The interviewee has worked in an embroidery factory, a lampshade factory and a soap factory. She has also worked as a cleaner, then making lunches in day care centres and in Greenwich Town Hall for functions.

**‘Ok could we just start by telling me when and where, if you can remember, you were born, please.’**

29th August, 1939.’

**Interviewer: ‘And do you know where…’**

I think it was Somerset.’

**‘Somerset? Ok. And, have you lived most of your life in London?’**

‘Yes.’

**‘Do you know, when was it you moved if you were born in Somerset?’**

’50 years ago.’

**’50 years ago, so you would have been…’**

‘That’s when we all condemned and we had to move from North Woolwich.’

**‘Right, so that’s when you moved from Somerset to…’**

‘No, not Somerset. No, Abbey, North Woolwich. That’s where we were born, then, don’t know how long before we moved to Woolwich.’

**‘Oh right, were you very small when you moved to London?’**

‘Yes.’

**‘Ok, so most of your life you spent in North Woolwich, and then when did you have to move away from North Woolwich?’**

‘About 50 year ago.’

**‘About 50 years ago, and now where do you live?’**

‘Abbey Wood.’

**‘Abbey Wood. So has there been any where else?’**

Yeah my sister was living with us, and that’s when, in them days, people didn’t get given flats, they lived with their parents, until they saved up with enough money to move to Sittingbourne.’

**‘Right, so let’s go right back to when you were younger, living in North Woolwich. When did you first start going to work? Can you tell me when you first went to work?’**

‘About 15.’

**’15. Ok. And what was your, can you remember what your first job was?’**

‘Doing embroidery.’

**‘And where was that?’**

‘Oh God forgotten’

**‘You forgotten? Can you remember a little about the work? Was it a factory?’**

‘It’s like a small room, you had a canvas, and you had like badges, like it was, like wire it was and I got taken bad one day, that was the end of that job.’

**‘Ok can you explain a little more about what you mean by taken bad?’**

‘Epileptic.’

**‘So you had an epileptic fit?’**

‘Yes.’

**‘Ok.’**

‘That’s when I was laid off, again, and couldn’t get a job again for ages. And then there’s factory at North Woolwich, Before they would employ me, I had to get a green card. To say that, because of an accident, they wouldn’t employ me because of the… So I had to get this green card so it was covered if I was taken bad.’

**‘So, you got that green card and then what did you do in the factory?’**

‘Packing.’

**‘Can you remember how long you worked there for?’**

‘3 years.’

**‘3 years. They were quite happy, they knew you might have a fit but they were quite happy for you to work there because you had the card.’**

‘Yes.’

**‘Can you remember what sort of a factory it was?’**

‘Soap factory.’

**‘Soap factory, so were you working on a production line? Can you just describe it a little bit?’**

‘Packing up, packing.’

**‘And what were you packing?’**

‘Soap, like.’

**‘Ok, into boxes?’**

‘Yes.’

**‘Ok, how many people were you working with? Was it a big place?’**

‘Yeah.’

**‘Ok, can you remember a little bit about what it was like? Did it kind of, did it smell really strongly of soap.’**

‘Yeah.’

**‘Can you remember how many people you were working with?’**

‘Quite a few, it was busy place.’

**‘And what were the people like? Were they friendly?’**

‘Yeah, yeah.’

**‘Did you make any friends there?’**

‘Not really.’

**‘And, erm, what was it like sort of going out to work? Did that did you take the wages home to your parents?’**

‘Yes we had to take, they used to say, you get money, your food and everything, you pay up on pay. Cos that’s the idea of it.’

**‘And did you take any of it yourself as well?’**

‘Yeah, yeah.’

**‘And what did you spend that on?’**

‘Well, clothes. Things that were necessary.’

**‘Can you tell me a little bit about other members of your family and what they did for work?’**

‘In a factory, I remembered my eldest sister, because it was all factories at North Woolwich. Dress making one of my other sisters.’

**‘Uh huh, and what about your parents? And what did your parents do?’**

‘It was just ‘me Mum. We never see our father. I think he went away to sea, didn’t come back.’

**‘When you were very young?’**

‘Yes.’

**‘He went away to sea, did you say?’**

‘Yes.’

**‘And did your mother work as well?’**

‘In them days I don’t think many parents worked. But she did work at school meals, in them days.’

**‘So she really needed your help then?’**

‘Yes.’

**‘So I imagine the wages you earned were really quite necessary.’**

‘And as I say, in them days, clothes, the eldest one down to one, and another one down to another.’

**‘Right, hand me downs.’**

‘Go out; buy a couple of yards of material. Dress us all the same.’

**‘Yeah, so your mother made clothes for you all.’**

‘Yeah.’

