

BAMPTON TAPES

Ruth Wheeler

Evacuees in Bampton

Interviewed by Jo Lewington on 6 November 2003

JL We are going to talk about the evacuees in Bampton because Ruth has very good memories of that. We talked a little time ago about it, do you remember, and you said how glad you were that you had a girl evacuee staying with you?

RW Yes, yes. I don't know what month it was or anything but it must have been early, it must have been 1940 mustn't it? 1939 perhaps at the very beginning of the war. I remember some coaches coming into Bampton up by the village hall and, of course, we all went up there to see who was who and these little children got off with their gas marks and a little bit of luggage and I always remember one girl. Her name was Sylvia Isaacs and she had like a beret on and she had the most beautiful chestnut hair, lovely it was, and she was sobbing her heart out. She was older than me but I'll never forget that girl. She was sobbing her heart out and Mrs Colvile, that was Major Colvile's mother and some other ladies had to billet the people out, you know. They put these people who had got room for them and these little children had to go if you had room you had a little child.

JL Who decided that?

RW Well, I think, I am not quite sure, I should think it was probably the Parish Council or something like that because Mrs Colvile, I remember, had them all down to her house into the garden and they all played games like three legged races and ball games and all that to sort of get them to be friendly you know and I was telling a lady the other day, I worked for Mrs Colvile and they had this bee room and in this bee room there was a lot of junk, well not junk, and there was this book and it was a real war time book 'cos the paper was ever so flimsy and on the front of it it got like something written 'with grateful thanks to Colonel and Mrs Colvile for looking after the evacuees'. I got it somewhere at home and in there were these photographs inside which I can't find at the moment and I went through this book and I said to Major Colvile and Mrs Colvile 'there's a picture of our little evacuee'. I went through it and, eventually, the Major said to Mrs Colvile, well, his mother had died then and 'we don't need it 'cos we don't know anything about it, give it to Ruth' and they gave it to me.

JL So, does that have pictures of all the refugees who came to Bampton?

RW Not all of them, some groups. I must find it out but I can remember this Sylvia Isaacs and she lived, she went to live with Pat and Kath Taylor in Pudding Corner and she lived there, she was there, I think, all the time she was inshe didn't go anywhere else. One day I think it was in the Oxford Mail or something she was requesting to know where she lived. She was trying to find out where she was evacuated to and she had been to Bampton and they told her that John Taylor had gone to Aston. She'd got the wrong Taylors so I wrote to her and I said 'I know who you were billeted with. It was Mr and Mrs Pat Taylor and they lived close to me so she got in touch and she wrote me a lovely letter and she had been to see Mrs Taylor. That got those together again.

JL Isn't that lovely? Have you got her address still?

RW I expect Mrs Taylor has. I expect I have if I look somewhere. Her little battery, her little travel battery, little Gladys Minns, she was with her sister, Annie Minns, and they went to live with Mr and Mrs Temple at The Lodge, Weald Manor and Mrs Temple didn't really want them but she had to have them because she had the room. We had a little evacuee hospital up where, opposite where, what was it called ??? House

JL Bampton House....

RW No no, do you know where Mrs Jackson lives, Kitty, that big housethe evacuee hospital. A lot of these children had, I mean some of them had scabies, bless them and things like that and they had to be treated, measles, things like that. Her two girls had measles and they were sent to the hospital and she didn't want them back and so mother said I could have one of them if Miss Flo Hampton, she said she's have the other one. So she had Annie and my mum had Gladys and then a little while after Mrs Minns and Tommy, the little boy, they had to come out of London and we had them as well. We had the mother and the little boy and then the dad used to come down every fortnight to see them. I tell you what we had the best Christmas I ever had when he came for Christmas because he gave us a real Christmas and we had games and everything. But the little boy, Tommy, oh he was a little tartar. My mum had bought these lovely chairs for 7s 6d each, the ones with the rod at the back and the corduroy cushions and one day she came home, she was an insurance agent during the war, my mother, and she came home and he'd cut the sides of the chair like that, the wood, with a knife. My mum was upset. I think they had a few words, she and Mrs Minns but she was good to them.

JL Was it three buses of evacuees that arrived altogether?

RW I don't know if it was three, it was more than one. I can't remember that exactly.

JL So would that have been about 60 children?

