaudible)) her tea". ((Laughingly)) She'd make bread puddings. I don't know ((inaudible)) I used to go to work, I used to send the children to play centre where the school was right



opposite where I lived. I used to chuck them all up there, I'd say, "Here you are chuck them ((inaudible)) together" and that was ((inaudible)) And I used to know the lady, her name was Mrs Suta, so I said to her, "See that they eat their tea, won't you", I said, "Because, er, time I get home", I said, "There won't be nothing, no grub left in the house", I said. So anyway she said, "I'll see to them", and she just ((inaudible)) bread pudding, oh gorgeous bread pudding. And one day I wasn't at work so I said, "Come home to tea tonight", "Oh no mother, we're going up ((inaudible)) and have our tea", he said, "They've got bread pudding up there". ((Laughs))

Interviewer What was the play centre then?

Responder Pardon?

Interviewer What was it, the play centre?

Responder A school. A school. And they ... some, some, some of the, some of the I think part-time teachers used to stop behind and look after them. Then you made ... used to have their tea there. So I knew that they was having tea because, er, time I was finished I couldn't ... I, er, had to go to work at six o'clock, the time you wait for the bus, buses was terrible then, wasn't it. Time you waited for the bus and that, so I couldn't get ... have any tea, and I couldn't give the children any tea. Because I knew that if I give them the money they would go and have their tea. And I knew that they'd eat their tea there. Well ((inaudible)) run out, don't they. ((Agreement)) So I knew that they had their tea. ((I do the same?)) for the boys now. "Do you remember Lily, Mrs Suta?", and she said, "Yes mum, wouldn't mind one of her bread puddings now". ((Laughs))

Responder Them, them days there was no bus stop. If you saw a bus coming you'd stand there and flag it down.

Responder That's right.

Responder And they used to stop for you. ((Overtalking)) Even when you were at the bus stop-

Responder How about the buses with no tops. ((Overtalking))

Responder The apron over the top.



Responder Yeah. With the umbrella up! ((Overtalking))

Responder When I was younger I had a, a red ((daintcot straw?)). Well they're fine straw, straws as you know, and, er, I was going over to West, um, Aldgate to the market one Sunday morning, and it just started to rain a little bit. Well, as I'm on top of the bus they've got the sheet over the front of me, and, er, but as we're going over London Bridge it absolutely fell down, and course the wind and everything, and I'm holding on the sides of my hat like that so that it didn't blow off. I had the ((inaudible)) up here and the side was down on my shoulders. ((Laughter)) I shall never forget that.

Responder No, it was a good thing when they done away with them open top buses, wasn't it.

Responder Oh yeah.

Responder But it was nice in the summer.

Responder They use it now for, um, tourists, tourists and sightseeing.

Responder It was the worst day at work when they done away with trams.

Responder I loved the trams. ((Agreement)) They used to ((inaudible))

Responder Tuppence-ha'penny workman's before half-past-seven, they'd take you there and bring you back home again.

Responder I used to come from Campbell Green to St George's Church on the tram, tuppence return. Tuppence.

Responder Four and six. They'd run all night for four and six.

Responder You had to be, you had to be at the church before eight o'clock. It was tuppence return. You had your ticket and they clipped it and you'd come home with the ticket for tuppence.

Responder Yeah, because the 46 tram ran all night, didn't it.

Responder Yeah. ((Overtalking)) ((inaudible)) Road and it would take you right up over Southward Bridget. Tuppence-ha'penny return.

Responder And when it was foggy you had to ((inaudible)) on the tram lines ... ((overtalking))



Responder You couldn't see hand in front of you, could you.

Responder No.

Responder And there wasn't the motors on the road there is now, there were more horse and carts.

Responder Yeah, that's right. ((Overtalking)) ... On a two wheel car, and he had all the ((inaudible)) on the side. ((Overtalking))

Responder What about when, when the dairies had the, um ... ((overtalking)) Late at night, they used to fill them up from inside the dairy, and if you ran out of milk you used to go up there and put whatever money you had – I forget what it was – and you used to pull a handle outside and the milk used to come out. Used to be good, that did. ((Agreement)) I used to like going up doing that! I used to say to my neighbours, "Do you, do you want any milk today?", because I used to like going up doing that ((inaudible)).

