

BOLTON REMEMBERS THE WAR

Transcript of interview with Lilian Mills (LM) • War Worker

Interviewed by Ken Beevers (K) 06.06.2005

K: What's your name?

LM: Lilian Mills.

K: And when were you born Lilian?

LM: 1925.

K: And were you born in Bolton?

LM: Yes, Haslam's Maternity Hospital.

K: Haslam Maternity Hospital, yes. What did your parents do?

LM: Well, my Mother... I don't think she worked. My Father, I think he did something with metal.

K: Right, so he worked with metal.

LM: When he left us he worked at the back where we lived, it was a bakery, Price's Bakery and I think he worked there.

K: So where did you live then, in Bolton?

LM: McKean Street.

K: McKean Street, which was whereabouts?

LM: It's off Weston Street, bottom of Bradford Road, you know.

K: Oh yes, Weston Street.

LM: Weston Street, it went down to Burnden... but the other half went up and there was a mill called Winder and McKean's and the street off was called McKean Street.

K: Yes, and what school did you go to?

LM: I went St Bartholomew's, it was behind McKean Street. I went to St Bartholomew's Church which is where Edbro's is now, that spare ground. It was there.

K: So when you left school, how old were you?

LM: 14.

K: 14, so you left school in August 1939?

LM: 1939.

K: Or June 1939.

LM: You know, you had a holiday.

K: And you went to work?

LM: Yes.

K: Whereabouts?

LM: Well, I went to work at Bentinck Mill, Bentinck Street, Farnworth, in the warehouse.

K: Because in the meantime you'd moved to Farnworth, hadn't you?

LM: Yes... I came to Farnworth when I was eight. We lived in Lily Avenue, you know, and I went to Plodder Lane School.

K: And then you left school and went to work in Bentinck Street Mill.

LM: It was a weaving shed.

K: As a weaver?

LM: No, I went in the warehouse and they used to make square cloths for headdresses, you know, for the Africans, to send away. We used to pin them up and cut them ready.

K: After they'd been made, you were packing them?

LM: That's right... but, I only worked there perhaps about six weeks, and my Aunt worked for Bolton Textile Mill, she worked at Suez in Worsley Road, and she got me a job in the warehouse, called Denmark - Bolton Textile, they had Number One Mill and Number Two, and Denmark is where they were packing the cops and in the winding room and I was in the warehouse, there. And I

worked there for... I only worked there for about two year... Well I moved to the Library in '41 so I wasn't working there very long. But, they moved me up in the winding room you see and I didn't like, so, when the job was advertised for the Library, I applied and went for the interview and I got it!

K: 1941?

LM: Yes, started April 1941.

K: What can you remember about the day War broke out?

LM: Not a lot! (laughs) I can't remember much about it, tell you the truth. I think it's probably, you know, we were young, you know, when you're only 14, it really didn't bother me, you know.

K: You don't remember hearing, that it... no nothing?

LM: No, I don't remember, because it was only radio then wasn't it?

K: Yes.

LM: I suppose, you know... When you're not so old, I suppose it didn't affect you really.

K: So what about air raids, you do remember any air raids?

LM: Well, air raids... we had, you know, air raid shelter in the garden, Anderson shelter...

K: In Lily Avenue?

LM: Yeah... in the garden. Because the garden went down, it were down steps, so they put it down there. Then, of course, you know, they got used to it and you didn't bother going (laughs) you went under the table instead (laughs).

K: Was there often an Air Raid Siren?

LM: Siren? Well, I mean, they were coming over to Manchester, you know, so that you got a warning that...

K: But they didn't bomb Farnworth?

LM: No, they didn't no.

K: So you went under the table?

LM: I went under the table. (laughs) Got fed up, you see, so we went under the table instead.

K: And was there just your brother and you?

LM: There was my Grandma and my Auntie Hettie, and my Auntie Sylvia and my Mother and my brother and I.

K: So what, was it a bit crowded under the table?

LM: (laughs) Well, it just depended, because I think my Auntie went to work at Trafford Park, you know on War work.

K: When you were at the Library, you know, we'll go to the fire-watching shall we? What...

LM: (laughs) and I've not thought of anything yet.

K: What was fire-watching?