RW I remember them coming off there and I remember there was Anita and Robbie Williams went down the Upton Road to live and later on, their mum and that come and they had another baby called Anita. I have met her since, I don't know where and I met Apple since then, that was the girl.

JL Apple?

RW We called her Apple Williams, she was quite an athletic girl, she used to turn pitch poles and things and quite an actress, do you know what I mean, quite an athlete. When we had things on at the time she used to do a little stunt, you know, and that was lovely. The girl called Joyce Morris lived with Russell and Mrs Knight who was Mrs Colvile's chauffeur, she lived there for a long, long time. She was ginger haired, quite stocky. Who else was it? There was Arthur Chambers who Edith knows. Edie and I were at the British Legion store at May Day and this chap came up and was talking to Edie and I said to him 'how did you manage to come to Bampton with an accent like you've got' you see 'cos he's got this London accent and he said 'I was evacuated here' and I said 'what's your name?' and he said 'Arthur Chambers'. 'Oh' I said 'are you any relation to Joyce Chambers' and this woman said 'that's me' and she said 'I'm 60' and she was about four and a half I think and she's on this photograph I've got and, of course, I knew her mother as well because her mother came to live here and they lived up Plantation Cottages - that's up towards ..

JL Yet I know, they have fallen down now.

RW Yes, they took them down. She fascinated me because she always had lovely hair and she always had these long, dangly earrings, Mrs Chambers did and she had a girl called, Mary, there's Mary. (There's two girls and one boy, isn't there?) Joyce, yeh, what was the boy called? Arthur. Yes but there was another boy wasn't it? Those three anyway.

JL Did they all come from London?

RW Yes, they came from Bow, Fairfield Grove School they all went to, the ones that came to Bampton, Fairfield Grove, Bow. There was a family called Bass used to live with Mrs Jenner, Doris Bass and her two little ...I can't remember what their names were. They had little twin brother and sister and she had a bigger boy. I keep calling him Alfie but it wasn't Alfie 'cos Alfie was the actor wasn't he, Alfie Bass. I can't remember what his name was. There was several at The Grange.

JL Were any unhappy, do you know?

RW I don't know. Now Peter Nicholson and Sylvia who live at the Lodge at Weald Manor, he wasn't evacuated to Bampton of course but he was evacuated to wherever he was. He was very unhappy. He had to sleep in the shed and when he took his clothes they took his clothes away from him. He was unhappy, he told me that.

JL That's a terrible story. You haven't heard any such stories in Bampton.

RW No, there was a family called Queenie and Doris Clapper – they were Jew girls – and their mother came to Bampton to live and we were awful to her because we used to say 'here comes the wandering Jew'. I mean we were only little kids.

JL Yes, you didn't know any better.

RW And there used to be a big barricade up by the Jewish League, one of these big sand bag things, you know, and we used to be terrified because she used to chase us you see and we used to get in that place and shiver because we knew we had one wrong. But Doris and Queenie, they were nice girls, you know, got friendly with them. There's Rhoda Preston had a girl called Maureen Ferguson live with her and, oh and Emmy, had two little girls called Ollie Peters and Gwennie Kindley and Gwennie had a brother but I can't remember his name., but they lived with Emmy and used to go to chapel and that.

JL I wonder if Fairfield Grove in Bow still exists?

RW I don't know but you see these little girls that I had, that we had they went back to London after a while, when it calmed down a bit, you know, and so I wrote to her, I forget their address, anyway, oh 51 Rose Hill Street, that was it, the address she gave me and I had this letter come back that said 'Address Unknown' so I thought they'd been bombed out and I never heard any more of them. Then quite out of the blue, not long ago, Sheila Harding in the butchers said to me 'did Roy tell you that there was an evacuee in here asking after the Shergolds?' and I said 'no' and, apparently it was Annie, the girl that lived with my sister-in-law and her mate and she went to see Francis but Francis never thought to say 'oh go and see Ruth' but Gladys is alive. She lives down the coast somewhere so all those years I thought they had been bombed out, they were still alive and Tommy, the little boy who cut the chair, he lives in Swindon apparently.

JL But you haven't made contact with him?

RW No, because Annie comes to see her son who lives, they said he lives in Aston but I even put a letter in the Aston, like our Beam, you know, and I didn't get any contact – a shame really.

JL What was school like? You got this huge influx of school ...

