

DOP/01/015

Mrs. Alice Gear (Nee Meacham) Born 1902
50 Oxford Street
Wolverton
(Sister of Marjorie Cook Tape 001)

Wolverton at War

007 Used to live in 52 Aylesbury Street, moved to 42 Aylesbury Street.

012 Hanging on railings of Drill Hall when war broke out. Alfred in Territorials. At Drill Hall, preparing to go on annual camp to Catterick. Kept at Drill Hall all day, eventually sent to Chelmsford.

022 Ox and Bucks Light Infantry – partly trained, good shots, more than half ready to go. Went to France at Christmas.

028 Aged 12 frightened to death. Had been frightened before by Haley's Comet in 1908.

033 War on 12 months, two Belgian families arrived sated till end of war.

039 Children less sophisticated, more childlike, be called dumb-clucks today but not worldly wise. Better educated then, can't do anything today, have a smattering of everything and a knowledge of nothing.

045 63-64 in class, three sitting in desk made for two Nothing to do but sit and learn, couldn't gallop about and express yourself. No room or facilities. School till 14. Could leave at 13 if reached Standard 7 and got your marks. dad wouldn't allow them to leave at 13 as believed they wouldn't set a better job, wouldn't get a trade.

058 Liked school. School didn't change much, didn't talk about war. Some time before conscripting began. Father examined. Making ambulances (coaches). Works reserved occupation. Father just over 30, but government didn't like paying separation allowance for more than four children and they had five. Not written down, but understood thing.

080 Manoeuvres. Lots of soldiers, including Scotch regiments, bands nice, liked to see men on parade. Went on tram to see them and Stratford whenever they could.

092 Grandfather on Royal train staff. He knew Kaiser as he waited on him. Said he was going to cause mischief and trouble. You mark my words, you'll see it if you live on you'll see it. Kaiser's mother eldest child of Queen Victoria, thought he was entitled to Crown of England. Came over 18 months – two years before war and he was fated.

113 Troops here about a month. Aunt cleared off with Sergeant in the Black Watch. Alf and father sheltered did not know what to do. Both at first came to live with them. Alf a lovely boy only 20 when killed in 1916. Aunt not only one to get involved with troops, but no one else went as far; a few got a bit friendly. Caused trouble later on. (9 months later). Not always as final as that. At that time men's wives had got to be like Caesar's wife – have no dalliings. If you were rightly minded you didn't want to, of course. Men had money and flattered the women. Men had sports and tent pegging – new to them. Men in Wolverton ignored them.

View of more fool them for being in the army. Young boys and girls and young women were interested.

145 Alf went to Chelmsford and billeted there for further training.

157 Men who joined up, some mothers didn't like it, but it was new, a change, took them abroad, thought it would be exciting. Lot waited to be called up, couldn't get enough volunteers.

165 At time family not radical. Dad turned Labour later. Then he was bigoted, very keen Conservative and churchman. The state was right. My country may she always be right, but if she isn't we'll still follow her. Conservative thinking.

181 Doubts re politics crept in when they tried to better themselves. Had been away and had seen other people in other parts of world with better working conditions (always quoted best). Wanted less hours and more money for what they did do. 30s. a week for trained mechanic. McCorquodales went in at 6am. Worked 54 hours for 5s.9d. Can't wonder why they rebelled. Went on strike, etc. In end bettered their lot – now gone too far.

217 Wolverton – chapels and churches flourished. People law-abiding. Brought children up as nice as they could, educated them and made school teachers out of them if chance came. Place that was on the up and up. Men enjoyed being craftsmen. After 2nd World War when work scarce craftsmen offered labouring jobs – some refused them.

231 Foremen wore tall hats and expensive watch chains, mechanics, labourers mixed together, but those who were a bit better off, knew they were a bit better off, put it that way. Victoria Street was where foremen lived, some in Stratford Road.

270 Vicar Harnett, doesn't remember him very well. Church and school belonged to railway. Son was autocratic and an astronomer – succeeded father as vicar.

