

## **DOP/01/017**

Mrs. May Brooks (nee Dolling)  
Born august 25, 1899  
44 Stacey Avenue  
Wolverton

000 Born in 16 Aylesbury St. eldest of family of three, brother and sister. Father in Works brass finisher, deputy foreman of brass shop. Mother used to work in print.

018 Getting concerned about idea of war. All news from newspapers. Carrying on usual life. Had just started first job – June 1914 at print. Remembers her and mother taking walk across fields and talking about war. Reason was mother's youngest brother had been living with them for few months. Regular soldier – Sgt. In 1<sup>st</sup> Kings Dragoon Guards – joined up during Boer War, then served in India. On a 6 months furlough from March – September 1914, when war declared regiment recalled lost month's leave. They were concerned about it. Had seen war had been declared in paper that morning.

044 Beautiful peaceful evening. Bank holiday, yet knew fighting going on just across the Channel. Talked about how terrible it seemed. no idea of what war would be like. Still knew it meant killing and wounding. At same time thought it would be short affair. All sure it would be over by Christmas.

059 No thought that we would be anything other than the winners.

062 Great feeling of confidence.

068 Many went with sense of adventure. Exciting, like to be in on. Parents not always so cheerful, they knew what it meant.

080 Her father 51-2. Can't remember father's feelings. War didn't effect her family very much. No one old enough to go to war. Only Uncle and cousin amongst relatives served.

095 Kept in contact with Uncle. In France in November Killed on June 1<sup>st</sup> 1915 – just one week after her mother died. Mother's eldest sister heard news. family shocked. Had had narrow escapes in South Africa. got it in their minds that whatever happened George (aged 32) would see it through.

115 War didn't affect her. Working in print, men away. Before war had been mostly women anyway. Print carried on as usual. Affected Railway Works more in time – ambulance coaches and a few munitions made.

141 Thinks war affected women's role in society. Called upon to do men's job. Thought they should get more like men and get vote. Can't remember any incidents relating to this. We were a very quiet community really.

160 Dad thought women could do jobs, but not very keen on it at first. No married women were employed normally, a few married women may have been employed. Can't remember

any local people involved in Suffragette movement. Too young to be interest but did at end of war. fleeing at end of war that things would be different. Women realised that in case of emergency weren't the helpless creatures that men thought they were. Could do job and do it well. If could do job, surely worthy of having the vote.

198 Strike at print. Women came to the fore. After war on for year, prices rocketed in shop. McCors poor payers. some of more radical girls formed committee and asked for rise in wages. McCors. Refused it. Couldn't do much as no union. Got in touch with union man in Northampton, formed branch in Wolverton. Still didn't make much difference, so came out on strike. No 100%. A cousin stayed in and got 1/- a week extra on wages. About 75% came out.

249 Family sympathetic. Relatives on father's side all went in. Mother's side more radical. Out for about a week. went down each day for news. One day marched along Stratford Road. All quite exciting especially for the younger element.

260 Employers gave in. since then have been better employers. Got 2-3 shillings extra. Her rate was 5/- long, long time before got 10/- at 17. Left Print end of 1916 early 1917. Strike seemed to be in spring, quite nice weather.

280 Some of men at Print involved, didn't employ many men. Sis Axby chief one, Mabel Archer, her assistant.

295 Some people thought they were going too far and they were more outspoken than some other employees would. Some people got idea leaders were trying to upset things. I suppose to a certain extent they were. – Trying to upset the way of going on, if they couldn't get what they wanted. Never needed to do anything like that before.

312 She thought it was jolly good – a week's holiday, Saw leaders as extreme, but wouldn't think so today. Mother thought they were doing the right thing. People in those days didn't stick up for themselves as they did after the war.

323 War declared on August Bank Holiday Monday. Was a Works holiday. No paid holiday – shut out. Had to apply for time off. Whole works heard about war in National newspaper.