**‘Right, ok. So, erm, I guess that’s where you learnt your embroidery skills as well? Can you just, sorry to go back to that one, did you, how long did you work, can you remember more or less how long you worked in the embroidery factory?’**

‘No, honestly, it was a long time ago.’

**‘It was a short amount of time was it?’**

‘Yeah.’

**‘Yeah. So you worked in the packing factory for about three years?’**

‘Three years?’

**‘Three years or so.’**

‘Yeah same thing, then we were moving, and that put pay to that job.’

**‘Oh ok, and where did you move…?’**

‘To Abbey Wood. And we were one of the first to go to Abbey Wood.’

**‘Ok, did a lot of people then move out to Abbey Wood?’**

‘Yeah, because all the houses got condemned they all had to come down.’

**‘Ah ok, so the houses you were living in were condemned. So can you tell me a bit about what, what it was like before they got condemned? What was it like in North Woolwich?’**

‘Very friendly. Little corner shop we used to have a banter with. And neighbours in them days, you could leave the string on the door, you know, not worry.’

**‘Right, and what sort of work did most people do? Were they working in the factories?’**

‘Packing, making machines go round. Cleaning of course.’

**‘And did it happen gradually the houses being condemned and people moving out?’**

‘Yes, as I said my sisters had permission to, in them days, to live with me mum and Jan got married one week, we was told to move the next week to a brand new house in Abbey Wood.’

**‘And why were the buildings condemned?’**

‘I don’t know why forget now. I don’t know why. Something they wanted to do I ‘spose.’

**‘So they just demolished them, was it whole streets they demolished?’**

‘Yeah.’

**‘Ok, and when you moved to Abbey Wood, can you tell me a bit about what was different?’**

‘Well I worked straight away. And found a job. Only factory I could find, was a lampshade factory at Plumbstead.’

**‘Right ok, and tell me a bit about that.’**

‘Standing, packing again coz I wasn’t allowed near too many machines.’

**‘Right ok’**

‘Cause of the complaint’

**‘Who… you said a complaint… what did somebody complain?’**

‘no, no’

**‘Oh, your complaint, yeah’**

‘Cause I’m not allowed near machinery see?’

**‘and, um, so you were packing lampshades into boxes, and was it a similar sort of thing of a very big factory with lots of people?’**

‘yeah’

**‘and how long did you work there?’**

‘Quite a while in there. [to self] what did I do after that?’

**‘Do you think a few, a few years or…?’**

‘Yeah yeah quite a few years’

**‘Okay, and what were the people like there?’**

‘Friendly’

**‘and um, can you sort of describe this factory, what was it like, was it sort of very big and noisy, or?’**

‘Yeah, noisy.’

**‘There were lots of big machines but you weren’t allowed to go near them.’**

‘Yeah’

**‘okay, um, and how did you travel to work?’**

‘Bus, by bus’

**‘and what sort of hours did you work?’**

‘Oh dear, I can’t remember now, long hours I know.’

**‘yeah, did you ever sort of work on weekends or…?’**

‘No, no weekends, Monday to Friday.’

**‘And then what did you do in your weekends? Did you have any sort of spare money to…?**

‘We used to have to help our parents, put it that way, we used to get pocket money, and I had the job of cleaning’

**‘Right, cleaning at home was one of the big things you had to do. And was there any sort of leisure activities that you…? What kind of things did you…?’**

‘Not really, our mothers couldn’t afford it’

**‘Yeah, so, mostof your money was to come back to helping with the family?’**

‘[Murmurs assent]

**‘So your oldest sister, did she then move out?’**

‘Yeah, they had saved up enough money then they went to Sittingbourne where they still live, with a deposit.

**‘Right, so then there were three of you living in the house with your mum?’**

[Murmurs assent]

**‘Okay, um, and, so you worked in that factory in umm, near Plumbstead Wood, living in Abbey Wood, and then, how long did you work there for, did you stay…?**

‘Quite a while, where did I go from there?’

**‘Did you go to another job, while you were still living there?’**

‘No, I went out in the hospital’

**‘Aah, can you tell me a bit about that?’**

‘It was a day hospital at Shooters’Hill, it was called Castlewood Day Hospital. And um, we always used to come from the Memorial Hospital over to Castlewood Day Hospital. Working there, quite happy, doing what I gotta do. And then the officer comes over, one day, “I think we’d like you to go to Bexley Hospital”, this is not as a patient, as work. Cleaning, when I got over there, I wasn’t doing meals, and I had to get the… 401 was it?, to Bexley every day. Cause I knew I wouldn’t get another job, so easy. And um, it was like a day hospital where the patients used to come, and there was this lady, used to have to come over with me, and clean and sweep as part of therapy.’

