**Ada’s Story**

**Summary:** Ada was born on the 30th October. Ada is from Rotherhithe and has lived in Surrey Docks, during the war, working in various jobs in factories producing biscuits, aeroplane parts in an engineering factory, lampshades and custard for different companies. When her husband returns from the war, she had two children, working in other factories, then a cleaning company and finally as a cook in a kitchen. She also plays the piano, and in her later years went to perform in a range of places, from pubs to hospitals, with her husband and others, to entertain audiences of people.

**Judith: ‘Ok, my name is Judith Arkwright. The date is the 30th October and I am at Ada’s house. And I’m with Ada. And Ada can you spell your surname for me?**

Ada: ‘N-e-w-m-a-n. Newman.’

**Judith: ‘Newman. Ok. Ada Newman. Ada can you tell me where and when you were born’.**

Ada: ‘I was born on the 5/12/1919. I shall be 93 this December.’

**Judith: ‘Blimey! That’s all I can say. And where were you born?’**

Ada: ‘I was born at No.3 Alpin road, Rotherhithe.’

**Judith: ‘Wow. Oh well, your birthday is near mine, Sagittarians, hooray! Erm, ok, so the first question is then, tell us about your work, maybe start with your first job.’**

Ada: ‘Well I, I started my first job on the 1st January 1934, and I went to Peak Freans, the biscuit factory.’

**Judith: ‘Ah, where were they?’**

Ada: ‘Pardon?’

**Judith: ‘Where were they?’**

Ada: ‘Drummond Road.’

**Judith: ‘Ah yeah, oh right. Oh where abouts on Drummond road was that? Where the college is?’**

Ada: ‘Just, well it’s not there now, they’ve all moved out, its all moved innit, it’s moved now, they went to another big place. But now its, all the biscuit people are all together, it’s a combined one. So you don’t get Peak Freans biscuits, but they do make biscuits for the people that they go to, that’s what they used to do is they got an order say, erm, some of these places where they had lot of biscuits, we get their special things to wrap them in, you know what I mean, at Christmas time when they done the puddings, they used to do an order overseas, they got to New York, I used to work on them and all Christmas time, and they had a red box, with gold labels, and red ribbon. All those beautiful red shavings, that beautiful. We used to do, and their special basins, their own basins, didn’t have a plain one. I used to love doing that.

**Judith: ‘So what was your work, what was your job?’**

Ada: ‘I worked on the Vita Wheat’s floor.’

**Judith: ‘On the what?’**

Ada: ‘Vita Wheat’s floor’.

**Judith: ‘Oh right right, what did that involve?’**

Ada: ‘Well that’s the name of the biscuit we done, Vita Wheat’s.

**Judith: ‘Oh yeah sorry I remember them. Biter Wheat, yeah yeah.’**

Ada: ‘That’s right, I worked on them. Then sometimes I used to go up on the other, on the other room, if they’d got not enough on there, we’d go up on one of the other sections, and, then we used to work on, well, all the biscuit packing them up and putting them on the belt to go along and to be packed and all that.’

**Judith: ‘Ah, I see.’**

Ada: ‘And when the war come we had war biscuits, we was all doing war biscuits, for the troops and that.’

**Judith: ‘Oh, what were war biscuits? How were they different to other biscuits?’**

Ada: ‘Well, they was ones that could be sort of sent a long way to keep, you know what I mean? There wasn’t, they look nice, you know, plain, only plain. We used to do them, you know. So we knew they was going abroad. Until I got married, 1941, and then, I packed up from there.’

**Judith: ‘So you worked there for about seven years?’**

Ada: ‘I worked there seven years, yeah, and then, when I got married, I got, my husband’s in the air force, and we got married Christmas time, and he got me a place up there and I went up there to live. But I still had to go to work.’

**Judith: ‘Oh right.’**

Ada: ‘See being 21, I still had to go to work. Didn’t matter what age you was. When I was up there, and I went to their Labour Exchange, the first thing they asked me what work have you been doing, I sat there and I said I worked at Peak Freans biscuits. Oh dear dear dear, he said, none of that up here, he said, we’re all on, we’re all on, work, war work, but it’s for the. Anyway, he said I’ll take you down to the shop, he said, where we gonna put you, and when I went down it was all the laids and the drills, and oh, and I looked at them, and they rigged me out, I used to have a, blue jacket, blue trousers, white shoes, and a white hat, on me head, and my name here, oh, my goodness gracious.’

**Judith: ‘And where was this?’**

Ada: ‘This was at, up at Stafford. You know, my husband was in the air force up there, Stafford. Yeah, he got me this room, leased, got me two rooms, that was in a little shop, and the people come from London. It was ever so funny, they, and her husband accident, he worked on the railway, and he lost his bottoms from his knees downwards, and they decided to go up there and get this little shop. And that’s where, where it was, where I got my two rooms through them. You know, they sold sweets, cigarettes, everything, well its all on rations, you know. Well, when they came in she always made sure we didn’t go short you know, give it under the spy, you know, don’t tell no one. Lot of that went on! But, erm, I didn’t like it on that floor.’

**Judith: ‘What was it, it was a factory was it?’**

Ada: ‘A big factory, tanks, oh my god, and the noise! Ah. And anyway, I finished up on the drills! And I come home to my husband and he says, what have you been doing today, I started laughing, oh my god, you daren’t ask. I said, I’ve been milking the cows, he said, you been doing what? Cows? What you got cows in there for? Oh I said, and no he said, no he said what you been doing? I said I’m on the drills, and you got five, six different drills, different lengths, and the big thing come along, and they got all these holes, and you had to put the drill in the right hole, you know, I said I’m milking the cows! But er, and then, he come home one day, and he said, well he said, we had heard or have heard, it’s in the hush, that we’re going abroad, I said I’m not stopping up here I’m going home. Ok, he said I can’t tell you no more or nothing, he said. So then I decided I come home, so I come back to London, and went with my Dad, stayed with my Dad and that, you know? And I still had to go to the Labour Exchange for a job. And they sent me to Siemens at Charlton. I thought to myself Charlton gotta go Greenwich Church, then get the train down to Charlton, yeah, well they said there’s stones first, a place called Stones a big place, next to that is Siemens.