LM: What was fire-watching? We had to go, I worked 'til eight o'clock and we had to go straight round the back to the Town Hall and we were actually... We weren't fire-watching, we were supposed to be answering the phone lines, you know, report centre, if there was any... I suppose they used to ring up if there was like some raid coming on, but actually we never had to answer the phone! (laughs)

K: Who would ring up? The Civil Defence, or...

LM: Somebody, yeah, and that, warning. And Pat and I used to go.

K: Pat Entwisle...

LM: Pat Entwisle and I used to go and I can't remember much about it. I think there were some out of the Town Hall and probably the ones that were fire-watching, you know, went in. But, we slept, there were two beds in one of the offices and Pat and I we went... we slept there, you know. There were nothing going on, we went to bed. I suppose if we were wanted, they'd waken us up, but we were never disturbed! (laughs) Then at eight o'clock in the morning, we'd finished.

K: Was there ever an air raid warning when you were on duty?

LM: No, (laughs), I mean it was only one night, I think it was about every month.

K: One night a month.

LM: Yeah, you know, it wasn't every week. It was only one night. At eight o'clock we could go home and we went home, you know, to have breakfast and get ready to come back to work, and we had to come back for nine o'clock. Although we had to go at nine it didn't open 'til half past.

K: In the Library then, did people use it a lot? Or did it go quiet?

LM: Oh, not really, it was quite busy.

K: People needed something to do?

LM: Yes, there were still, you know, I mean we had all the blackouts up, you know, and that. And of course, you see, it wasn't as big as it is now. I mean it was only the centre, you know, with the books, because the reading room was terrific, it was all the full length, and they had every paper and every magazine you could think of.

K: And did people come in there to get news about the War, did they? Did people read the papers?

LM: Well, yes it was... it slanted down and it was a metal strip, and you undid it, so you changed the papers. You know, we had the Manchester, the Bolton, the Journal...

K: ...and the daily papers...

LM: ...and the daily papers, and you know, we had a lot, magazines, you know, Exchange and Mart. We had really a lot. So they was changed, you know?

K: Because it was the War, did people use it more? To read the papers?

LM: I mean they'd just come in as normal, you know. Some of them you didn't know. They just came in, because they weren't probably... not members. So they just came in to read the papers and sit down and... you know and read the magazines. I mean there were women's magazines and everything, you know. They'd quite a lot.

K: So when did you have this switch to other work?

LM: When I was eighteen, they had to go... They said I had to report to Cheetham Hill Training Centre, and I had to get the train in the morning, at seven o'clock. I had to walk it from home down to Moses Gate Station, get the train to Victoria, and now we used to walk up the hill to the top, and wait for a bus to take us up to Cheetham Hill.

K: Cheetham Hill was a training centre for what?

LM: It was for the ones that were... There were a lot of women there. There were mostly women, for War work.

K: For engineering?

LM: Yes, engineering and everything, you know.

K: Could you have gone in the WAAF or the Wrens?

LM: No, I think they didn't have... I think it's because, it was getting near the end of the War, you see, when I was eighteen, yes, so.

K: So you'd be, it would be 1943 wouldn't it?

LM: Yes, so, but they didn't say 'Which did you want to go in' they just told you where you had to go, where you had to report, yes. Like, it was sixteen week training.

K: Sixteen weeks? So what did you learn there?

LM: Well, as I say, I learned to operate a lathe. They were showing you how to grind tools, but it were mostly training on the lathes, you know, to get the correct, how to set them up and things like that.

K: And did you enjoy that?

LM: Yeah.

K: Yeah. And were you accurate?

LM: Yeah! (laughs) I always remember that you had to fasten, this say, metal bar, you know, that wants turning and you used to set it on, and you used to have a piece of chalk, and you held it near, and where it caught, you know you had to unscrew and turn it round, so that you could get it accurate all the way round, you know. When it got accurate the chalk mark was going all the way round and you knew it were all right.

So, as I say, after that, I was told to report to Fletcher's Paper Mill.

K: And what did you do there?

LM: I worked in the mechanics shop there, on a lathe. In the mechanics shop, yes.

K: So what was your job? What were you making or..?

LM: If they wanted anything turning, you know, any metal, and that, for the machines.

K: For the paper mill?

LM: For the paper mill, you know, because, it was quite a big mill, you know, and that. And they were all men in... Mark Hobson, he was over the mechanics shop.

