

DOP/01/001

Mrs Marjorie Cook (nee Meacham) born 1st December 1907
And Mr. George Cook
31 Osborne Street
Wolverton

Mrs. Cook.

- 005 In 1914 lived in Aylesbury Street, one brother, two sisters and one male cousin, Alfred Meacham, called up August 1914 (Territorial). Remember him packing kit and marching along Church Street with battalion behind band. Father joined Special Constables. Apart from gathering extras to send off to Alf, remembers little until 1916.
- 012 Severe blizzards in '16. Telegraph poles brought down. Youngest sister born February 28th while Father searched barges for escaped P.O.W.s
- 017 Only bathing place at Viaduct. First refugees from Belgium housed in Stratford Road and invited out for a lot of meals and made a fuss of. Close friend, who lived next door, jealous. One day after bathing in river pretended to be refugees. Jabbered away in what hoped sounded like foreign language and two ladies stopped them, asked if they were refugees and gave them 1d. Friend had conscience, thought penny would bring bad luck so persuaded Marjorie Meacham to bury penny at bottom of pole in Haversham Road earlier knocked down. By time got to station MC persuaded her it was a waste of a penny; they returned to dig up penny, but as all poles had been re-erected, a lot of fresh earth around each, so didn't ever find it.
- 040 In August heard Alf had died of wounds. Received usual letters and possessions came back. Attended memorial service in St. George's – held in lunch hour.
- 055 When Armistice declared, fetched from school and marched around town behind band. One lady stood crying - her son had been killed and MC felt guilty rejoicing.
- 058 Sister did man's job in War and was unemployed when the men came home. In 1916 spent one week's holiday at Linford Wood. Holiday really a shut-out as men received no pay for it. Went by train to Linford. Took truck laden with food and tools. Walked to patch in woods where father had bought top of tree. Trunks felled for war effort. Locals could buy tops of trees for small amount, providing they cut it up and took it away. Piles of wood and tools never interfered with. Family went each day with pram, became friendly with gamekeeper, who gave them water and early apples. Provided logs for all winter.
- 078 Even for men at home life was hard – long hours at work, allotments, Special Constable duties, mending boots, etc. Women's lot hard – kitchen shelves with soap, pickles, candles, goose grease, horse-radish, puddings. Mother and other women always used coarse aprons, made from Tate and Lyle sacks, full length; in time knees became hard and corny. Men's woodwork aprons made from unbleached calico-brown, becoming white with washing.

- 112 Manoeuvres of 1913. At Stacey Hill Farm. Local people gave impromptu concerts standing on farm carts and singing, etc. Men invited to people's homes. Uncertainty over whether manoeuvres were at Old Wolverton at same time – Mr Cook thinks so. Remembers a neighbour, Nora Waite, singing "Oh You Beautiful Doll" and getting good reception. On one of manoeuvres her aunt went away with a sergeant from a Scottish regiment. Then Alf (her son) came to live with the Meachams.
- 156 Alf a very good athlete and footballer, having a trial for Northampton F.C. in 1914, but was called up. In Territorials, called up immediately after war declared. Joined Oxford & Bucks Light Infantry.
- 173 Remembers silk cards sent to them. A loving young man - like brothers and sisters to him. Too young to remember much else.
- 180 Lot of propaganda, lot of pride in having relative in war. Thinks pride quickly went and sadness stepped in. Nobody saw any glory in that war in a little while. Didn't take her family long to get disillusioned, but doesn't know about other families. Horrified at what happened to Alf and his pals. Family did not take active part in expressing their dissatisfaction with war. Didn't know anybody in Wolverton who did. Father's job relied on towing the line. Didn't know of any conscientious objector. Everybody expected to tow the line. Father didn't object to being a Special. Asked to be relieved of duty on night daughter was born, but had to go just the same. Didn't have doctor or nurse, had one lady who looked after everything. Father had to go and search boats in bitterly cold weather. On Sundays people went down to Broad waters and skated – very bad winter.
- 218 Heard of Alf's death through a letter. Father went to work at 6.00 a.m. Returned at 8-8.30 for breakfast - used to read mail.
- 233 My father undid a notification that Alf had died of wounds. No special telegram as far as can recall. Family very bitter about Alf's death. A very fine young man. Thought it such a wicked thing.
- 240 Lot of hostility to German (Sigwart) who had business in Stratford Road. Her father and uncle showed it. In end, had to board up shop because of threats. Naturalised Englishman of German origin, wife never learned to speak English very well - very German. People wanted to take it out on them.
- 251 People blamed Germans, not generals. Stories of Germans and atrocities were pumped into us and believed. Wouldn't get away with it today. Mr. Cook: Some of the stories may have been true. Mrs. Cook: But they didn't lose anything in the telling, I doubt.
- 261 Doesn't know whether memorial service was because Alf was a church-goer but he was. Also a member of Church Lads' Brigade before he became a Territorial. Lots of people went, imagines it was for more than one person.
- 275 Can't remember war having much effect on daily life of town.