**Judith: ‘Siemens, what’s that?’**

Ada: ‘Same work, well not the big machines and that, but it was all, all, where I worked, it was all for airplanes, and they used to give, you had a box come up, and you got the plan, and you had to, put this thing together to the plan. Had to laminate it, and then we used to put tops on with little things, put the wires up there and up there, what’s name , and we had all the little tools, you know, and you worked in, eight of you worked together. See, we all had, different boxes, but if one got finished first, the other one would help you, we all had to help one another. So, we was all finish at the same time. And I liked it there.’

**Judith: ‘And that’s Siemens engineering?’**

Ada: ‘Eh?’

**Judith: ‘Is that the engineering?’**

Ada: ‘It’s a great big place, yeah. And cos I worked on aeroplane bits so I didn’t mind, same as my husband. And all the girls, they was all married, and husbands in the forces, and one day, one would come in and she’d look a bit downhearted and we’d all look at her and say, what’s the matter? Got a telegram. Oh, all used to look at one another, missing. Yeah. And she found out he was in one of the German concentration camps. Another one’s husband was out in Japan, out that way, but they had all the trouble. And her husband was a prisoner there, oh, and another one come in and her husband was a sailor, and she come in one day and we said, what’s the matter, oh, got torpedoed, missing. We said to her, just go home. But my husband was out there four years, he went out 1942, and he come back 1946.’

**Judith: ‘Where did he go?’**

Ada: ‘He went to India. Out that way, yeah. When you hear about, and when the war was over, the first part, then the second part was when the Japanese and that all got and that ended in August, but he didn’t come home until February 1946. So I didn’t see him for four years. And I’d only been married a year when he went out. But I liked it at that job; I really, really enjoyed working there. And I worked there till I had my daughter, yeah yeah I did, I loved it, I loved the job.’

**Judith: ‘How many years were you there then?’**

Ada: ‘Well, must have gone there ’42, my daughter was born ’48, so, How’s that?’

**Judith: ‘Yeah, about six years then.’**

Ada: ‘Yeah, during the war. Saying, being, it was a journey, I used to make them laugh my children laugh. How did you used to get to work then Mum? On the tram. I said, we never done buses then, I said, I used to get a threepenny workman’s ticket she said a what, a threepenny workman’s ticket, it took me to Greenwich church. I said I could get off of that tram, walk round the corner, and get another tram, another threepenny ticket, took me to Charlton ’

**Judith: ‘Were the workmans ticket, were they specially for working people?’**

Ada: ‘Yeah, for working people. Only threepence. Yeah, threepence on each tram, that’s a return threepenny ticket. I still got two tickets from when the last tram was run, stopped when they stopped them. I got ticket for the last tram.’

**Judith: ‘Really! Have you?’**

Ada: ‘I got two of them. I got two of them.’

**Judith: ‘And do you remember how much you got paid in that job?’**

Ada: ‘Oh I can’t remember now. I really can’t. You know but, you know I mean the girls were very nice, you know. We used to get on well together. And when it was lunch time, we used to walk up and little bit up the road, there was a little pub there, and we used to go in there and have our lunch, and they had a piano in there. They found out that I could play the piano, and we have a little sing song. And we come back to work. And they all said that Christmas time we’d all be together, we’d go over the pub you know, and have a drink, well everybody did. So one of the girls, she used to make all these fancy hats, oh we always had a hat for Christmas, she’d make them. And our foreman used to say, oh, he say, you getting ready for Christmas? The hats are coming out! Yeah, yeah we’d go up the pub. And then we all made a pact, that if we was there when the war ended, VE Day we’d be together, we’d go up the West End, and we did. And did we have a time. And we had our hats then, with white and blue hats, we had garters, and we had big rosettes, and they say, well leave your aeroplane thing off, don’t put that on! Your brooch, take your brooch off. Our foreman used to say, oh here they come again, oh what they making hats for now, I wonder. Yeah, but it’s funny though you know and then we said, when the war was over we all said, well, how about when your husbands come home, we all meet up together. So as each husbands come home, we’d meet, and you know have a drink and that. And because my husband was the last one, he didn’t come home till ’46! We still done it, yeah. They still come though, ’46! Brought their husbands. We all went to the little pub where we went, the ‘guv, the bloke used to say to them, let me tell you a few things about these, oh my god, they used to drive me potty!

**Judith: ‘What they were doing while you were away yeah.’**

Ada: ‘Yeah but no we had some, I did, I enjoyed it. The only thing is it was a long way to go, you know?’

**Judith: ‘Can you describe the place? What it was like, the actual factory?’**

Ada: ‘Well it was a great big place it was. But it’s nice floors you know, it was all set out nice. I mean some parts were doing things for the ships. Another part, be doing things for the army. But I was on where we do the airforce. All had different things to do. But I mean, I did used to like it, I did, I really got to like it in the end. You know, the people, very nice people.’

**Judith: ‘And how many hours did you work?’**

Ada: ‘Quarter to eight in the morning, to quarter to eight at night. Five o’clock Saturday, and 12 o’clock Sunday. So just imagine, time I got home was ten o’clock. All through the winter we had to, and all yeah.’

