

Interviewee: Edward Garnett

Interviewer: Linda Taylor

Date: 30.09.2010

LT: Ok, so if you go ahead. This – it's Linda Taylor recording this interview.

EG: My name is Edward Garnett, I was born in December – correction September [LT laughs] – 1930. I was born at Fulham and lived there 'til about 6 years old when I moved to Barnes.

LT: Ok.

EG: The war started the day I was 9 years old, and that [clears throat] was exactly the same day that I was evacuated all the way to Windsor. I stayed there 'til about the Christmas then came home because things were very, very quiet then. It wasn't 'til later on in the year things started to warm up, if warm up's the right word. The - raids and such like were on but didn't affect us that much.

LT: Whereabouts in Windsor were you evacuated to?

EG: Vansittart Road Windsor – number 7. Yeah God, do I remember that.

LT: Did you go back –

EG: Don't know why I should be that – I went back and visited once yes years later. Anyway -

LT: What experiences did you have while you were there?

EG: Well, it was school half a day a week. They had another boy roughly my age there. It wasn't too bad but when Christmas came I wanted to come home. So that was it, my mother came down to fetch me and brought me home again. Going, well, I've heard people say it's like a cattle market, you get to Windsor station you are all herded together, and all the locals walk round and select who they want to take home. The teacher I went with I knew her well after school she's quite a good friend and she's the one who took us down there and she said there's one lady there picking out all the big girls. So we said "Well why?" Well she ran the local brothel apparently! [LT laughs] So that's a little bit more I remember. Well, we – go on

LT: I was just going to say did you have your other members of your family, any other children?

EG: No, no I'm the only – only son. I suppose one of the things we used to collect was shrapnel and I think there was Anti Aircraft guns in Richmond Park and they were very, very noisy. But I think they done more damage to the public than they did the aeroplanes because the shrapnel that was lying around that would be – you're hit by one of these pieces of shrapnel and you'd be a gonner, shocking. As I say things you remember like they said on the television one had one egg a week, but in actual fact we were lucky if we got one egg each a fortnight. And I remember that my mother used to cook the eggs with perhaps toast or fried bread for my father and I and she'd make a cake out of hers to

share it out a bit more. Rationing, well – my father had a snack bar so perhaps the rationing didn't hit us quite as hard as it did other people. Although you know you can't depend on that at all. But we – we got by. And we've always got something to eat.

LT: What other meals did you have?

EG: Well, sausages weren't on the ration so that was probably one thing that we had quite a lot of. And we had our rations obviously and corned beef - instead of meat sometimes. Tinned food which was on points, but you still got it, you know, you had some. And bread, rolls, funny enough they weren't rationed until after the war. And the food we done quite well out of it I think most families in our area did anyway, they all got by. You registered¹ with a grocer and usually you at least you got your rations and this went on for ooh - obviously there was no bananas or anything like that, no ice cream, all you got was frozen water with a touch of orangeade in it or something like that. And of course you always carried your gas mask, no matter where you went you carried your gas mask. There was a saying that when you were out when you saw a queue join it, there's always something at the end of it you know - it happened. I know when I was about – 12, I suppose, I went to camp with the Scouts - and being under a tent, this was only at Cobham. I think London had an air raid that night and we could hear it, it's a very funny sensation, a very funny sensation.

LT What kind of, how, describe how you felt.

EG: Well, yeah, it's a sensation where - you're a little bit scared, all you've got is a bit of canvas between you and the outside world. But at the same time it's quite thrilling for you know another word. So we managed things like that.

LT: What about school? What were schooldays like?

EG: Aah – well my schooldays were not very good because time we got to school and get started the air raid sirens'd go, and they never sat there, we always went downstairs to what they called the air raid shelter and we spent many, many hours down there, and I had to leave school at 13 ½ because of what I'm gonna tell you about the bomb. So school I wasn't that well educated.

LT: How did you get about in the war? Transport and so forth?

