

**Interviewee: Doreen Foreman**

**Interviewer: William Francis**

**Date: 03.08.2010**

Interviewer: This is William Francis talking to Doreen Foreman on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of March – March? August [laughs] 2010.

Doreen: You haven't been up long?

Interviewer: No [laughs]. So Doreen, when were you when the war started?

Doreen: Where was I when the war started? In Margate.

Interviewer: In Margate. So where did you spend the majority of the war?

Doreen: In Rugeley in Staffordshire.

Interviewer: Ok, and who were you living with when you was in Margate and when you –?

Doreen: My parents.

Interviewer: And what about when you were evacuated?

Doreen: When I moved away, who was I living with then?

Interviewer: Mm.

Doreen: Mr and Mrs Bentley.

Interviewer: What experiences did you have of the war? Obviously evacuation but stuff like air raids and working with the war effort?

Doreen: Well, actually, the main thing I remember, particularly, is having the family digging a hole in the garden and putting in an air raid shelter. We used to go there when the siren sounded and we used to go down to the air raid shelter and then we had the letter home from school to say all the children were being evacuated and would I – would my parents let me go and they said yes and – so that's what happened on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of June 1940. We got on a bus and we didn't know where we were going and we ended up in Rugeley, Staffordshire.

Interviewer: So what were your main memories of the war?

Doreen: They're pretty vague, really, cos when you're eleven, you sort of accept, don't you, what's happening to you. I know it was very strange and looking back I – it was. It was going because I went from a different – one environment to another. I went from a very ordinary church-going family to live with a mining family in Rugeley and where we used to spend church – all day on Sunday at church here, I spent it in the pub [laughs] or the club or whatever, you know. At Christmas, our Christmases

were quite different because there again, we'd go to the pub and whereas here it was always in church and so I know that, you know, there was a vast difference. They were lovely people, really nice people, but I don't know if you can call them poor, it was only on a three day week and so they took in three evacuees, I think it was 7/6 a week they got paid for us each. I think that supplemented his income so they took us in, I think, mainly for that. But they looked after us very well.

Interviewer: So how about – what was your parents experience like back here in Margate of the war?

Doreen: Well, they were here. My father was a policeman and he retired and so after a time Margate you could only stay in Margate if you were needed here. You had – they asked you to leave and so they were more or less sent away and they went to live, in all places, they went to live in London, right near the docks. So they were badly bombed there and so then they had to move on from there. But the thing I think that struck us most at that time, it was very sad. We had to have our animals destroyed. We had beautiful dog, cat and you – it was a queue down at the town yard with people with their animals all being put to sleep because everybody was leaving. It was bad enough finding somewhere to go to without having animals, you know, people just had their pets put down and that was very sad.

Interviewer: How – how did you feel about your memories of war? Were you happy during those times or lonely?

Doreen: Yes. Yeah – no, happy. I was very fortunate because the people I went to had no children of their own. They would have loved children and they were very kind so I was very fortunate but I – having said that I did see those that weren't.

Interviewer: So how – how long was the period you were evacuated for?

Doreen: Five years.

Interviewer: Five years. And what experiences do you remember when being evacuated? Sort of what were you told?<sup>1</sup>

Doreen: We were told that we were going away for a short place – short holiday, really, with the school and it wouldn't be for long because the war would be over and so it would just a short period of time that we would have to go away and it wouldn't be long before we were back. In a way, I suppose, it was fun at eleven to think that, you know, you got your little suitcase and your gasmask and all your friends and you got on a train and you – it was all quite exciting, really. Until we got to the railway station, we got the bus took us from the school to the railway station and the station was absolutely full of soldiers. They've been brought back on the little shi – boats and ships, you know, and they were Belgian and English soldiers that had been maimed and disfigured and injured and been brought back from France. So that was quite traumatic seeing all that.

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<sup>1</sup> 5 min

Interviewer: So – so what – what was the journey like on – on the way there? How did you feel?

Doreen: Fine.

Interviewer: Moving away from Margate?

Doreen: Yeah, fine. I was with my friends and it was fine.

Interviewer: What was the reception like when you got there?