**Judith: ‘Seven days a week then you worked?’**

Ada: ‘Not Sundays, didn’t go to work Sundays. Yeah, so that’s how we used to. Well you couldn’t go nowhere when you finished work at quarter to eight at night, time I got home it was ten o’clock cos I had to get the two trams. And then you never knew if you had air raids, you might be merrily going along the tram and it stop, and, all out! All out! And we’d all say why? Oh, there’s been an air raid, and you can’t go down that way. And there used to be what they call wardens and they’d have a light with them, and they used to take you round, somewhere else to pick another tram up, take you a bit more. And that’s how it used to be. Yeah. And I was, one day we had a warning in the dinner time I think it was, and we all went down the shelter, come up again, and I heard one of them say, all blimey they narf caught at Surrey docks. Oh my god, the man was saying. Yeah, he said, all the houses there, he said, and those by the arches, and I’m sitting there and I’m listening, I said I live there. That’s where I live. My Dad lives at Surrey, we did live at Surrey Docks. And I was with my gran, and down the bottom was the five hundred arches. And my Dad was opposite in the park where the park was, big park. They had Adcock guns And when I heard it I said to my foreman, I said, can I go home. And he said, what for? And I said I just heard where that air raid was I said. Ada he said, it’s more than we can do to let you go home. Because he said, supposing we had a bomb they come here, he says, and you get all their names who’s going down, and you was missing, you’d gone home. He said, well you wouldn’t know, no one would know, he said, wonder where you was. So he said, no, he said, I’m sorry about that.’

**Judith: ‘So he wouldn’t let you home?’**

Ada: ‘No.’

**Judith: ‘Did you think that was harsh?’**

Ada: ‘And if I did go home, I had the job of getting home then, from Deptford Park, down to Rotherhithe, like where I lived at Surrey Docks. And it appears; that the school, the children were all coming out the school and they bombed them, machined gunned them as they come along. And all the Docks, well I remember when all the Docks went out, we was in the air raid shelter. And of course, first thing I thought was my Dad. But I didn’t have time to go down there; I got home to my Gran who I lived with. And she was all in a dither, I said to her, I said to her, now where was you, was you in the air raid shelter?’

**Judith: ‘Ah, she didn’t go?’**

Ada: ‘And I said, where was you then? I was only, I was only talking to Mrs. Clark next door, we were standing talking. I said, talking? Yes, she said. Well, she said, standing there having a little nitter natter, she said. And all of a sudden guess what? I said, the bombs come down, I said, I could see it by the end of the street. Oh is that what it was? No no, not that, she said. I said, why? This aeroplane, come along, low and the man had a white scarf, flutter, flutter, flutter, and he was waving to us. And I thought, whatever is she talking about? I couldn’t make out what she was talking about! I said are you sure it was an aeroplane? It was in the sky, she said, and came along and she said, I reckon he was waving to me and Mrs. Clark. I said, he had a white scarf something was fluttering she said. Anyway, when I saw my Dad, I was telling him. He said, it is true; it’s a German, German aeroplane coming over. Well I said, you what? And he said, where was your Gran? I said talking to Mrs. Clark out the… he went. She never forgets it. Yeah, that’s what I had to go home to. Oh no.’

**Judith: ‘So what was it like in the factory? Were the supervisors really strict with you and stuff? That sounded a bit harsh that man not letting you go home.’**

Ada: ‘Oh no we were not allowed to, no.’

**Judith: ‘Was it very strict in there?’**

Ada: ‘Well just on several things, I mean we had a good bloke on with us, you know. And he used to help you and all that. He couldn’t tell you where, wasn’t allowed to tell you where they got bombed or anything like that. I might have popped down and got my coat and gone home. Well they wouldn’t have known. And if that place had got bombed, and they started reckoning up who was down there, they wouldn’t have known. I suppose, in one way it was for the safety sake, you know, but as I say, I enjoyed working there and I worked there till I got out my daughter, she was born ’48.’

**Judith: ‘Was there anything you didn’t like there?’**

Ada: ‘Not that… just the journey I think! That was always in the dark, with all the blackout, you know we had all the blackouts. We used to have little pencil torches, you know. And even then they used to tell you off about having them then. I said you can hardly see. Yeah, no fun to walk and we didn’t know where we was going and we had to walk. One day, I was going home and they had a air raid, and we was trotting along there, no trams, and we got as far as, what was it, Blackwall Tunnel, and we’re like we’re alright now, we know where we are, we’re on this side of the road. Now, we know our way, yeah. And we walked along merrily; four of us there was all starting down. Now, let’s think. Is there any turnings here? Oh, I don’t know, don’t know. Well, we’re still walking and walking, and all of a sudden, and air raid warden come up. He says, where you think you going you four? And we said, we’re going home. He said, oh do you live down here then? And we said, no! And one of us said, I live at Deptford, the other one lived at Greenwich, I said two of us live at Surrey Docks. Well he said, carry on down there love, he said you’ll be in the water. Because the water at the bottom! He said, you’ve missed your turning! Anyway, he took us back and put us on the road again! Yeah, he said, well we couldn’t stop laughing. Well, we laughed at it afterwards, you know. In there you’d get an air raid warning and have to go down the shelter. I said, what do you mean? I said, we wanted to go to the pictures, and the only time we could go was either Friday night, or Saturday. Because we couldn’t go through the week. I said, well then again, I said the pictures, well, I said,. I said we still used to go dancing.

**Judith: ‘I was going to say, what did you spend your wages on, so, dancing? Pictures? The pub at lunchtime?’**

Ada: ‘Oh yes, what else. Nothing else, that’s it!’