K: Did you work with other women?

LM: No, they were all men, they were all men that was in, you know.

K: Because the men were at the War, you were taking their place.

LM: Yes, you know, because, I mean, like... they made cigarette paper.

K: So that was important.

LM: Yes, when you worked in a department, you weren't allowed to go anywhere, but, because we worked in the mechanics shop, we could go round, you see. They didn't stop us, because we didn't know what we were doing you know. You know and it used to be on rolls, and it were only very thin, like that, you know, just the width of the paper, the cigarette paper, and it was quite interesting to watch them melt... you know they used a lot of rags for the process into paper, you know, and the machine. It was really good watching the liquid dropping on all this, it were like a sheet, you know, going round and it were going round warm heated rollers and it came out as paper. Then it used to, you know, go in a reel - a right big reel.

K: Did they make any other kind of paper?

LM: They did... waxed it, one part that did waxing paper, but I never went in that part, you know, it was nothing to do...

K: And did you have to work long hours, during the Wartime?

LM: No, I didn't, you know, just starting time and closing... I mean I should imagine there were shift work, but it didn't affect me. There would be shift work.

Vale House, across the road, belonged to Fletcher's, you know. And they had a canteen there, and then of course, I were only there about, well perhaps over twelve months, you know. And the War was slackening off, so I came back to the Library.

K: Do you remember celebrating the end of the War?

LM: Well, my brother told us we had a party - I didn't know...

K: In Lily Street?

LM: In Lily Avenue, I couldn't remember, they said though. It weren't much, I think it were people just round, because, with it being an estate, it wasn't like a little street, but just a few of us, you know. So he informed me.

K: Was that VE Day or..?

LM: It would be VE Day, wouldn't it? Because the other one that went on VJ Day, was it VJ?

K: Yes, VJ. What about food during the War, do you remember, did you grow anything?

LM: No, we didn't, we didn't have anything growing but, my uncle used to have hens... (laughs) He used to put them in isinglass, you know, to keep them, you know, the eggs. Yes, he used to have hens. But we didn't and... I mean my Mother was working, you know and my Grandma did cooking, you know, did a lot of cooking.

K: I've forgotten what you said your Mother did?

LM: My Mother cleaned, she were a cleaner. And, you know, we did all right and my grandma used to cook a lot, we had an oven and she used to cook a lot. And we used to have a butcher that, you know, on Egerton Street, that used to deliver the meat, and that. And then there was the Co-op shops.

K: Was your brother in the services?

LM: No, he worked in Norris's, because he was two years younger than me, so you know, he weren't... He wouldn't be eighteen.

K: No he wouldn't no.

LM: He worked at Norris's, he worked in the storeroom and then he went to be a joiner.

K: And you didn't meet Joe until after the War, did you?

LM: No, because he was away.

K: He was a dispatch...

LM: He ran dispatch riding, yeah, in London, and as the War was ending, you know, when they invaded, the one he was in... The men, they were a bit of all sorts, you know, burglars and all sorts. Well, I mean, they were the type of person that, and they were following up, you know, like if they went in a town. They went in what you call it's house... they went in getting records, you know, seeing what they'd left and Herman Göring, Göring it was.

K: Göring, and this was in Berlin was it?

LM: Well, I don't know whether it were Berlin or not, you know, but they were going and they were following up all the time, you know. They weren't on the War, you know, it was just the follow up.

K: And then he was still in the Services after the War, wasn't he?

LM: Yes... I don't know when he came out.

K: So do you have any major memories of the War?

LM: We didn't get a lot of money, as I say, you know, at the library I didn't get much, because I was working at the Library during the War. There weren't a lot of books, the reference Library was quite big, the reading room was big and the work room, but the Library itself was only very small, from the pillars just to the windows... they had a lot of music and that.

K: Did Joe find it difficult to adjust?

LM: Well, they had a shop, you know, so when he came back, he went to work in the shop, you know, they had a flower shop and then when he came back, of course, he went in and he used to go to Smithfield Market in Manchester, you know, for flowers.

K: What did you... What about Christmas? Was it...

LM: At home?

K: During the War, yeah

LM: During the War, well I think we had all the family, you know, because, another Auntie was married, and they used to come and so, you know, we used to have like a Christmas party, just a family party.

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