Responder There used to be one on the corner of Meakin Street. There was one of the corner of Dickens Square.

Interviewer I was going to ask you what sort of food you ate then.

Responder Well we had fresh meat then. It was fresh meat. ((Agreement)) ((Overtalking)) You'd get a shoulder of lamb, ((inaudible)) it weighed two pounds so you had a lovely shoulder for three shillings.

Responder You'd get a breast of lamb with it for nothing, wouldn't you. ((Agreement))

Responder They'd wrap your meat up in that.

Responder We used to go over to Smithfield, my older sister and me, on a Saturday, before they closed. That ((inaudible)) is still over there, one of the families of the ((Heart family?)), and, er, used to auction it, ((inaudible))

Responder That's it, yeah.

Responder Give me so-and-so, give me some ... all of sudden perhaps he'd come up with two lovely breasts of lamb, "Who will give me a tanner for this?", because you'd had two. Say,

"Yeah all right, I'll have that", and you'd get a string of sausages, bind them round, say, "Catch it", and you had to wrap it up yourself. All for a tanner.

Responder At Christmas time that's when you had a chicken, that was a treat. ((Agreement))
((Overtalking))

Responder Had chicken, did you? ((Agreement)) ((Overtalking))

Responder But the meat today ((inaudible)) ((Overtalking))

Responder Christmas puddings, make your own. ((Overtalking)) We had a big stone copper and big wooden fire underneath. My dad used to get all the wood and chop it up to go under the copper. And, er, mum used to make these big Christmas puddings in china basins. Still got ... ((overtalking)) put your thruppenny bits in it and, er, silver tuppenny bits, ((inaudible))over the top, greaseproof paper, then a cloth with string to keep it on, and she used to ... once that water bowl ((inaudible)) We used to have, er, my young sister's birthday was first so there was always extra one for her birthday, mine was next, there was an extra one for me, and ((inaudible)) was third so she had one, then my mum's birthday, and then it was Christmas again and my dad's. So she used to make Christmas puddings for Christmas and then one each for all our birthdays, all used to go in them stone copper.

Responder And you could keep them for years on end. ((Agreement)) ((Overtalking))

Responder They'd go all mouldy in them time. Those what you made yourself they'd last for years.

Responder Yeah. Even, even a loaf of bread, you, you could keep a loaf of bread for a fortnight, couldn't you. ((Agreement)) ((Overtalking))

Responder Because my husband don't like that cut bread. ((Overtalking)) A couple of weeks ago because I run out of, er, what's saying there, cut loaf, put in the fridge, next day mouldy.

Responder Well they don't put the yeast in it now it's all chemical, isn't it. ((Agreement))

Responder It's wrong, I don't buy no more bread.

Responder I put my bread in ((inaudible))



Responder Do you know what they put in bread as well? Vinegar. Now I've seen that on a wrapper and I never knew that, and I was looking at the wrapper and I was looking at the ingredients.

Responder Vinegar?

Responder Vinegar. Essence. ((Overtalking)) I was looking at the ingredients on a wrapper and saw vinegar, I've never known they put vinegar in bread.

Responder I tried to make bread once-

Responder I know they put it in pickles. ((Laughs))

Responder No, in bread. I forget what bread it was I had it.

Responder ((inaudible)) maybe I left it on the side. ((Laughs)) It nearly broke my blooming tooth ((inaudible)) table. He said ... my chap said, "Here, you can't put ... leave it alone". I never try no more. But I'd love to try and make a loaf of bread.

[END OF FIRST AUDIO FILE]

[START OF SECOND AUDIO FILE]

Responder ... and she'd go up and see them and see if they had everything ready. Because them days you never had any, er, talcum powder or anything, it was, um, it was ((inaudible)) powder, um, ((inaudible)) powder and all that sort of thing.