285 No married women teachers, automatically sacked on marriage. Married women could do charring. Superintendent lived in Gables. Second in command lived in 2 Western Road next door to the doctor.

307 Harry Hipsley, headmaster of Boys' School, also choirmaster of C of E choir. Very close to Harnett. Autocratic, but did the boys good. Punished for wrong-doings outside school too. called a great many names for that. His house was next door to Gables looking up Green Lane. People of influence, they were.

332 Dad went to work at 6 came home to breakfast. She'd get up and do some errand. Two hours at lunchtime – can see mother now waiting for her with pram in one hand and a basket in the other. Had to do shopping. You expected to take a part in the house and join in things. Never thought of saying we shan't. did shopping, ironing, washing, take the children out. eldest child always caught it. She was eldest. Not much spare time. Played in gardens, charades, dress up, made mud pies.

360 More games of soldiers for boys and nurses for girls with war.

369 Remembers woman, Mrs. Cole, in Buckingham Street losing two sons within a week of each other. Run berserk in streets waving telegram and screaming. Sticks in your mind. Ran to fetch husband out of work. Very sad and very tearing really.

386 Loss of Alf. telegram from War Office. To her was a brother, more than her own brother. Two or three men killed. Always said it was English shell that fell short. Paralysed – good job he died – a good athlete. Other fellows who came home later told family, saw him carried off unable to move, just his head.

412 Soldiers came on leave and told you what happened and what hell it was. Trench life was awful in their weeks in same clothes, verminous. When Alf came home, took off clothes in the barn. Alf had three or four leaves. Killed August 1916. Wouldn't talk much about it Auntie its awful it really is. Its dreadful auntie, don't talk about it.

434 Last leave in February when youngest sister born. Alf went down street and saw every man killed with him. Sgt. Major Smith, who told him where they would be going in France. Smith killed outright, Alf lasted three days.

447 Get pink envelope from War Official knew what it was before opened it. Pink or yellow. The War Office regrets... Just formal. It's hell out there, Aunt, I'll never see you again, aunt. Mum said Oh yes, you will, you're worrying because you've had enough of it after two, after two years of it. No auntie it's dreadful, you haven't got much chance of coming out of there alive. And of course he didn't.

475 Spent leaves going round with friends – not a pub goer. Keen on fitness, looking after himself. Had girlfriend had fallen out by time he was killed.

492 Those on leave wanted to live every minute of it. To go to bed was a treat.

501 You had to send him off as well as you could see you next time and keep your chin up. Fellows of that age don't talk about feelings very much unless they break down and cry, which some did. How many wanted to leave mothers?

Side Two

004 Alf wasn't the same, not a young man any more after what he'd seen.

010 Likes him, a nice boy.

013 People led sheltered lives in Wolverton. If you wanted to get on had to go to Church or chapel and mind how you got on. If person stole or did something wrong might get sack, or were suspended. Had to behave yourself all time. Narrow-minded place. Alf a tee totaler.

028 Had grown up – a man, a bitter man. Not nice to spend two winters in trenches, rats, couldn't change clothes.

034 Knitted socks and sent them out. Bucks Light Infantry one of few regiments with a quick march past.

038 Alf didn't lose temper with family – loved Mrs. G's mother. So glad to be amongst them. Most just wanted to go to bed, spent whole leave in bed. glory to be in between nice sheets. Not nice in trenches.

047 Knew he was afraid – fatalism bullet with name on it, but Mrs. G. thinks it was just bravado. You can't face your end at 21 can you.

052 Case of person who came back from war and got lost. Lived in Cambridge Street, rumoured he didn't come back to avoid problems, but may be only gossip.

059 Saw people with shell shock. Some never got over it. Those who were at Gallipoli for years had ruined health.

079 Had white feathers – one or two. Majority didn't try to dodge conscription. some tried to get exemption certificates, but had to be on war work.