**Judith: ‘That was your wages gone, after that.’**

Ada: ‘After I paid my Gran, after you paid your insurances and got your food, well, what food you did get we used to go over, where we was, opposite, there as a great big stall and they used to do the cooking for the army and one thing another, they used to pop in there for food. So they said, I wonder if we can go over there and have it? Anyway and we all trotted over there one day, and they let us in! And that’s where we used to have our dinners at the end of the day. Well, by the time we got home in the night you couldn’t cook nothing.’

**Judith: ‘Where was that?’**

Ada: ‘That was at Charlton.’

**Judith: ‘So all the girls used to go there?’**

Ada: ‘Well, some of us did, not all of us, you know what I mean? Perhaps some of them used to take their own lunch or one thing or another. But the time I used to have to get up in the morning, I didn’t have time to do a lunch, I hadn’t been to bed long! Especially if we’d had a warning, you had to get up then. Yeah, no, I can say, that, you know, I did enjoy that job. I really did. And I was sorry really, when I had to leave. Yeah, and all the husbands that came home. And one girl, her husband didn’t come home. The one that lived, what was on the Japanese, out in Japan, when they was making that special railroad, they had them all out there doing that. And her husband died out there. While doing that, yeah. I don’t think she got over it, died doing that, what we heard about it, you know. How they treated them. I was thought to myself, my husband was at… he was at, what’s its name, he was at Lahore. Lahore, India. And I had a message one day; I had a telegram one day, telling me he’d been taken ill, malaria. So they was moving him to the malaria hospital. That was it. I was like, thank you very much. Yeah.’

**Judith: ‘But he was alright in the end.’**

Ada: ‘Yeah he got in the end, yeah he got over it. But when he came home he never used to speak a bit about it. Didn’t say a thing about out, about what happened out there and that.’

**Judith: ‘No, that’s common, isn’t it? They never said anything.’**

Ada: ‘No just about the blokes he was with, they was all alright. And he said the punkawallas they called them, their servants, he said, when you used to go to bed at night, you’d leave all your clothes out, when you got up next morning, they’d been all washed, ironed and pressed, all ready for your day. The punkawallas. I said don’t expect me to do it do yah!

**Judith: ‘So what work did you do… So you stopped at Siemens, you stopped working at Siemens when you had your children…’**

Ada: ‘Yeah well I didn’t go to work then, not when I’d had my first one.’

**Judith: ‘No, and did you start work again after that?’**

Ada: ‘No, no I had my son then, the next one. That was 1950, two years between them. But it was when they got a little bit older, I did start work again. I used to go office cleaning over the West End. Go out five o’clock in the morning, used to get back about half past eight, the lady downstairs… used to get up see to the children, my husband used to go to work and the lady downstairs used to go up and see the children, by the time I come home, they was all ready for school. So I take them to school, started them off at school. Then I got fed up with that, because every time I went over London Bridge, there used to be a coffee shop there, and I can’t stand coffee or the smell of it, and I used to walk past it like this… My sister in law used to say; there was four of us whatever’s wrong? I can’t bear coffee, makes me feel ill! And I gave it up in the end, I didn’t like that.’

**Judith: ‘Where were you working? In an office?’**

Ada: ‘We worked in a big, bank-cleaning, big cleaning. Before they opened up.’

**Judith: ‘And how did you find that job? Was that through the Labour Exchange as well?’**

Ada: ‘Eh?’

**Judith: ‘How did you find that job?’**

Ada: ‘One of my sister in laws worked there. And she got it for me. But I didn’t like it. I worked there about a year I think, but no.’

**Judith: ‘Why didn’t you like it? You think? Well, I mean, apart from the coffee.’**

Ada: ‘The work you had to do, I mean, you know when you’re going to Bank you got that long walk, innit yah a one point you, we go out on the side and it got great big, we used to have to clean that, then go round and clean all the desks and the counters… oh there wasn’t much we didn’t have to do, I packed that up and, erm, what did I do next? I think next I got myself; I don’t know what to get up to. And, well one of the girls said, well you want to get a job like I’ve got! She’s got a machine; I said Of course I got a machine indoors. Ooh, nothing like there where I’ve been working. So she was making budgies… birds in the cages, she was making the covers for them, the good-night covers, and I thought to myself, I’ve got a budgie, I’ve got a budgerigar. Anyway, it was only the Old Kent Road we had to go, and, I got that job. It was interesting, it was ever so interesting.’

**Judith: ‘So was that, did you do that at home then?’**

Ada: ‘Yeah, machining.’

**Judith: ‘So how did that work, they brought you…’**

Ada: ‘They used to bring it home to you, you used to make it, and they’d come and collect them. And from there, I went on to doing those sponge bags with strings, and I had to get the children to cut the string and hand it to me! I used to get them going! And then I packed that up and didn’t like that.’

**Judith: ‘Why didn’t you like it?’**

Ada: ‘Eh?’

**Judith: ‘Why didn’t you like it?’**

Ada: ‘Well it was at Richmond, I used to have to get on the train…’

**Judith: ‘Oh, so they didn’t bring you the work then.’**

Ada: ‘No, no, I didn’t like that. Then I went down Albany Street, and there’s a place down there that done, they done, erm, what did they do in there when I first started? Oh, babies pants, you know, like, what’s er name pants, you know, erm, not the..’

**Judith: ‘Plastic pants?’**

Ada: ‘Yeah, like that. Oh I thought to myself, I’ll have a go at that, then I used to do them. Then I went on to do something else. Then I went on to lampshades, doing lampshades, and then we went on beach bags. No I enjoyed all that. And then something happened that they put me on, and I said, I didn’t like that. I said, oh no, I packed that up. So I packed that up. And then, I don’t know.’

**Judith: ‘So these were all work jobs in factories?’**

Ada: ‘Yeah the children were getting older you know, so I said, to my husband said, he said, you don’t want to go and work, I said, oh I don’t know. Anyway, I got fed up working indoors on my own; I said I’ll look for a job. Oh, he laughed, you’ve just looked for a job. I said, yeah. Well then, Pearson Doves was opposite where I lived.