Responder Not in one, ((inaudible))

Responder And, um, ointments, castor oil and zinc.

Responder Zinc, yeah that's right.

Responder Because them days you could go in the chemist and ask them to make it for you, but nowadays it's all made up already in the pots. And she used to go round and see they had so many napkins and, er, the napkin pins and, and she didn't believe in bottles or anything like that, all had to be breastfed, and she'd see that everything was right and just say, "Well, if, er, you reckon so-and-so day mum", she'd say, "Yes, that's right", she'd say, "Right, well, if it's before that you send round for me as soon as possible, as soon as you

start", and mum used to go, sometimes it would be 12 o'clock at night, be a bashing on their door and, ((pauses)) and see if we was asleep. She used to say, say, "I've got a call out", she says, "Now listen, don't you open the door to anybody, and as I go out you lock the door", "Yes, all right mum". She'd have her big starched aprons and a shawl round her shoulder and her hat on, and off she'd go. And then sometimes about seven or eight o'clock next morning she'd say, "Elsie, are you all right? You got the others up?", I'd say, "Yeah, all right mum, we're ready", she'd say, "Oh, I couldn't half do with a cup of tea", I'd say, "Yeah, I've just made it, it's on the hob". Don't know how long that pot was on ... tea pot was on the hob, you all had to drink that tea smoky or otherwise. ((Laughter))

Interviewer Did she used to get paid?

Responder Oh yes, yes. But if it was a difficult case then one of them would have to go up to the hospital and get the doctor, and a doctor would come down and he'd say, er, "Oh yes, um, no you're all right, there's nothing to worry about, it's clean and everything", you know, and say, "It's very good on your part" and pat my mum's shoulder, say, "You're a very clever girl". But, um, she done that for years. Then of course when we left ... lost my dad she couldn't do that, so what she used to do, she washed for 12 families besides ours, and I used to go round with a whacking great big old bassinet – do you remember them bassinets? ((Agreement)) I'd knock at Mrs So-and-So's door, "Mum says do you want any washing done?", "Yeah, wait a minute", and she'd bring me out a ((bag?)). That was the first one.

Responder ((inaudible)) wasn't it. ((Overtalking))

Responder I'd finish up somewhere in the ((inaudible)) Pollock Street, it ain't there now, it's called, um, Rodney Road.

Responder Rodney Road, that's right.

Responder Used to be Pollock Street, and they had some funny buildings there and you used to go up to the second floor. Her husband was the postman and mum said, "Do you want any washing done this week?". When I finished I'd have about six or seven parcels on it all before I went to school in the morning, seven year old I was. Take them all the way back, because we lived then in Queen's Buildings, because my dad died in 1915, so-



Responder ((inaudible))

Responder Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Right opposite the Police station. And, um, take them back there and then mum say, "Oh, Mrs So-and-So's got a bundle for me this week", out would go the pram again, I'd say, "But I'll be late for school mum", "No, you've got exactly 15 minutes, now you'll be there and back again and you'll be ready for school". Then of course if it had blankets or quilts, because there used to be ((calico?)) quilts them days with a fringe round it, that's right. well.

Responder And they'd be pure white, wouldn't they.

Responder Yeah. And they used to be in the bath in soapy water. When I come home from school dinnertime off came the shoes and socks and I'd have to ((truddle?)) then.

Responder The old Hudson powder.

Responder Yeah.

Responder Lovely.

Responder Yeah, that's right. Mum would finish them off while we'd go back to school. ((Overtalking)) And time I come home from school they'd all be hanging up on the line drying, and they'd all come down. ((Overtalking)) Put it through the mangle. Mum would say, "((inaudible)) back again", back it come through again, she'd say, um, "Yeah, still got a couple of creases in", she'd turn the old handle to make it tighter.

Responder They'd come back lovely, wouldn't they.

Responder Just as everything had been ironed. ((Overtalking)) Ha'penny a dozen mum used to charge. And by four o'clock, by four o'clock on a Saturday afternoon we never had a stitch in our house belonging to anybody, even our own washing was all ready. She used to work like a Trojan to bring us up. Course they were no, no telly from anywhere, we never had them-

Responder They didn't go in the work place.