- 278 Thinks father not called up because he had too many children. Mr. Cook thinks age limit, but he was only 32. Can't remember reserved occupations in the First War. Family life normal in War.
- 310 Special Constables because lot of young police joined up. Those who did not go to war and were able-bodied, were made Specials. Possibly prisoner of war camp at Linford. Prisoners wore round patches on coats. Assigned to look for escaped P.O.W. on barges at the Locomotive - Galleon Pub now. Possibly Saw P.O.W.s when at Linford cutting up trees. Could have been felling the trees. Specials had arm band and a walking stick with a knob on the end.
- 370 Recalls scene of father dragging canal at Suicide Bridge. Describes where it is – has always been known as "Suicide Bridge". Kids walked along parapet of bridge, thinking they were clever. Seemed to be quite a few people who used it – favourite form of suicide locally.
- 411 Doesn't know why people committed suicide. Person whom she knew had house, husband and home and two children; doesn't know why she got so desperate.
- 428 Mr. Cook – Mother said at breakfast that they think the war will end today. War didn't mean much to him, lived with all apparent life. After dinner young chaps from Woks burst into school, knocked over Headmaster and called all kids out. Staff left standing. Marched round to Girls' school, round town behind band and down to Bradwell. His first ever visit to Bradwell and very interested. Aged 7-8 at time. Lads didn't say anything, didn't need to, just called them out. As band marching round Wolverton, people all over place waving tiny Union Jacks. As child wondered wherever they got them from in such a short time. Imagine this was anticipated. Can't remember what happened at Bradwell, probably just dispersed.
- 496 War meant nothing to him, just a state of living. All of conscious existence had been during that war. Remembers newspaper headline just before end of war said British or Allied submarine sunk, 19 drowned. Just remembers that of war.

Side 2

- 002 Mr Cook remembers playing soldiers in school playground. Always imagines them being killed with arms outstretched. On one occasion bell went for return to lessons. He walked in queue with arms out-stretched. One of friends said I've never seen a dead man walking. At 4 at school had clay modelling session. German airplanes making presence felt. He clay modelled German airplane, imagining them with wings sweeping backwards. Teacher praised him and allowed him to collect up plasticine boards afterwards. Had never actually seen a German plane.
- 030 Mrs. Cook remembers friend, Ethel, whose father dropped down dead from heart attack in the Jitty (an alleyway off Green Lane). Mother had to take in washing and other jobs (no pensions and four children). Ethel till end of life remembered every Friday being hauled out of class to receive Parish relief, or to confirm she was still at school so that mother got it.