**Judith: ‘Pearson Dove?’**

Ada: ‘Pearson Dust, yeah. Make the custard and the jellies and all that. That was only up the road, and I thought myself, they was advertising for people to go and help with the Christmas wrapping. I thought to myself, I’ll have a go at that. So I goes over, got myself a part time job there. I used to work from half past one till four o’clock. And I was on the custard, doing the custard. Doing all that you know, yeah, I liked that, I enjoyed that.’

**Judith: ‘How long were you doing that?’**

Ada: ‘Oh I done that about ten years I think. Then they were going to move, they moved out, and I left a year before they were moving out. I thought to myself, oh, and I was sitting there, and my husband said “for good sake find something to do your be bored stiff by the time I come home”, the kids they were all teenagers, you know. And I said, I dunno. I was looking down the paper, oh yeah, I’ve never worked in a kitchen, I’m saying to myself. And there was a job going over in Fenchurch Street. Now my husband worked in Fenchurch Street, for Willis Haver. And this was, next door, was the big shipping place. Anyway, they wanted someone for the kitchen or something. I’m going to go after that. I went up there, my husband told me where to go, you know. I got up there, saw the lady, and I was talking to her and that. So she said, I said I’ve never worked in a kitchen. Well you’ve got a kitchen indoors haven’t you? I said, oh yeah. So she said, well this one is for somebody like you, she said, I think you’ll fit in. And I said, alright, she took me down, teach me, down the bottom. There was eight of them down there, there was the cook, the pastry cook, there was two silver waitresses, two ordinary waitresses, another one used to do the lunches and everything and my job was to do the vegetables and the washing up. Anyway, I went down there and spoke to them, and they all seemed nice, and I said I’ll have a go. And I worked there for five years, in there. The best thing was, my husband was only next door. Every day, they used to say, Ada, your husband’s coming round! He’s coming round to see me! They used to give me the warning that he was coming!’

**Judith: ‘So what was this place? What was the kitchen, what were they serving?’**

Ada: ‘Oh they used to do all their dinners, do the dinner, and if they had a big do, we could be there till ten o’clock at night.’

**Judith: ‘But was it for a family?’**

Ada: ‘No, for the people who worked there, the people that worked there. All the workers that worked there, the managers.’

**Judith: ‘And what was the company?’**

Ada: ‘I think it was shipping line. That’s right, yeah. Anyway, and he come down and told us that they were going to shut it, shut the kitchens down and the dining rooms because they wanted to make them bigger. So, they all paid us, we all got five thousand pound each, and a letter to say that, when it was all finished, if we wanted our jobs back, we could go back there, if we wanted to, on that. So, come home, oh, now what am I gonna do what I’m going to do. Having another little look, and oh, oh there’s one there. At Fortmorton Street, oh, that’d be alright, little bank. I said to husband, and I said that one, he said where, I said, Fortmorton Street, I said by the stock exchange, by the Bank of England, he said oh yeah. I said they just built a little bank there, it’s only for the governors and the head managers it said. I said, it’s alright isn’t it! I’ll go over there! Trotted over there and it was newly open! I had to go and see this lady, well she said, what it is she said, is they’ve got a cordon bleu cook, they got the head butler and they got something else and She said they wanted somebody to sort of, do the vegetables and little things like that, she said. She said, I’ll take you down there, she said, and introduce you to the other people, and said, I reckon you’ll get on alright with them, well I went down there and I did! They were very nice. Well, we had to start, the bank wasn’t open but we had to get everything ready. I done five years there. But then of course, when I come to sixty, they should have pensioned me off. But the old governor, I used to like him, he used to come and talk to me, he says, he said, no, he said, we’ll keep you on. And I worked till I was 63 there. And in the end they had to let me go.’

**Judith: ‘What bank was it?’**

Ada: ‘I think it was a little Midlands bank, a new one. But I don’t think it’s there now. Yeah, and the best bit was, my son in law works for Rothchilds Bank, and it was only through the alley way and up the road used to make him a sandwich and he used to sit there, [36.06-36.11] first my husband, now him! We used to have some laughs, I got on ever so well with them. Yeah, when I left, the governor said, I think we ought to treat Ada, as she’s been treating us. So the table was all laid out, everything on there, and the governor served me. Yeah, he served me with me food. He said I’m ever so sorry Ada you’ve got to go. I said it’s just one of those things, I think I’ve made by now though. And he said, you’ve worked hard haven’t you? I said, well, it takes it out of your when you have two children. Yeah, he said, true. And he bought me a lovely leather purse, and when I opened it there was fifty pounds in there! Bought me a bouquet of flowers and a bottle of champagne and got me a cab to go home! Cab to bring me home!’

**Judith: ‘Out of all the jobs you did then, what would you say was your favourite job?’**

Ada: ‘When I worked at Siemens.’

**Judith: ‘Really? Why was that then? What did you like about the job.’**

Ada: ‘Well I liked the job and I liked the people. We all got on together, it’s like a family. You know what I mean? I don’t know, I think that it the one I liked better. Peak Freans was alright, you had to work there to earn your money.’

**Judith: ‘Do you remember what you got paid in any of your jobs?’**

Ada: ‘Oh I don’t know, can’t remember now. Never used to be a lot I know! In them days it wasn’t! No, can’t remember now. No, you know, I’ve seen life, all the different jobs I’ve had.’