350 Armistice. Previous day a United Church service in old Congregational Church. felt them that war was coming end. Announcement was made that if Armistice was signed the next day there would be a thanksgiving Service in the Cong. Church. Got up in morning hoping news would be correct. she presumes they had a phone message because shortly after 11 the men from the Works came rushing out and called the men from the Works came rushing out and called everybody to stop working. Came to co-op and called them out. Went around shouting and singing – really exciting. dancing in street, everybody excited. At end of day excitement died away a little and had Service of Thanksgiving.

380 United choir sang something from Messiah. Being young didn't notice the tragedy so much of people who had lost somebody.

410 When people settled down after Armistice and peace in 1919, realised what a terrible thing war had been, didn't realise it when going on. lot of people decided to work for peace. MB became very interested in League of Nations.

435 Influences on life to change views. Church member, took it seriously, began to ask whether wars were right, not at beginning, but at end. Thinking of young fellows who'd gone and wouldn't come back, was it worth it Young and enthusiastic, prepared to join movements trying to make world better.

455 Minister at Church a big Liberal. His daughter engaged to conscientious objector, a Londoner, Hearing them talk influenced her. Came to know him later. Can't remember conscientious objectors in Wolverton.

470 Never heard of white feathers being given. Didn't hear of girls goading boys to go to war.

482 Went to work in Co-op. Monotonous at Print in Ruling Department. Heard they needed people in office. Sat exam – two got through. Worked in Cheque Office.

505 Co-op at first had hard time, but by time of First War was very respectable – most important shop in Wolverton. father was President of Co-Op at that time.

525 Men came back gradually, didn't notice lot of difference. Went out more quickly.

535 Men never talked of their experience.

540 Towards end of war had fellows of own age going, not so interested in the opposite sex. She wasn't at that time interested. Some girls thought it marvellous to walk out with members of opposite sex. Never appealed to her. War meant no fellows there to walk out with. Few romances. At one time there were a few Canadian soldiers stationed nearby. Two or three married and went out to Canada. Towards end of war 1917-18. They were strangers, people liked to be kind to them, taken into people's homes. One or two romances resulted from this. Can't remember them having a lot of money to flash around.

601 French and Belgian refugee families came. French family, perhaps a teacher, have French lessons. girls at Co-Op wanted to learn French so went once a week to his house. Came about 1917. Lived at 1 Osborne Street. seemed to stay quite a long time after the war was over.

635 Church had knitting parties, raised money by giving concert parties. good one from Congregational Church. Went round district, 1 or 2 good singers singing Roses of Picardy, Little Grey Home in the West, mostly females as no men there. Did a sketch and a recitation, quite dramatic – The Green Knitted balaclavas, socks, mittens, gloves for other Comforts fund. run in town. Some of money went to send parcels, cigs, chocolate.

Side Two

005 Minister not regarded as suspicious because knew couchie. Some didn't agree with views, but no big deal.

012 Divisions between C o E and Non-Conformist. Never came together for united services as do today. No division of religion on basis of where worked, but Prim Methodists inclined to be very liberal. Regarding C of E as more Conservative Congs. Seen as Liberal, Wesleyans a bit of both.

030 Not much Labour Party activity until after war. Believed it to be direct result of war. Ordinary people realised how much country had depended on them, that helped.

040 Spare time spent getting efforts up to raise money, dances, social evenings. Seemed to find plenty to do. not so much blackout, war not over towns, got out in summer, went on walks. Didn't effect town as it did in Second War.

055 Always got evening postal delivery.

060 Pearl White. Perils of Pauline at cinema. Went every week when a serial on. Did not have newsreels.

063 Had Music Hall, but didn't go, then changed into cinema. Just wasn't interested, didn't like it. Liked a more serious concert.

087 Xmas – always went to grandmothers, fathers mother, lived in Buck Street. Had dinner at home, went to grandma's for afternoon tea and evening. Had chicken or turkey, plum pudding, mince pies. Difficult for some, but OK for them. Her income and brothers' income at end of war, as well as father's.