EG: Got a bus or train, trains weren't all that frequent, bus fares - weren't too bad the bus, buses in those days. Another thing a lot of people remember is that at the corners of the roads, each night the council van would come round and put a hurricane lamp on the corner, and then put a metal box over it, and this little box had a cross that let the light out, so the drivers could see where the corners were. Another thing that crosses my mind I don't know if I mentioned it on here - end of several of the roads were what they called pig bins, great big heavy dustbins, and rather than waste food, what you have left over you'd put it in these bins - all except bread – it was against the law to put bread in there, it was against the law to waste bread, you not supposed to put bread in there. But my late wife's uncle,

¹ 5 min

one of his jobs was to go around picking all this stuff up and he was amazed at the - knives, forks and spoons that they had in this, because people just cleared the table, and I have got a set of, I think it's six apostle spoons, which according to my mother-in-law he collected out of all this and I've still got them.

LT: Right.

EG: What else did we do?

LT: What about entertainment, what did you do for a laugh?

EG: Pictures [laughs] wasn't much other than that really. Actually I've spent a lot of time down at the Scout hut - 'cos there weren't many things to do in those days. So, you know, I was down there I won't say every night, but quite often. But Tuesday nights was always Picture night because in my Dad's shop he hung up a little card to say what was on at the local Pictures and by that you got a free ticket so him and my mother used to go and if I was available I would go with them.

LT: What did you see? What movies?

EG: Ooof - can't remember now. They were all so called up to date² ones, mostly American from what I can remember. It varied greatly from I was going to say happy ones to sad ones, all the different parts of them. But used to come and go and then say "Oh I didn't like that" or I liked that" or something like that, but unfortunately then they knocked the building down and it's now a block of offices, so there's no local cinema round here now. [Terrible – under breath]

LT: What did your parents do during the war?

EG: Well they had this cafe you see.

LT: Oh yeah.

EG: And they had it before the war. And they packed up I suppose 19 – ooh [laughs] – trying to remember back – 1950 – no, no, no – 1980 something like that and by that time I was married, and we had a flat in Elm Road round the corner here. We eventually, with the help of my parents, bought the place and they had the flat upstairs so that was all settled and they were much happier there because where they were, they didn't have a lot of mod com at all, but still that's another story.

LT: Mm - did they do war work in addition to the cafe?

EG: The only thing was fire watching that my father done, I mean they were working what from 7 in the morning 'til 6 at night and wasn't much other time to do anything else. [Clears throat] Right opposite our place was an air raid wardens' post and funny enough the – it always had beautiful flowers in it, all round it, and they were done by the mother of Jimmy Edwards who didn't live all that far away, and she looked after the flowers, she was one of the wardens as well. We had a week

² 10 min

where - people were, 'specially children, were encouraged to collect waste paper, and we had to take it to this air warden's post and they guessed what the weight was and they put that down against your name. Well, in those days - telephone booths all had - books in with people's different telephone numbers, telephone directories, but after this thing there were no telephone directories in the neighbourhood [laughter]. We got um 5 shillings between the 3 of us for what we collected so we didn't do too bad. [Unclear] then was, you know, quite something. [Talks under breath].

LT: Say something, tell us something about what happened in that air raid on your parents' shop.

EG: Well it was in February 1944. We were in bed we lived above the shop [unclear] - our only air raid shelter, was a cupboard under the stairs, and we had to come down. We were laying there and the air raid warning went and I had a feeling I didn't want to stay there. I didn't want to stay there. I eventually got my parents and we all went down into the shop to enter the cupboard. Well, I never heard the bang - but the whole blast went right through the house. And it placed me under a table. Now my mother and my father [laughing] were just about to go under the cupboard - well mother I think was in there - my father found me laying under a table there and I'd gashed all the back of my head - bleeding down there. Finally he called into the wardens' post opposite that there was injury here, 'cos the place was in wrack and ruin, well the building was still there but all the contents were smashed to pieces, so they came across and I had a feeling, I went like that³ - being a cafe -

LT: [Sorry - he touched his head at that point - just for the recording]

EG: [I beg your pardon]

LT: [That's alright]

EG: I touched my head and at that point I said now look - on the evenings beforehand my father used to buy pilchards to use in the shop for sandwiches and rolls, and each evening he used to mix them up in a bowl so it's all ready for the morning, and what had happened was this blast before I was flung under the table, I was hit with this dish of pilchards and that's what was down onto my back and I've never touched pilchards since.