**Judith: ‘How did it affect your home life, do you think? Working? Because you’ve worked most of your life didn’t you?’**

Ada: ‘Yeah, no it never affected it really. I mean we used to be happy enough, the children were happy enough. They both got married and had nice weddings, and that you know. But erm, no. We have had fun, me and my husband was in a concert party for twenty years, there used to be 15 of us, all of us the same age, and we used to go and entertain in all the homes around here. We used to go to Guy’s Hospital, there were two wards in there, we used to go, entertaining, yeah.’

**Judith: ‘What do you mean entertaining?’**

Ada: ‘Oh, we used to do all sorts of things. We used to do the Lambeth walk, the mammy scene, oh yeah do all them. We make all our costumes and everything. I used to play the piano, and my husband used to sing, and they all used to sing. We all had some good times.’

**Judith: ‘So there was a group of you?’**

Ada: ‘Yeah, there was 15 of us when we started, well it had been going before we joined up with them, it’s only that the people who were doing it, they was going to someone’s, an old lady was nearly 90, and she wanted a party. And they got in touch with a person at Bermound, and said could we do a show for them, the lady was getting on and she said… we never used to charge. We used to go by donations they give us. We never said it will cost you so and so, we used to take all our own gear with us, our phone, you know, our speakers; we had hand microphones and everything else. And chap used to do all the business on the… we used to have some good fun. We went to that party and she had someone say in the pub, do you know anyone who can play the piano, all old time songs, course the lady in the pub knew I did because I played their piano. No she said, go to this number Ada, she said, just see what it’s like. They’re down the I said shall we go, so we went down there, met the people, they’re all very nice. I said the only thing is, I said, I don’t know how you all sing, I said, everybody sings in different keys. Anyway, I started playing the piano for them, oh yeah will you do it one night, our pianist has let us know. I said I’d do it, so we went round, Tissington Court, walked in, and do the other night. Oh! I don’t remember coming home! I had drinks on the piano; I didn’t have time to keep drinking them. And when I finished, the governor come up and said, I hope I’m not encouraging you he said, but do you think you could play for another say, half hour, or hour? He said, so we can have a good old Knees up, Mother Brown Oh I said, that suit me oh Knees up Mother Brown yeah go on let us do it, it’s Saturday night, yeah we ain’t got to get up in the morning. It was two o’clock when we come home I think! I don’t remember coming home, I really don’t! I know they thanked me, was kissing me, and the next day, the man come round and bought me a great bouquet of flowers, and gave me 20 pound.

**Judith: ‘Gosh, how fantastic! Where was it again? This was your first gig?’**

Ada: ‘Tissington Court.’

**Judith: ‘Where’s that? Round here?’**

Ada: ‘In Rotherhithe New Road. Where I lived. I knew where it was when they said Tissington Court. Oh I said, I used to live round that way. Yeah and then, I done that for them, so, the girl that an it says to me, well she said, I think that’s marvellous Ada. How about stopping on she says? We’ve heard our one aint coming back. Oh I said, I don’t know about that, I said can we think it over? Yeah, she said, we haven’t got a show, she said, not for about another fortnight. Anyway, we and my husband had a talk about it, and I said to her, well we don’t mind, but sometimes we go to Southend because my daughter’s just had a baby, we used to go down to see the baby. You know. Oh don’t worry about that, she said! We can always get round that and do another show that week! But we ended up doing shows during the week, and Saturdays, and I don’t know where we didn’t go? Simon Hughes, you know, you’ve heard of Simon Hughes? He asked us if we’d do a stint up Morley College? I didn’t even know where it was! Yeah! I said, well what’s it for? Well, he said, what they’re doing, he said, is trying to get music, from like children, going up in the steps, teenagers, working people and elderly people. And you’d be the last people to do the elderly part. And we went! Oh, lovely grand piano.

**Judith: ‘Yeah go on. Carry on with that story about going to the hospital?’**

Ada: ‘Yeah, well they was all in bed, they couldn’t get out. And they used to like our acts and that. At Christmas time, there was about eight of them I think they had in this ward. A girl made eight hats, same as our, red and white, you know for Christmas. We took them with us, when we got up there, we put the hats on them, oh you seen their faces. Cos they got the hats on, all sitting in bed with their hats on! And when it was Easter time, we used to bring them Easter bonnets! And we all had Easter bonnets! Ooh they used love that, go ahead and put them on it for them, tie ‘em up, ooh they loved it.’

**Judith: ‘So you had a piano there in the hospital?’**

Ada: ‘Yeah, there was a piano in the ward. We done another one in the other ward, I can’t think of the name of the other ward we went, but we didn’t go in the ward, there was a big room, a long room, the other side of it that they used to go and sit for entertainment and that. And that’s where we done another show for that ward.’

**Judith: ‘And which hospital was it?’**

Ada: ‘Guys! Guys Hospital. Yeah, and when we done the one there, my daughter, my granddaughter was about eight I suppose, we had her up here with us for a week, and I forgot that we were going, and I said what we going to do with her, I said, next door was at work, I said I don’t know, I said, we’ll have to see Helen, I’ll have to ask if she can come with us! And Helen said, yeah bring her with you, she won’t hurt, she said, she’ll be sitting out there with all the girls, she knows all the girls. And we take her with us, dear Lord, and when she used to come up here, she used to say to her Grandad, her Grandad, learn me that nice song I like! And it was ‘Melancholy Baby’, and he learnt it and she could sing it. Now anyway, we was up there and going on, merrily going along, and all of a sudden, the chap got up on the mic, he said, oh he said, we have got a very good surprise now, they’re going to be entertained by a very young lady. So I was saying to Len, who is it? I said, I don’t know? I ain’t got it on my book. Ooh, I said, perhaps it’s someone from out the hospital, or someone. Took no notice. All of a sudden, out come along my granddaughter, they’d done her up with a big hat, and a stool, what’s she going to do! So she comes straight up to the man on the mic, he says this is the young lady I was telling you about! The people were all laughing, so he said, and she’s going to sing to you, he give her the mic and all of a sudden she comes over to me. Nan, I said, yeah, I’m going to sing ‘Melancholy Baby’. I said, you sure you know all the words? Course I do! Don’t I Grandad? So he said, yeah of course she does. She said, but Nan, when was you’re doing your shows, I noticed that when the people were about to sing, you used to play a little bit, and go like that… and they knew that to start, will you do that for me? Play a little bit to come on! Well my husband sat beside me, oh for god’s sake; hope she knows all the words! Anyway, she stood there and she sang it all the way through. Did they clap her? Come down and can you sing it again, Nan, do it again!’