Doreen: It was very strange when we got there because they – the train – I – it went straight from Margate, which you can't do now, straight from Margate to Rugeley via, I think, via Litchfield and we got out at the Trent Valley station and all these Weldon busses were waiting there for us and we all piled on these double-decker buses and were taken in to Rugeley town and to a little village school there. We were all out in the playground. I think you've heard this before because everybody says the same. That you're lined up and people come along and say, 'I'll take him' and 'I'll take her' and you – and I went with my friend Betty and her little sister, she was four, and we said, 'We've got to stay together', cos, you know, and so, really, nobody wanted three. It was – so we were one of the last that were left and then Mrs Bentley came along and she said, 'Oh, I'll take 'em', and so she took us. But unfortunately the other two didn't settle in the billets at all. They were not really happy there, I don't think they really liked the rough miner's life, you know, from what they'd lived here and so they were found other billets.

Interviewer: So how was the host family? Were they – were they kind to you? Were they –?

Doreen: Ever so kind. Very rough, she swore like a trooper and – but, yeah, ever so kind but not a bit – they weren't gentile, you know what I mean. A bit rough and ready, spotlessly clean, gave you good food and – and, of course, they spoke in a funny dialect to us because some of the little kids that came with us, when they – I was joining a school where I was living and you could hear the children, the little children in the school next door being told how to speak properly. You had to say 'coom op', instead of 'come up' and things like that, 'No, will you say it properly', you know, and these little kids and they got the Rugeley accent after a time.

Interviewer: What – what were your experiences while being evacuated? What – what kind of – what was your daily life like? Up – up in your host family?

Doreen: Much the same as it was here. I used to go to school, come home for lunch, go back to school and come home and we played like other children, you know, and much the same, really.

Interviewer: What was your schooling life like up there? What would your day consist of?

Doreen: We were much more clever. We got the edge on them and – because our education system here was better than theirs so we swanned through the school [laugh].

Interviewer: That's – whilst you were away did – did you keep in contact with your family?

Doreen: Oh, yes. Yeah, my mother – I used to – I used to usually write and say will you send me so and so.' Will you send me some – my photographer?', 'Would you send me my stamp album', you know, that sort of thing. But I think on the whole I was quite happy there, really. There were two little chaps who lived across the road from me, their name was Philpot and one was about six, one was about eight and they were – that was their – where they were – digs where – where they were billeted. They were never allowed indoors and they were poor little souls, they used to sit on<sup>2</sup> the front door step and they weren't looked after at all. Their mother eventually came and took them home but they were very badly treated. I don't think these days they would have got away with it.

Interviewer: What was life like for – for the family that took you in? What was their daily life like?

Doreen: Well, he, as I say, he was a miner. He worked three-day week, she just lived a normal housewife she was really and did the cooking and cleaning and things like that, you know, quite ordinary, really.

Interviewer: Did evacuation affect any of the relationships with your own family?

Doreen: No, no, not really.

Interviewer: And –

Doreen: Cos, eventually, after a period of time my parents had to leave London, of course, cos they got bombed out of there as well and they eventually came up to Rugeley and got accommodation there.

Interviewer: So did you then go and stay with your parents or –?

Doreen: Ah, well, they – actually, they took over part of the house, cos it was a very big house that my parent – the foster parents were in and my parents took over two of their rooms to live there when they got bombed out.

Interviewer: Did you – with your experience up – with you being evacuated, did you – did you stay in contact with the family once you left?

Doreen: Oh, yeah. My – my pa – my foster parents?

Interviewer: Yeah, your foster parents.

Doreen: Oh, yes. My foster mother was Godmother to my daughter. They used to come down for the – miners used to have a fortnights or weeks holiday every year that when we got back to Margate, they used to come down to Margate for their holiday and stay with us. Then, as I say, I got married and when my daughter was born, Mrs Bentley was her Godmother. So we were very happy with the really. She still swore and she still liked to go to the pub [laughs] but that was her.

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<sup>2</sup> 10 min

Interviewer: So whilst you were up in – sorry what was the place?

Doreen: Rugeley.

Interviewer: Rugeley. Did you feel the effects of the war up there? I mean air raids?

Doreen: We had, well, they started bombing Birmingham and Coventry which was very near to us and if there is a plane going over or coming back say and it had got bombs left on, it would jettison the bombs adlib over anywhere, you know, rather than carrying them back with them. We got the odd one, we had the sirens occasionally and we used to – with Mr and Mrs Bentley used to put under their kitchen table and – until the raid was over and we'd be under their kitchen table.

Interviewer: So did anyone in your area at Rugeley have any near misses or houses bombed or –?

