

Oral History – Winifred Annie (née Stovell) Hall

Recorded by YVONNE SHAW and CHRISTOPHER JOHN HOGGER

Mrs Hall was aged 103 when a recorded interview with her was undertaken by ELHG in 2011. By then she was mostly confined to bed in her downstairs front living room, which is where the interview took place. Her daughter Monica played an important role in making the meeting possible and also lent to ELHG, for scanning, a set of photographs providing unique views of the Old Forge and the adjacent Yew Tree Cottages in which the Stovell family had lived.

Introduction

Mrs Winifred Annie (née Stovell) Hall was born on 18 September 1907 to parents Arthur Archibald Stovell and Gertrude Georgianna (née) Bell who had married in 1906. She married in 1934 to George Hall.

She was interviewed and recorded at her Effingham home 12 Strathcona Avenue, in the presence of her daughter Mrs Monica Christine Wallis, on 14 February 2011 by Yvonne Shaw and Christopher John Hogger. The audio recording is accessible on Effingham Local History Group's website but is not transcribed verbatim here as the interview structure was not suitable for that purpose. Instead, the text below was produced by Yvonne Shaw from the recording and faithfully represents Winifred's narration of the events in her life.

Winifred died on 19 August 2013.

Winifred's narrative

I stayed at the same school till I was 14 and then my Mum got me a job to work with the schoolmistress and I didn't like her. And I gave my notice in but Mum made me go back and work for her again and then I heard there was someone else that had a job and they was giving me half-a-crown more money a week. So I told Mum and I gave my notice in again and worked for them and they were in the little grocer's shop opposite Effingham church. I done housework for every job I did. They were Yates; they had a grocer's and sweet shop. And if they weren't there I used to serve in the shop until they come back. And then they moved and they took over a big grocer's shop by where the butcher's is now. And I went with them. And the shop itself was all hard boards; they stained them and I had to polish them on my hands and knees. You didn't take any notice of things like that in those days, you just got on with it.

My name before I was married was Stovell. My Dad was a boot repairer. Eventually Mum and Dad bought the old forge that used to be a pub. My Dad was born in there but he never drank; he signed the pledge. I lived there until I got married. I didn't get married until I was 27 and then the girls came along after two years; two girls. My other daughter's up at Leicester so I don't see her very often.

My husband worked on the building; of course he was in and out of [the] dole because they didn't work if it was frosty but we managed. Of course he was [sic] TB, he died when he was 36 and then I had to go to the council in Epsom to claim money for myself and the girls. If I went out to work they stopped my money; it's better now than it was.

I lived in West Ewell when I got married. The council found us a house so that my husband could have a room on his own. And then his sister lived here and she went back to Durham and he wanted to get back here because all his brothers were here and so we moved over here. He had four brothers and a sister. He went to three different sanatoriums and he was the other side of Guildford when the war broke out and they sent him home before they could start anything with him. And then my mother died [in 1951] and my Dad had to come and live with me so there was myself and the two girls and Dad all in the one bedroom. I got a friend to come and live with me after my husband died and she had two children and the girls slept with her and the boy had to have a little room. Then when the new council houses were built in Norwood Road she applied for one of them and then Dad could have a room of his own which made it easier. Well then of course he died, he was 86 when he died [in 1966]. I think about what he used to say. If he said something to me and I wanted my way, he'd say, 'Alright gal you have your way, you'll live longest.' I often think of him when he said that. The books that I'm reading, some of those sayings come up in that.

I worked hard all my life. At school there were three classes. The mistress had one and then we went up to the master's one. He was a nice man; I got on all right with him. His name was Adams I think. I don't know who died first, but I think one of them died when I was at West Ewell. I wasn't there long.

With the bombing, my husband was getting a bag of nerves and when he knew that we could come here, his sister saw the rent people and they let us come over and we've been here ever since.

There was a baker's shop, Richards. Because when I was at school, every day I had to go and get the bread and come home and have a snack and then I had a hot meal when I came home from school.

I had to work for my Mum, do her cleaning and everything, when I was 7 years old. We moved into the two little cottages next to the Haig – Yew Tree Cottages. And there was just two up and two down. No sink, no gas, no electric but eventually my Mum got round to the landlord and had that but with the sink, you had to have a bucket outside because the water wouldn't run away. And Dad had to have holes to empty the water into in the garden. Nothing like that now.