103 Presents – cosmetics, jewellery, something for ourselves. At Print gave half of wages to mother. At Co-op, step up in wages, gave about 12/6d. Saved a bit for holidays and spent it on herself.

120 Holiday during war in 1917 – went to Morecambe. went for day to Lake District, had tour in horse wagonette. Quite a few had holidays, because men had rail passes, but had no money if had holiday. Not until 1927 that men got paid for holidays.

142 Fathers wage, about £2 per week. A lot of overtime, but only up to about £3.

150 Thought prices were always going up by big amounts, 1d or 2d. Wages fell behind a little.

160 Two posters, remembers Kitchener Your Country Needs You and little boy looking up at Dad and saying And what did you do in the Great War, Daddy?

173 Rationing, but not until 1917-18 that they had ration cards. Not like it was in 2<sup>nd</sup> war. Before ration cards every retailer, especially in grocery line, was running short of stocks and as soon as it became known that he'd got margarine or butter, or bacon, the news spread like wildfire and the people would rush to the shops. Didn't get queues, just rushed. Poor assistants, had to, when shop was full, lock the door and clear shop. By then goods had gone. Before official rationing the retailers would do their own rationing, so much per person.

197 Doesn't remember black market. Meat a bit short, older people noticed shortage of butter, had margarine, in those days pretty horrible. Some old people couldn't eat it.

214 During war the old recreation ground, now built up, was turned into allotment. Helped a lot in food situation. dad had always had allotment. brother helped a little.

229 Clear division of jobs – man to do allotment, chop wood, bring coal in, bread winner – woman's job to run home. married women didn't go to work, one or two may have in war.

250 Women would take in sewing for people.

260 At first thought Germans were terrible – as war went on realised ordinary soldier or person in Germany was same as in England. All they wanted was to live in peace and security in own way of life. got broader outlook on people in Germany than at beginning of war.

280 Sigwarts very nice family. Feelings against Germans higher than in 2<sup>nd</sup> War. Didn't know them well as Catholics. didn't mix much with Protestants. religion played important part in life in town.

313 Prim Methodists smallest church in town. Loss of people was almost like losing one of your own, hit you more than a member of another church dying would.

339 Heard of quite a few people wearing brown paper round chests to protect against cold wind because clothes in short supply and difficult to get proper underwear.

346 Managed well for clothes during war.

348 Field postcards – printed with "I am well", etc. soldier just ticked and signed and sent to family.

360 Newspapers very important – only way of getting news. News day or two old before got them. Didn't take "Wolverton Express" in those days. Read "Daily News" ("News Chronicle") Liberal paper.

394 When war first started, people very optimistic, would be over by Christmas became more pessimistic until spring of 1918 when position changed a lot.

413 Not too bad at first – came back to jobs. Jobs became more difficult. Had doubts about whether it had all been worth while. Many returned to Works, but as soon as 21 got the sack. Could get back, but had to go away first. A good many never came back. Before Milton Keynes, Wolverton becoming town of old people... In 1914 plenty of work.

463 Manoeuvres of 1913, various regiments came, during summer. Had food kitchens, full of soldiers. Became interested in life of town. Here 2-3 weeks. when word of fresh soldiers coming in by road, went down Stratford Road to see them. Great excitement. Got friendly, taken into homes, given meal. Some of soldiers good actors and singers.

508 Thinks time does heal, but for those who lost someone, Armistice Days brought it all back. In 1928 saw sights which made her against war, Star and Garter home of disabled soldiers near home. Never forget seeing coach load, some no legs, some blind, first real

thing she'd seen in mass of effects of war. Made her think, "Well I don't know what a terrible thing it was then. They were young, youngish people yet they were ruined for life. That brought it home to me more than anything. Well, in fact we talked about it. What it must have meant for their relatives". Here in Wolverton in war years knew very little about it.

553 Only one or two who came home disabled.