Doreen: Yes, we had one lady came, Mrs Hyde, she came with her daughter actually, she came during – came to Rugeley with the school and after she'd been there I suppose a couple of weeks, her husband wanted her – the mum back here so Mrs Hyde decided to come – to leave the daughter up there. She came back home, wanting to be with her husband, the house had a direct hit and she was killed.

Interviewer: So what were the consequences of the air raids in the area? Did it impact on your schooling life at all?

Doreen: We used to go down to the dug-out and we thought it was a great laugh because we'd have sing-songs and it was better than being in the classroom, half the time. We did have a spell in Rugeley, where a – the school did – was targeted by plane and it was shooting at the – they – I don't think they thought it was a school and so we all got under our desks and – but a few windows out but nothing more.

Interviewer: So after that attack did school carry on?

Doreen: Yeah, just the same, yeah.

Interviewer: So how about your impact on social life? After air raids and with the availability of food in the area, did it ever impact, like, when Birmingham was bombed did –?

Doreen: When Birmingham was bombed.

Interviewer: Did that affect your supply of food to the towns? Did it –?

Doreen: No, I don't think so. I don't think it did. No.

Interviewer: So how – how did you feel in anticipation of raids? When that siren went how did you feel?

Doreen: It was a horrible feeling and I still feel it now when I hear it on television. It's a horrible feeling and when I<sup>3</sup> was at home before I was evacuated and it used to go and you see dogfights overhead and my mother was petrified and she and the dog used to run down to the shelter and I was a bit nonplussed, yeah, I couldn't understand it. At eleven you don't really, you wonder what's happening, you know. It does affect you, I think.

Interviewer: So when the siren went to say that everything was ok, that –.

Doreen: Yeah, and it cleared – the all-clear went.

Interviewer: How did you feel then? Was it lucky, was it –?

Doreen: Relief.

Interviewer: Really.

Doreen: Yeah, mm.

Interviewer: So did you – what changed as a result of the war? In Margate when you came back? Was it –?

Doreen: The relief to come back. Oh, I remember coming out the railway station, it was a lovely day. The sky – the sky here is so much higher than it is in Rugeley, it's always a low sky there and a bit grey. We did have nice days but nothing like we've got here and the relief when I came out and saw the sea. I thought, 'Oh, home at last', it was lovely.

Interviewer: So once you were back here, how did you adjust back into it?

Doreen: Well, I was working then and I was transferred from the Tax Office in S – well, I went to Stafford to work from Rugeley every day and I was transferred from the Stafford Tax Office to the Margate one so I just picked it up as soon as I came back. I just started working here.

Interviewer: So the availability of food as well when you came back, how was that? Was that –?

Doreen: Well, we were still rationed, yes. We still had to be very careful, we used to have the dried egg and Mr Bentley, when we were there was lucky because he being a miner, he got an extra half a pound of cheese a week, through for this what they called, snapping, and so we had extra cheese which was quite a help. But, yes it was – it was, you know, not easy, really.

Interviewer: Up in – up in Rugeley – is it Rugeley?

Doreen: Rugeley.

Interviewer: Rugeley. How was the attitudes towards your foster father, as it were, Mr –?

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<sup>3</sup> 15 min

Doreen: Bentley.

Interviewer: Bentley, what was the attitudes towards him as being a miner? Cos – often –?

Doreen: He came back black from head-to-toe. He was covered, obviously, in coal dust and, well, it was just strange. I mean, it was just something I never experienced before but I think as a child you accept things. This is what he did, you know.

Interviewer: How – how about people in the area? Because mines were often there an important part of the war effort but people sometimes think that they were the people who didn't want to go to war.

Doreen: No, I don't believe that.

Interviewer: Oh, I –

Doreen: No, I know you're not saying that. No, I'm saying, no, I don't believe that. I mean, I don't know why they were on a three-day week. Whether it was that they hadn't got the coal or – I don't know. But they certainly were on a three-day week when I went up there and they were very hard-pushed moneywise, they were quite poor, really. They were struggling.

Interviewer: How – how did your life play out up there? Did you build your own new social life? Did you build –?

Doreen: Oh, yes.

Interviewer: A new working life and –?

Doreen: Well, to start with, obviously, it was, I made friend with the school – some – which I'm -- whom I'm still friendly with. One – one in particular, I made a good friend of when I was at school and you just made your school friends, like you do anywhere, really. And some you took with you and then, of course, when I went to work, you got a new group of friends that you get friendly with where you work.

Interviewer: What job did you have when you left school?

Doreen: That was when I went into the Tax Office.