Where the butcher's is now, there used to be just a little butcher's shop because they had one in Bookham and they used to come over about twice a week and I had to go up and get the meat, and if they gave me the wrong meat I had to take it back and get it changed. There was a big grocer's shop, Tommy West his name was and then he sold it and Yates took it on and I followed them there and Tommy West made a tea shop on the main road next to where Sibley's is on the main road. I used to wait for my husband to come home from work. He started with gardening when he first came from Durham and we used to have a cup of tea there and of course then Yates finished and they turned it into flats.

There used to be a chemist's where the hairdressers is. You could put your prescription there but they had to take it to Bookham and then come back again.

I worked for Mr Bayly and sometimes I also used to clean the school and the chapel. The chapel has an organ and I used to play the organ with one finger! I liked music. My Dad got the Effingham band up. The boys of Effingham broke into the Working Man's club and they got the drums, two small drums and the big drum, and of course they didn't know you have to wind them up for them to play and and of course they busted them. Well then there was a Miss Ross and she was very keen on getting the boys together and she asked Dad (Mum and Dad were caretakers of the club) if he could pack them up and she'd send them up to London and she'd get them all done. Then Dad got the older people to learn the flute – it was a drum and flute band. There used to be a room at the back of the Working Men's Club called the concert room. It had a stage there and at harvest time, the man who used to beat the drum was working and so I had to do that. But I couldn't carry the big drum, I had a small one and I used to march with the boys going round the room. My Dad was a cripple and the boys made fun of him and he gave it up. Another man, Mr Street he took it on. I can't remember why it disappeared.

When the Rev Bayly was there he used to live in the vicarage, and he moved from there into a small cottage opposite the forge cottages and my first dog used to take the local paper across the road and drop it on their step. My Dad wouldn't let me have a dog – he was bitten three times, but when he came to live here with me you couldn't keep the dog away from him. He'd sit in the garden and have a cup of tea and call the dog to come and get a drink. I can understand it with him being bitten. He used to work at Stemp's in Bookham, they were boot repairers.

Then the people in The Lodge (just past the school on the Lower Road) they were Catholics and he had the Catholic Church built. And he had the boys learn the chip carving and Dad learnt boot repairing. Well eventually he went to Bookham and the man who had it then was a Mr Wragg and he gave Dad sixpence for his first day. He was apprentice. Well then eventually they wanted him to teach the daughter the trade and he did but then Dad got the sack so he started on his own. Mind you he used to work for nothing really and when the stiletto heels came in he wouldn't mend them. He said you should wear flat heels, your back will be bad in years to come. I always wore flat heels. I remember my Mum taking me to Leatherhead to buy a new pair of shoes and there was nothing that I liked and I had to have flat heels, and the man said, 'Your daughter is too fussy' and I turned round and said 'My Dad knows what sort of shoes I should wear, he's a boot repairer'.

[To get to Leatherhead] We had to walk to Effingham Junction or Bookham station and then we had to walk at the other end. In later years I used to bike. After I moved away, I was carrying Monica [her daughter], I used to bike over from Epsom, do Mum's work for the day, a bit of cooking and then bike home again. I used to bike a long way. Monica used to bike with me, we used to bike to Redhill and Reigate. I used to love biking. My husband, before we were married, was knocking down a flinted wall and he got a bit of flint in his eye and finished up in Guildford Hospital and I used to bike in every day to see him.

We arranged to get married in the November and when he came home I said I'm not waiting any longer and we got married on 1st December. He was a Catholic but he never asked me to change or anything. I had to promise that the girls would be Catholics but I don't think they bother too much nowadays. I was married in the Catholic church. My first grandson was christened in Effingham but he lives in Bideford so I don't see him very often.

The school children used to come and look into the forge to see the bellows blowing because there was a two-part door and they used to run up from school to see that. When Mr Woods retired, no-one else took it on so Dad gave the bellows to the museum at Guildford. I wonder if they are still there [they are] – they were very big. He used to make iron gates and all that sort of thing; he was a very clever man.

They used to live up Norwood Close. I was born opposite the Plough and then we moved next to the Haig and then the forge house and the bungalow opposite the church on Chapel Hill was going to be auctioned. Mum wanted the house on Chapel Hill but someone else got it and that was how we came to have Forge House and then I was able to have my own bedroom. When we lived in the other cottage, the roof went right down to the floor and you couldn't get a proper bed in there. My bed was on blocks of wood and there were the old flock mattresses, they used to get lumpy.

We had a big bonfire where the new houses were built from the avenue [Strathcona Avenue] because it was all fields there because there was a footpath that came out into Norwood Road and someone fenced it off and one of the neighbours went and cut the fencing away. There used to be lovely big fields there and you could walk from there into High Barn Road and then they had all those houses built and it wasn't the same. Still I suppose people have to live somewhere.