- 057 Ethel and she walked to Weston Underwood (about 10 miles). Got to her Granny's by lunchtime. Every day of life Granny made suet pudding – dipped one end in gravy and the other in jam. Best pudding of her life. All people worked for Lord of Manor (Bowyer) and
- 057 curtsied to Lord and family. Her father ordered her not to curtsy, but Ethel did. Pudding called "a Buck dumpling". Plain suet pudding done in cloth in large pan. Made every day of life by Ethel's' granny, including Sunday. Couldn't afford joints. Staple diet.
- 091 Ethel the girl she did refugee trick with and did everything with. Born next door, from birth onwards great pals. After death of father all hard up, little to spare, probably gave mother vegetables from allotment. Ethel and brother could always come to house. Eventually mother got job as caretaker of Church Institute, meant her working evenings so Ethel stayed with them.
- 104 Refugees – two families from Belgium. Children went to school; first time she'd ever heard a foreign language. Given house in double-fronted shop in Stratford Road previously used as Food Ration office. Well treated by local people. She was green with envy – they were always invited out to tea and meals. Aggie Barley would remember their names as she had them to tea a lot. Went back after war.
- 127 Mrs. Tarbox, midwife, wonderful person to all of them. She was midwife, housekeeper, and got children to school. Everybody had her or Mrs Higgs, but she was a shocker. They charged £1 and stayed for about a week. They came every day and did everything. Nobody had a doctor. Was lovely person – very kind. Very kind parent too – didn't know what a slap was. Therefore, very horrified when father raved at her from boat at Suicide Bridge. Not used to that. Midwives were booked in advance. Also laid out the dead as well. Sent them on their way. She always seemed old to us always, old people did then. Probably a widow – obvious choice of job. Worked on own, not in partnership. Probably never unemployed because when at school everybody's mum seemed to be having a baby.
- 170 Brother and she had schemes for helping war effort. Fattened up rabbit, no intention of killing it. Bought bran. Got up one morning, father had come home for breakfast and killed the rabbit, not said anything to either of them and body of white rabbit was hanging on handle of mangle, ready for mother to skin to cook. Not deterred, they fattened up two cockerels for Christmas. Grew maize in back garden. Brother Arthur built cage that was too small, so when they threw back heads to crow they hit heads on roof and crow was cut short.
- 200 Blackberrying parties by schools. Sold for jam for soldiers as part of War Effort. Tried to collect wool attached to barb wire.
- 222 Used to go to Byatt and Hopkins shop and treasure house of household items, including the seats for wicker chairs. Hung in roof. Bought for few pence and tacked in place of broken seat. Did it dozens of times. Frame of chair was pitted with holes where number of seats had been tacked in. Even though father a woodworker anyone would tack seats in.

- 240 Definitely had ration cards. Mr. Cook remembers going shopping and losing them and being frightened. Retraced steps and found it, white ration card. Even King had one. Punched holes in them in relevant sections.
- 260 Told horror stories, children did as well amongst themselves, of Germans killing babies, etc. Totally childish and ridiculous propaganda. Always the wicked Hun. Never think that the German soldiers were the same as our lads. Lots of cartoon of Big Willie and Little Willie, Kaiser and Crown Prince, always featured as being totally ridiculous figures. Mr. Cook believes a lot of propaganda stories had a lot more than a grain of truth in them. Has heard old soldiers subsequently saying that they'd actually seen the results of German atrocities on various Belgian and French women.
- 300 Mr. Cook. Stories at local Works that when men came back they were not welcomed because people who'd been there all of the war were worried about losing their jobs with large influx. Only hearsay, but can well believe it. Practically all men he'd worked with in 1942 when he went into Works had been in war.
- 330 Mr. Cook Can't remember sentiment about war experience being expressed, but split at time of Second War between those who wanted to go back and those who wouldn't go back for anything.
- 350 Mrs. Cook. Can't remember Christmas being any different during the War. All Christmases pretty meagre. (Never short of food. Mother always did plate of toast for their return after school.) Stockings were orange, few nuts, few chocolate coins wrapped up in gold paper and possibly a sugar mouse. Never anything else. Remembers Christmas before war in 1912. At Christmas got big blue painted doll's cot and in it a doll with 1/- ticket on its stomach. Very pleased. Come February Mrs Tarbox called in. Came into room in morning and saw new baby sister lying in blue cot. Furious, took years to come round to liking that sister.
- 400 Christmas lunch – rabbit. One year father trapped birds and they had them in a pie. Can't remember type of bird. Two cockerels one year and neighbours delighted when they were killed because of early morning crowing. Jelly, but Christmases were very ordinary.
- 435 Games, cards, as home entertainments. When small, designs with wooden matches, snakes and ladders, Ludo, then came on to cards. Father came home every night with firewood – bits of tongue and groove. Fitted them together to make farmyards and animals with clay and plasticine. Can't remember ever having a toy, apart from doll which did not last long, but never seemed to be at a loss. Street games when weather fine.
- Mr. Cook. Thrill of excitement when bought first book at 8 or 9. One Christmas influenced by war had toy soldier's uniform.