Then - we couldn't live there obviously - so we went upstairs in the following morning because we went into someone else's house for the rest of the night. Following morning we went up there to pick a few bits up to go and stay with relatives in Putney - and on my father's pillow was a piece of concrete I should think at least 12 inches wide. So, you know, if I hadn't've insisted we went downstairs he wouldn't have got past the night. Anyway, we went to Putney and my uncle had to go into hospital he was ill, my aunt there had two small children and one of them got - scarlet fever. Well in those days you got scarlet fever they come and fumigated your room, took your mattress away and put you in hospital - which was Woolwich. So - we stayed there and eventually he came home. Before he came home, sorry, his sister had it so she went off, but she went to a different hospital. He came home and he hadn't got rid of it - and he gave it to me. Again we went in different hospitals I went back to the

³ 15 min

Woolwich one but I don't know where he went. While I was in hospital the doodlebugs started – so that was – you just didn't know what to make of it. People were saying to the nurses “What's that? What's that?” because you got the noise – an unusual noise that they made – and it cut out. Now sometimes you'd get a bang straight away and other times, it seemed to be a long time before it exploded - and it was two or three days before anybody really knew about this thing. And then of course the – second front started. One of the ideas of that of course – was to stop these bombs – and – anyway I come out of hospital, come back to – live in Barnes. One day there was a terrible explosion, nobody knew what it was and were saying “Well, what was it? Oh, it was a gas main” bla bla bla. But what it was was the first rocket – and it landed just the other side of Chiswick Bridge which as the crow flies is probably what? A mile from here, [LT mm] - and I think there must have been others, well there was others, afterwards.

So that started again so my aunt, and by that time my uncle had died, my aunt, the two children and myself went down, and stayed with another aunt in Norfolk and we were down there quite a while in fact my first job down there was to milk goats. And – you could hear what you'd take to be rockets falling then, they weren't all that near but they made such a noise that, you know, it impressed upon you what they were.

One thing, and I don't like it now, I don't like to be in a dim room [LT: mm] because when we moved to – stayed at – Putney with my aunt [clears throat] you were waiting to go down the air raid shelter as soon as the fi.. as soon as the air raid warning went, you know, you weren't going to stay there. They had an Anderson Shelter⁴ – [clears throat] and their room that they put us in was only a small bedroom, but it had a very weak light, very small bulb and what with the can't see very well, having to get the rest of me clothes on and me balaclava and things to go down the air raid shelter, and with this light to bad lighting all the time so I do like places to be lit up. This is all out [unclear] [LT mm].

LT: What was it like sitting in the air raid shelter?

EG: Well, it's a strange feeling because you're sitting there sometimes and there's no noise at all, nothing, and you think to yourself “Well, is it worth - being down here?” Then gradually the guns start again [LT mm] – and you think “Well, that's it like we stay here”. We were lucky because – when get this gotta get this right – when I came out of hospital, a few weeks later we moved as I say down to Norfolk or up to Norfolk , - and where we lived had a doodlebug land on a school right opposite – so again we got out of that one [laughs].

Oh, then I at 14 I started work – I worked at an office in Hammersmith. Well, nobody mentioned air raid shelters or anything there and – the air raid warning went – I didn't hear much noise or anything and then the people came back and said “Well, you know, what are you doing there” and I said “Well, you know, why”? “Oh we've all been down the air raid shelter”, but nobody told me about it! [laughter]

LT: So where was the shelter?

⁴ 20 min

EG: It was right below the building actually, it was – wasn't much more than a storage place really but people crowded in there.

LT: You didn't use the tube stations there then?

EG: Well, they're not underground.

LT: Is it not Hammersmith?

EG: No, no, no. Before we moved down to the country or moved up to Norfolk and after as I say we got bombed out, every night we went over to the school and used their air raid shelter there to sleep in. We slept on benches – [coughs] because when I went to the school, before I went to the secondary school we again spent time in the air raid shelter sitting on these benches - by now we are laying on the benches sleeping, you pick up all your bed clothes and things and wander home again – and it wasn't too far actually, probably about 500 yards something like that. But all these little things crop up in your mind and I think –

LT: Anything else?