Interviewer: How was that? What was that like?

Doreen: Great. I loved it, then I transferred to the one here and so, yeah, it was quite a good job.

Interviewer: Is that how you got to come back to Margate? Was that when the war ended or was that when you became older?

Doreen: Came back – we came back in March 1949, I suppose. Was it? No, it wasn't '49, no, of course it wasn't, 1945, would it be? '45.

Interviewer: Alright, so when – when you were up in Rugeley what – what were the other attitudes of evacuees up there? As you said, you friends didn't quite adjust, was that a common thing?

Doreen: Oh, yes. My friends<sup>4</sup>, we still talk about it now a friend of mine came here yesterday and she had a different experience altogether from me. She had – she went into a family and she said – she said the woman was twenty-four stone but whether she was or not I don't know, but she said as soon as the milk came – was delivered, she'd drink the top of – the cream of the top of the milk. And the left – the rest was left, you know. But she has some quite nasty experiences, really, her little brother was six and he went into digs in Rugeley and the people had him but they didn't bother with him. So he was left to his own devices and he never bathed or, you know, he was just really left to his own devices, at six. So they did have far worse experiences than I had. I was just lucky.

Interviewer: So what was your – what was food like up there? Was that very different to here? Was it more sort of agricultural up there, was you –?

Doreen: Well, they grew a lot of their own, yes, we were fortunate in that they all had allotments. They wouldn't have grown flowerbeds or things like that. It was all vegetation, you know, vegetables and fruit. We really were quite fortunate, cos I think you could get – I think you queue for Fish and Chips. I think you could have that. We used to have that on a Friday so you had that and if you got friendly with the butcher, he would sneak a few sausages or a bit of offal and you'd have that to complement it, you know. And I can't remember – we were never hungry.

Interviewer: As a child being away from home, did you find that you – it was an adventure? Did you enjoy the experience of war? Did you being a –?

Doreen: Yes, in a way I think you did. I mean, had it not happened we would have been quite different people. I'm convinced of it. It was – I don't know quite what way it's changed us all but I'm sure it did change us having that five years out. We wouldn't have experienced what we experienced up there, you know. How the other half lives really. But –

Interviewer: So when you – when you came back to Margate and you sort of fitted back in here, did – did you find that things – everyone else had changed? Did you find –?

Doreen: Yes, because a lot of people had gone up there and stayed. A lot of people just didn't come back to Margate and, yeah, that Betty I went with she came back so I still had her when I came back. But, yeah, you made a new group – well, I made a new group of friends as soon as I came back cos I was working and so they were my friends then, you see. But a lot didn't come back, I think a lot are still up there, actually.

Interviewer: So with Mr and Mrs Bentley, did – did your attachment to them, did you feel –?

Doreen: Yeah, very fond of them.

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<sup>4</sup> 20 min

Interviewer: Very fond of them.

Doreen: Very fond of them, yeah. They were – they were such nice people, really nice people. I used to go backwards and forwards when I had leave from work, I used to go back and stay with them and, yeah, they were – they were so – they were quite different but such nice people.

Interviewer: Did you mother from down here met up – well they did cos they were evacuated.

Doreen: Yes, they did. We –

Interviewer: Did they get on well?

Doreen: Yes, they did. Yes, they did. We were very fortunate. You had to make allowances. I mean we both did because Mrs Bentley gave up half her home. My mother had to share a home and it can't be easy. I mean, I think of it now, when I talk to my daughter about it, I don't know that anybody could do it these days. I'm sure they couldn't.

Interviewer: When – when you say you watched dog – dogfights round – was it Margate?

Doreen: What's that?

Interviewer: Dogfight in the Battle of Britain.

Doreen: The what?

Interviewer: Did you watch any sort of dogfights whilst you were here in Margate before?

Doreen: Oh, yeah, dogfights. Yes, yeah. Yeah.

Interviewer: What did you feel when you were watching them?

Doreen: Oh, I didn't cos I went the dug-out but my dad used to stand and watch them. But, no, I didn't and the thing that always fascinated me which I've always remembered, I don't quite know what it was. An aircraft used to come over and it had a round thing underneath it<sup>5</sup> which obviously was a magnet, I suppose, and it used to fly over the sea and you brought the mines to the surface and then they, I suppose, shoot the mine, I don't know, whatever they did, decimated them, I suppose. But, you know, I always remember that plane and I don't know what it was but it had a round thing underneath it and – and I'm sure it must have been a magnet of some sort cos it used to bring the mines to the surface. Cause if we had mines around the coast, cos you couldn't get on the beaches at all because it was all – what was it? All –

Interviewer: Was it cornered off or something?