**Judith: ‘It’s a hard song I think!’**

Ada: ‘Oh, well we couldn’t get over it! So he says to people, he says, well now you know, who she belongs to, that’s her Nan and Grandad. Every time the girls got dressed up they were dressing her up and all, oh dear, when I saw my daughter, said, they done what! Oh I think she’s alright, oh she said yeah, ‘Melancholy Baby’, but she said Mum, she said, and Gran gave me right, and Grandad’s going like that, and Nana’s going like that. She said, it’s alright! They liked it!’

**Judith: ‘So tell me what other songs did you sing when you did those gigs?’**

Ada: ‘Oh we used to sing all different songs.’

**Judith: ‘Tell me a few of them.’**

Ada: ‘Oh, well husband’s favourite song was ‘Song of a Starry Night’, he learnt that one in India, never heard it till he came back and I had to learn it. Oh he used to sing a lot of sings I used to sing. Used to I sing a lot of songs, Crazy and songs like that. Yeah, and the others used to sing their old songs. A lot of old songs. And some used to sing ones that might be a bit nearer, you know. We used to have a laugh though. We had a little bloke who used do a little dance. And he used to dance, and er, he used to dance, and he used to bring a flag in one pocket, shake out the other, and then he’d been dancing about. Just to pass the time away more or less! That used to happen. His favourite song was, ‘Don’t Laugh at Me Because I’m a Poor Man’, that was his favourite song. We’ve had some fun. We went to a nunnery and all, where the Nuns were. Yeah, because one of the girls, her husband or something, used to work there or something. I don’t know what he used to do. And it was in the nunnery, she was 60 I think he said, and they were they were thinking about having a party for her and they were talking about trying to get entertainment. So we told them about us. So we all decided to go. When we got there, we got through the gates, and we go through and the first room is where they used to say their prayers and all that. And one of the girls, used to say she was Catholic, she trotted in there, and standing in front of him doing all this and that, and she ain’t a Catholic, she come out laughing! And when we go into the other room, all the Nuns were there in their black, you know. And they had a little feather like mine. And, a couple sitting there. And we started, going through it. And when they do the Mammy scene, they used to black their faces, like Hal Johnson, and put wigs and all that, and of course they done that, and then after that they used to wash it all off. And one of the little nuns says to me, she said where are those black men you had she said? I said, what black men? They was doing the Nanny songs? Where they gone, they gone home? I said no, they’re up there singing, look? No, no. I said yeah, they blacked their faces! Oooh she said. And, when we finished, out come the big cake, and we had a bit of cake and we had a little drink. And they couldn’t thank us enough!’

**Judith: ‘Wow, you sung music hall songs to nuns, did you?’**

Ada: ‘Yeah we done old fashioned ones like wherever we go! We did the Mammy scene all the costumes. Yeah, oh they enjoyed it. Oh yeah, they liked it.

**Judith: ‘Where was the nunnery?’**

Ada: ‘I can’t think where it was! I really can’t! I know it was a little it was a little way, we had to go a little way out. Oh we did have, we used to have some laughs.’

**Judith: ‘Can I take you back to that custard factory and ask you a few more questions about that? Because you worked there quite a long time?’**

Ada: ‘About fifteen years yeah.’

**Judith: ‘So what work did you do there?’**

Ada: ‘Well I used to, you’d have so many, two of you would be on the table like, then there’d be a custard machine where the custard was. Well the girl used to, put the bags in to fill them up, you know, the packets of custard you used to get, get three or perhaps six. Well she’d put the bags in, and when she filled them up they’d come along to us. Then we had to wrap them, open the boxes and put them in and them on the belt that went along. And on the end of there, they used to pack them into the big boxes, or in packets, wherever they had to go and it was done at the end of a machine. And, if we had a Canadian order come in, they used to scrub the machine all the way through, the day before. And next day, they used to put their own custard in, for Canada.’

**Judith: ‘Oh I see they, what they had different custard?’**

Ada: ‘Yeah, different packet of custard. Yeah, done the same way, in the bags, you know, and then put in, in the things. I’ve don’t think they actually use their own custard.’

**Judith: ‘Why’s that?’**

Ada: ‘Dunno, dunno why. Never found out. And then we did the tins of custard, you know, we’d have tins of custard. We used to have to do then. And then, if, if there wasn’t enough custard, you know, you had no orders for custard you sued to do skillets, and do them. And then, we I, another job I done was bicarbonate of soda; they had a machine to do that. You know sit there and do the bags up. Put them along. It’s surprising what they do.’

**Judith: ‘Yeah, what hours did you work in that job?’**

Ada: ‘Well I used to work part time, one o’clock till four, in the afternoon which was a, for the kiddies, you know, getting home and that.’

**Judith: ‘And what was it like, what was the place like? Was it a big place?’**

Ada: ‘It was a, that was a big place. That’s all that was. The jelly place we used to up there, and the other place we used to be another way, and we’d be on the third floor doing the custard, at the back of us what’s ‘er name, the glue factory. They used to make us open the window and you’d get the glue factory, especially when they stirred it up. Whoah! I thought being with custard glue factory.’