083 Knitted balaclava helmets and socks – couldn't wash them, destroyed them and relied on people sending more.

088 No women recruiters in Wolverton. When people got call up papers immediately, lots went to doctors to get certificates showing they weren't fit. When not forthcoming reluctantly went. One or two conscientious objectors. either to prison or worked on land.

109 One of husband's family – now lives in Australia. Local preacher. Didn't know what he was talking about, foolish boy. When the war's on it's too late to argue. Got on and do it. Get on and win it. Eventually left Wolverton – joined Plymouth Brethren. people thought they shouldn't have a ration card. Why should young fellows go on the runs to Russia and Norway and Sweden bringing food back and they share it while other fellows years younger than themselves are losing their lives. Lot lost in convoys.

145 Left school at 14. Won scholarship but no help for families. Father couldn't afford uniform. Couldn't go. Howled all one day, but no difference. Got job in works, replacing man who had gone away. Clerical girls had been in offices. In Accounts Office. Few girls worked in Works – especially in sewing room. As man went was replaced by girl, but only on a temporary basis, not on staff. Works doing ambulance coaches, but can't remember them making munitions.

177 Men didn't like women doing men's work. Off handed. Didn't help very much. Girls had to cling together and help each other out.

184 Father a coach maker. Bigoted Tory. Didn't mind her taking a man's job, so as long as she behaved self and brought no trouble home. Same for everybody, mustn't disgrace family. If girl ran wild and had child, as she and child were family disgrace. No adoption. Kept in back bedroom, food pushed in as though they were prisoner. Very very dreadful thing to do in those days. Family had to bear it, no question of getting rid of it.

200 No more of it in war years. No soldiers – bulk after manoeuvres. At end of war men too exhausted too fed up to sow many wild oats. Many got married and all wanted was to go back into Works or Print and pick up pieces if they could. On leave, went about a bit but

things very quiet, couldn't make whoopee as there was nothing to do it with. Money was tight always unspoken, unwritten rules that had to be kept.

228 Doesn't think war had effect on position of women. Always women who resented being second class citizens and took that opportunity to prove they were as good. After war were edged out. Very few stayed on in offices for years. Many men came back, got sack, no surprise.

267 Very few married women worked in war, some in shops a few charring. She got various clerical jobs in district.

282 Men at first wouldn't help and made nasty remarks but settled down.

296 Things became difficult to get. Belgian families source of interest. Sister Madge wished she was a refugee. DeRikker – name of family. Daughter same age Irena. Came over once or twice after end of war. Belgians had school-aged children. Wolverton people generous to them.

343 Sent Alf cakes and mince pies and food parcels. always looked forward to coming home and finishing time at McCorquodales. Mrs G. couldn't afford chocolate – had everlasting strip or white milk bar. Little fruit, only had them when in season, no refrigeration. Foreman better off, but nobody had much for luxuries.

390 People went mad when armistice declared. Mrs. G. at work – someone came in and said it was over, no-one believed it. Said it would be eleventh hour, eleventh day of eleventh month. People hoping their relations would scrape through. Somebody had to be the last one killed, didn't they. Arranged street parties quickly. Arranged things bigger after that. Wasn't allowed to leave office. Courting husband told her to come down. I can't get past old man So & So. Joined in celebrations later couldn't stop people later. Had fireworks. Teas dances got up quickly. Got flags out. Made to look festive straight away it was so lovely to be jolly and happy.

444 Feeling end of war was near. Stalemate for two years. feeling of father and others that generals should be sent out in trenches and let them have a bash, that it would be over quicker if they did. Beginning to change political views then and become just as strong Labour. POW benefits all on one side and why shouldn't they have a bit.

466 Husband to be was running up 18, he'd soon be for the chop. He'd probably have been in next call up lot. An only son and a sister, still a spinster. Many a single lady willing about today whose possible husband died lost one and quarter million. Not necessarily a boyfriend, but lack of men to go round as husbands. She was perhaps too hard to please.