RW I was going to say. Mr and Mrs Jackson, they were teachers, and Miss Davies, they came with them and they used to have (I think I am right in saying this, don't take me as sure) I think that they used to have their lessons in the town hall, the Zacharays, because I can never remember being in school with the little girl and she was the same age as me but Miss Davies used to come and teach us at Bampton School because I remember that because she always said 'when you made your cake you had to stir with a spoon' and we argued with her,, we said 'our cookery teacher tells us you've got to stir it round with a knife' and she would have it and she said and you know another thing she told us and I've always thought about it since. She said, 'when we were in the blitz' she said 'and perhaps there was no light or anything' she said 'and so when I used to undress' she said 'I used to take the first thing off and put it on the bottom and the next thing I take off put it on there so when I went to dress I could start like her vest.....

JL From the top of the pile.

RW Yes and I've always remembered that you know.

JL So she could do it in the dark.

RW She's on these photographs. I shall have to try and find her. Mrs Jackson was a little lady with glasses, a short, chubby little lady. Miss Davies was a bit like Miss Taunt, that kind of woman you know, very strict, ever so strict but she did argue with us about that spoon, I always remember that.

JL But I can remember you saying you were absolutely thrilled to have these two, or this one little girl staying with you because you didn't have a sister.

RW Yes no because I didn't have a sister, you see.

JL Do you think most of the children loved having the extra children around.

RW I don't really know Jo, I can't say.

JL I'm just wondering how the households were

RW When mum said we were going to have this little girl to live with us I was overjoyed because Roy was that much older than me and Francis was in the army and I hadn't got any, not to play with indoors, and I remember my mum bought us both a big doll, we had a doll exactly the same. My mum treated her the same exactly as me.

JL Your mum was very good.

RW And we shared a bed I mean, you know, we shared a bed together.

3rd Person Did you go to school with Arthur Chambers then and this is Arthur Chambers, you know because ?

RW The thing was ...

3rd Person He's the only one I've ever really known as a

RW 'Cos some of the evacuees stayed on of course didn't they, cost George Wiltshire from Aston, he was evacuated, he came, I think he came with ?? people.

3rd Person Did Arthur Chambers' mother go back or something because I remembered him going down to see my father because he lived down, he was staying with Mrs Gillett.

RW That's right, she lived with her until she was eleven.....

3rd Person You see, that's how I came to know him when I came out of the army.

RW Mrs Townsend went back to London.

3rd Person He always used to come down and my dad used to let him camp in the field.

RW But Joyce stayed on until she was eleven.

3rd Person Oh that's why I only knew Arthur then.

JL But it must have been very difficult for some of the adults to suddenly take in two children.

RW Oh yes, I'm sure.

JL But as a child you were never aware of that.

RW No, no and there were two little boys called Kenny Howe and Leslie Tucker lived with Mrs Whiting at the end of our road and they were proper little devils. We used to go down the brook bathing and put our little bit of clothes on the side of the brook down there...

JL This is by the Isle of Wight is it?

RW No, just down this first, next field whatever. Just put our clothes on the side and paddle about and catch minnows and whatnot and when we got out of the water we couldn't find any of our clothes 'cos it was all over on the big, high thistles (*too many people talking to decipher*) That was Kenny Howe and Leslie Tucker.

JL You remember those names.

RW I was going down the shop one day and Robert Radbone called me and he always calls me 'Afro' cos he used to He said 'hey, Afro, get yourself down to the Elephant and Castle' he said 'there's a bloke down there and he was evacuated' he said 'and he wants to know where he lived'. So I said 'alright, I'll go in' so I go in and there's this little man stood at the counter and his wife and that all there I suppose. I said 'excuse me but are you the gentleman that was evacuated?' He said 'yes' and I said 'are you Leslie Tucker?' He said 'I am'. I said 'oh, I used to play with you when I was a little girl' and we got quite friendly and had a lovely day there.

JL And have you got his address?

RW No, he's dead now. He died, but he's on this photograph and Kenny Howe and he traded in antique silver and that up in London somewhere and I said 'Are you Leslie Tucker? I hear you don't know where you lived?' And he said 'no I don't' and I said 'well I can tell you

where you lived. You lived with Bubbles Whiting and her mother and father and he said 'could you show me where they are buried?' and I said 'yes I will' and I was going to take him but he never came, I was going to take him but he never came to see where they were buried.