**Judith: ‘So what did you like about that job?’**

Ada: ‘Well, I dunno, it used to be alright, just a job really to me. I used to like it, girls are alright where I worked with.’

**Judith: ‘What did you do at lunchtime?’**

Ada: ‘Well I used to have my lunch when I worked at one o’clock. Children used to come home, get their dinner, I used to do their dinner, see. Children at twelve o’clock, they’d be ready to go back to school and I’d be ready to go over. I didn’t live here; I lived in the new Neckinger, right opposite near that. Right across the road, and round the corner and I was at work. Time I got home at four o’clock, the children would near enough be following me in. About half past four they’d be following me in.

**Judith: ‘And what about the Peak Freans one, what can you remember about that in terms of, what was it like, what did it look like inside?’**

Ada: ‘Well it, it wasn’t bad, it was alright, they used, if you didn’t have no job on one floor, they’d change up to what they call the top floor. And up there they used to roll the biscuits all up into great big, great big blocks and that would be ready to go downstairs for people to wrap them up. We used to sort them out, and wrap them up, put them in the boxes and take them downstairs. I used to work down there on a conveyor belt. I used to sit there, you’d have your biscuits by the side of you, as it’s coming along, you if it was a mixed one, and you’d have to biscuit where it’s supposed to be, till it got to the end and then it all come out. I was doing custard creams one day, I always remember it, I was doing custard creams one day. Well then, at twelve o’clock the hooter used to go for dinner-time, and I was waiting for the buzzer to go, pick one up and start eating it, and I thought oh that’s alright. When I come back I had to go up the office. The forelady saw me do it. And I had to go up to the office. And I got three days suspension for eating a custard cream. They were very strict about it. She said, Mrs why did you do it? I said; well to be quite truthfully, its dinner time and I was getting a bit hungry! I said, I was waiting for that buzzer to go off, I [56.33-56.44]. Got me three days suspension, come home on the night time. My mum says, what’s the matter with you? Oh, I ain’t got to go to work tomorrow. What do you mean you ain’t going to work tomorrow. I say, I got three day suspension. What you been up to? I said, cos I ate a custard cream. She went, do what? I said, dinner-time, waiting for the buzzer to go, I said I was on custard creams, I said, I just picked it up and started to eat it, I said, the forelady saw me, and told the old lady upstairs, Mrs. Redborough and I had to go up and see her and she gave me three days off. And I never liked custard creams since!

**Judith: ‘So what were the hours of work there at Peak Freans?**

Ada: ‘Half past seven till half past five. And Saturday till twelve. Yeah, but ah dear. I used to like being on the Christmas puddings. They’d come along and just warm; fancy a bit of Christmas pudding later on? Yeah. So one of them would drop the basin! Drop the basin! She’d be working along and all of a sudden she’d go like, oh god! I dropped the basin! I dropped the Christmas pudding, well that’s no good, and can’t we use that that’s no good! Put it in the bin, just down, just down, in the little rack we had bit. Then we all had a Christmas pudding. I don’t know what we would have got if they would have seen us. Oh dear. But no, that was nice, you know. Working on the Vita wheat floor, it’s on the ground floor and the windows looked out on the street. And you could see people going along, you know. But then you could get a permit to go up and visit Peak Freans and they’ll take you round. Well my husband, well I didn’t know him then, I mean I wasn’t with him then. But er, I knew his sisters because they worked with me. One worked in the bake house, where I was, and the other two worked upstairs. And er, they said, oh, our Dad’s coming round this afternoon to see our work. I said, is he? Yeah, and there was his father, and a mother and my husband as he was then, you know younger, him, and his mate and somebody else. And of course they come to the Vita wheat floor, been in the bake house and seen Grace, that’s the other sister. And they come round to me, you know, mmm, yeah, I’d. Then they went upstairs to see Grace, what was it, Grace downstairs, [59.35] upstairs, me on downstairs and the other one, Ethel, was the one above that. So they had a tour around.’

**Judith: ‘Oh I see, why did they come on the tour?’**

Ada: ‘Eh?’

**Judith: ‘Why did they come on the tour, just for…’**

Ada: ‘Well, just to have a look round, see what it’s like. They have the visiting days, only one day a week, had a visiting day. Yeah.’

**Judith: ‘So is that kind of how you met him? Is that how you met your husband?’**

Ada: ‘Yeah, because where his sister’s there, and normally I was with them, you know, that’s how I met him. Yeah, and we made the wedding cake, I think it was for, trying to think who it would be for, it might have been for the Queen when she was younger wouldn’t it, when she got married. Might have been her. I know we made this wedding cake. Oh you ought have seen it. It was a view at Peak Freans. Used to make the cakes for royalty and all that, they did the big cakes. Yeah.’

**Judith: ‘And where was this factory again?’**

Ada: ‘Down Drummond Road.’

**Judith: ‘Down Drummond Road.’**

Ada: ‘Course. It’s not there now, they moved, I forget where they went, but where they’ve gone now, its all the biscuit factory are all combined, near enough. You know, you don’t see a packet of Peak Freans biscuits anywhere now. Custard creams no, every time I look at… I can remember my Mum’s face; they gave you three days off because you ate a Custard Cream! I said yeah I don’t like Custard Creams now. Oh dear, but no, it was fun. I’ve had some fun in all the jobs really that I’ve been. You know, it’s what you make it really.’

**Judith: ‘Yeah, what do you like about it those jobs though?’**

Ada: ‘The what?’

**Judith: ‘Why did you like working so much?’**

Ada: ‘Well it’s people you meet, you know. You make good, well I’ve made a lot of friends you know. But, I’ve had some fun and all. But erm, there you are. Went right through the war, so was all right.