Responder Oh they don't know what work is today.

Responder No.



Responder They don't. My mum was an office cleaner on the, er, Lambeth Station, where they had to ((rake the bars?)) out, you know.

Responder And fetch the ((inaudible))

Responder Yeah. And their hands were, you know, cracked all over. ((inaudible)) my mum, she used to wear ((inaudible))

Interviewer How did your mum learn ((inaudible)) who taught her how to do it?

Responder I don't know. ((Overtalking))

Interviewer You don't know who taught her.

Responder No. All I knew was that she ((inaudible)) to go round to Mrs So-and-So and she used to go ((inaudible))

Responder She couldn't get out at all, ((inaudible))

Responder That's what my mother had, that's why she used to have to take in washing. She used to stand with that leg up on your stool while she had ((inaudible)) on two chairs and doing the washing. They used to do it down the old ((inaudible)) didn't they. I've still got two ((inaudible)) indoors, glass ones.

Responder I've should have one indoors. No, the old tin ones.

Responder No, I've two glass ones indoors, a little tiny one like that and a bigger one.

Responder So tell you how old my one is because that's the old tin one.

Responder That's right. They were ((inaudible)) weren't they.

Responder Yeah.

Responder Do all the collars and if they wasn't cleaned have a little nailbrush and give it a little scrub, get all the grease out.

Responder Worked hard in those days.

Responder No, no bleach then, just elbow grease and plenty of soap powder.

Responder Hudson's they used a lot, didn't they, Hudson powder.



Responder And ((inaudible)) rooms in the house, er, to use, er, certain day for your washing. ((Agreement)) You'd go down and do your washing. But you'd have to be out by 12 o'clock and you've got all that ((inaudible)) to keep you ((inaudible))

Responder But it was wash houses, wasn't it, the wash house.

Responder Yeah, we used to wash houses in ((inaudible))

Responder That's right. Used to be on the landing. ((Overtalking))

Responder I never had no water upstairs, I had 30 stairs to come down for water, so all the water I took up I had to fetch down. And toilet was out in the garden.

Responder No, we was pretty lucky because when my dad was alive we had ((eight roomed house?)) in Lower Square, in Lower Square, turning off St George's Road with quite a big school on the corner. That's where I started school, it was no fuss in there. And, um, we had our own wash house. ((clears throat)) We had our own wash house ((inaudible)) because my dad was a horse keeper to Partridge contractor and, um, then of course when we moved from there when we lost my dad and moved into Queen's Buildings, well we had all our own water and toilet there because you had everything complete there. We lived on the first floor and as, as you opened the street door you would see ((an all square passage 08:48?)), kitchen door that side, bedroom door that side, and as you went in the kitchen so there was another door there, you had a little balcony with a lavatory on it. Oh, it was very compact there. But I mean when we first went in 1915 you could have ate your food off the stairs. ((Agreement)) Just before they, just be- ... taken down like, it's pulled down, it's all pubs now. No, but I mean even in the ((inaudible)) blocks round here you couldn't eat off the stairs. We used to have, um, Mrs Lee was the owner, Miss Harst and, um, what was the other owner's name? There was two of them, used to come round and collect the rent, and if you never paid by a certain time she'd expect you in the office with your rent, and if you hadn't cleaned the stairs there was a blue summons notice stuck on your door, if you don't clean these stairs by Thursday morning 10 o'clock there'll be extra two shillings on your rent. Because they'd get somebody to come and clean them. And you might be ((inaudible)) white, all our stairs.

Responder It wasn't like that towards the end, they were terrible.



Responder Oh, they was terrible when anybody went in it. Once Mrs Lee sold them flats then they went to hell.

Responder Oh, they were awful.

Responder I moved out then, 1936. After I lost my mother I moved away.

[END OF SECOND AUDIO FILE, INTERVIEW AND TRANSCRIPT]