Doreen: Yes, what is it that they put?

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<sup>5</sup> 25 min

Interviewer: Barbed wire?

Doreen: Barbed wire.

Interviewer: Yeah, well, I just wanted to ask that, what was life like here in Margate before you went? Was it likely to be beaches being closed off?

Doreen: Yeah, you couldn't go on the beaches. You –

Interviewer: How – how did that feel?

Doreen: You had a little gap, I seem to remember, there was a little gap in Margate between the clock tower and the railway station, I think, I don't think that was closed off but everywhere else round the coast cos they were expecting, an invasion and so there were soldiers everywhere and so you couldn't get on beaches.

Interviewer: Did you have many experiences with meeting soldiers and –?

Doreen: On the railway station, when we went to be evacuated. All these poor souls they were down there and one – and they were being given chocolate and cups and tea and by the WRVS and I went to get on the train and one of the soldiers came over and gave me his bar of chocolate which I thought was quite sad, really.

Interviewer: So when everything so around Margate became, like, prepared for war.

Doreen: Yeah.

Interviewer: Did everyone around the area feel nervous at the anticipation of an – a potential attack?

Doreen: Oh, a lot of people did, I'm sure, and, of course, we've got Manston so there was activity from, being the airfield, you know. So, yes, I'm sure, I think probably more the older people, I don't know little children would really, quite would they,

Interviewer: Did you understand what was going on?

Doreen: No, no really. Because no, looking back I should have been interested in the country's that were being overrun by Germany and as they came nearer. I don't remember any of that. It was remote to me, you know.

Interviewer: What – what were you told about the war? Were you told why – why it was happening?

Doreen: Yes, I think so and when I, way before the war, there was some Blackshirts that moved in. I don't know if this is relevant to the war at all but some Blackshirts lived over a shop quite near to where I lived and they always frightened me. They were to do with Moseley, weren't they? And I don't quite understand the significance of it but I know there was a family of Blackshirts and for some reason I was frightened of them but I never knew why.

Interviewer: Was – was – when war broke out was the war effort did – how did that affect you? Was your –?

Doreen: Well, you saw all the railings go, do you mean that sort of thing?

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah. Stuff like that.

Doreen: Yeah, you had to any – if you got any spare saucepans and kettles, they accept those and they take all the railings up round the parks and all the gates and this is why Dane Park here still hasn't got any railings. They have never put them back. So that sort of thing, yes, they did have, you know, that sort of thing.

Interviewer: Did – so what changed as a result of the war in your life and in the areas that you stayed? So in Margate how did it change there and how did it change at Rugeley? Did it –?

Doreen: Rugeley blossomed through it, I think, because there was not so much unemployment because people they – they were needed in Birmingham for the – in the factories in Birmingham. Very few people were unemployed in Rugeley and it went upmarket, definitely. It – it was not the poor place latterly because people were earning good money in the factories. So it did change quite – quite a lot really.

Interviewer: And how about Margate? How did that –?

Doreen: Margate, of course, you came back to an empty place people started<sup>6</sup> coming back, gradually. But you came back to a very quiet Margate and I don't think it's ever picked up quite the same since somehow. It seems to have gone downhill if anything.

Interviewer: So would you say –?

Doreen: Because before the war, you see, we had so much – so many visitors, you had – the hotels were full. People used to come for a week with their kiddies and stay for Bed & Breakfast, you know, they had 'bucket and a spade' weeks and it was very alive, Margate, before the war and it's never picked up.

Interviewer: So looking back now on your experiences during the Second World War, how would you say you – you have personally been affected by this? How would you say it's affected you?

Doreen: It's very difficult to say cos you don't know how you would have been like if you hadn't had the war, do you, really? It – I – one thing it has made me appreciate is coming back to Margate to live, I could not live in the Midlands. I mean, it's not – I'm not criticise it for people that like it, cos my – a lot of my grandchildren family they all moved up there, gone up there and they love it. But I've, no, I do like to be down in Kent and near the sea, really. I missed it when I was away.

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<sup>6</sup> 30 min

Interviewer: Well, thank you very much Doreen for your time, it's been a pleasure interviewing you.

Doreen: You're welcome.

Interviewer: Thank you. Bye-bye.

**End of Interview.**