EG: Just look down at me bits. Clothes were on the ration - and when I became a Scout I had the money funny enough for the uniform which was about - just under the pound. But that wasn't the trouble - it was getting the clothing coupons to buy them as it did all clothes. Well, one day my mother and father bought me a pair of shoes, nice new pair of shoes, and I went into the local recreation ground with a friend and they have a paddling pool there so I took my shoes off and I put them under a tree and went paddling. When I come back the shoes were gone. And my friend had to go all, come all the way home and see my parents and get an old pair and come back and put me and did I get a rocking when I got home. [laughs] They weren't very happy about me. I think, if I remember correctly, shoes were about 12 – 12 of these coupons a pair but⁵ I would stand corrected on it.

God that was another thing - never saw bananas or anything like that. They - somebody brought a couple to school once - now how they got hold of them I don't know - but our classroom which was probably about 30 people – they cut these 2 bananas up into 30 pieces so we'd all have a – we ate the skin as well! [laughter]

LT: Did you play games that kind of activities?

EG: Well, we had a cricket team, we had a football team, even had a rounders team. But it was all off and off because you'd start something and then you'd have to run down the shelter things like that. There was no competition like there is today. You didn't go against other schools because people went from home to school and school to home again generally, you know [LT mm].

LT: So you had raids at night and during the day?

⁵ 25 min

EG: Oh yes, yes. They didn't seem so bad during the day. I suppose 'cos - like during the actual Battle of Britain I've often looked up into the sky to, what would it be the south - east, and you see all the trails where the fighter planes were going round and all that - I remember that. I can't tell there was many games I –

LT: No. What about neighbours you know when you came up out of the shelters after a raid?

EG: Well, if it was night time everybody would get up and get back into bed when the All Clear had gone - and when the warning went, you know, you dashed down there and d'you know every now and again you'll hear the warning on television the actual warning, and my stomach turns over then. [LT Yeah] The All Clear doesn't, doesn't do anything but when I hear the warning just that thought, you know.

LT: Did you have a bag prepared of things?

EG: Continually yes, yes, yes.

LT: What was in it?

EG: I know my mother had a hand bag with all our insurance, post office books. I had a – when I was 7 they took me down the Post Office and got me a Post Office book money box – and you could only open 'em at the Post Office, they used to have keys to open them. Upset me as – and I've still got it, and the money in it I'm sure must be the old coinage but you go to the Post Office now they say no, no – no we haven't got anything. We haven't got the keys now, send it up to Bank of England, trouble is I send it up they're likely to lose the book so I'll just keep it.

LT: Any other stories? Where were your grandparents at this time?

EG: I'd lost all my grandparents [LT Aah] at that time.

LT: Any other stories your parents used to tell?

EG: Well, ones they'd tell'd be about the First World War!

LT: Yeah.

EG: The First World War my father was a prisoner of war in – right the way through it - and my mother she was making uniforms for the troops, that's right. But they never said a lot about it. Course they had the Zeppelin raids then [LT: mm] but the bombs weren't as bad as they are - or were – let's hope we never see 'em again.

LT: Anything else you want to add?

EG: I'm trying to think of anything else that might've occurred. I think I thought what's – what's silly really - when⁶ we got bombed we went to these people's house couple of roads away and one of the men in there had a grocer's right opposite where one of these bombs landed – and he went back to the grocer and he brought back a packet of biscuits and opened it for us. He said "They won't miss these". Now he could have brought back anything because this place was just blown out [laughter] but all he brought was this packet of biscuits, unless he thought he'd lose money on them and I don't know. Can't think of much else.

LT: Ok, well that's been very good.

EG: Not now I'm on I'll probably think of 'em next week or something like that.

LT: You probably will. You've been speaking half an hour so you've not done badly.

EG: Have I?

LT: Yeah

EG: [Laughs] Oh dear!

LT: Ok, shall we stop it there then?

EG: Ok.

End of Interview.

⁶ 30 min