**‘Sorry, the cleaning was part of the therapy…?’**

‘Not for me, for the patient, it was like a little play ward, not the hospital.’

**‘Oh right okay, so the patient would clean with you as part of their therapy. And what was wrong with them?**

‘there’s a, well, mental hospital, that’s what I’m saying, seems unreal all this I know, an um, one day I’m not well, and I’d like to see at the office”, oh right, “erm, it’s like this, we don’t want to get rid of you, but if the health authorities find out, we’ll be in trouble, they’ll be in trouble, so, bang goes that job, off I go again. I was gonna have a holiday, and um, went to sign on, I said I won’t be here next week I’m going on holiday, um “oh you know you won’t be able to get any money?” I said why? He said “cause you’re not in reach” you know, can’t get hold of you.’

**‘What do you mean you’re not in reach? Cause you’re away?’**

‘You’re supposed to be within reach there for a job’

**‘Right, so you couldn’t go on holiday’**

‘No, I couldn’t go on holiday. They got rid of me’

**‘The Bexley hospital. So did you take, did you go on holiday in the end?’**

‘No’

**‘You didn’t go on holiday in the end? And you tried to sign on, and did you manage to do that, eventually?’**

‘No, I signed on, yeah, but not a holiday’

**‘Yeah, I see, can I just go back to that first job, so before they moved you to the Bexley hospital, were you working with meals? That’s what you were doing?’**

‘No, that was here, cause the meals at the Castlewood Day Hospital, that was where I wanted to stay, but course I had no option, you see.’

**‘And that’s when you moved into cleaning?’**

‘I said that’s a long way, they said I’m sorry but it’s all combined with the one group, see? Some people used to attend there, others over there. Off I go, and that’s what happened, again. Out you go, out the window.’

**‘Okay, so the work you wanted to do was meals, but they pushed you into doing cleaning?**

‘Yeah’

**‘Right’**

‘And they said that they had to get rid of me there, cause of the …’ Umm Bexley they sent me up to a… no, it was another factory in Plumbstead industrial estate, cardboard things they used to put, put the lids on ‘em.’

**‘Okay, so you did get a job in a factory, after the hospital?’**

‘Yeah, and um, putting caps on them like little pepper pot things. And then you put ‘em in the machines and then you’d have to put the same thing years ago and I was there quite a while, erm, then they started getting rid of everybody and everyone.

**‘This was the sort of pepper pot factory?’**

‘Yeah, and erm, they said I can’t see you, you have to see the factory doctor. What for? Everybody’s getting laid off they were, and of course with me they had to have a reason, didn’t they? Cause of me green card. They had to have a reason. And erm, anyway, I went to the doctor and he sent me up London Borough of Greenwich, he said “go in there, tell them and if they say the same thing tell them what game they’re playing”. And I did, I said “Have I got an appointment for the doctor?” “No” I said, “Greenwich Council they’d like you to phone them and tell them what game you’re playing. Outside. That’s when they decided to send me to a day centre. Goes there…

**‘So the hospital decided to send you to a day centre?**

‘The doctor did. Anyway, they sent me to this day centre anyway at Plumbstead. And erm, when I got there, a fella said to me, he said “how do you feel about helping out with the handicapped? They take much kinder to younger people, and as you worked in a hospital”, I said “okay”’

**‘So how old were you?’**

Oh Christ I’ve lost count now

**‘But you were young, sort of maybe in your twenties?’**

‘Yeah a bit older, yeah, must have been, yeah. In this room, there’s a few of them. One used to feed like this, feeding him, yeah, you know.’

**‘So you started to…’**

‘Social workers come even to see me. One day, and they said, this is not the place for you, I said, no I agree. They said, send you to another one at Abbey Wood. Goes there, there I am making tea and coffee and things.’

**‘Ok, and were you, were you being paid for this work?’**

‘No, no.’

**‘So, you were, you were a patient at the day care centre. But obviously, in both of them you got involved in the work, didn’t you?’**

‘It got to the stage when the day centre, they sent me to Chris Mayhew MP, because they couldn’t understand why. That a hospital like it was, why they put me off the job. And they got patients in there, worse. They wouldn’t reinstate me.’

**‘They wouldn’t reinstate you in the job?’**

‘No.’

**‘And, why was…’**

‘Goes to Federation Day Centre the one at Abbey Wood making teas. The idea was to send me on that to prove that I was capable as anybody else. Rather than sit about all day. So I used to do wood work, make trays, but mostly I used to do kitchen work.’

**‘Right so you did all that which obviously proved you were capable of working and was that also with the intention of coming out of the day care centre and going back into a job? And, but that didn’t result in…’**

‘This young boy was away at Eastbourne, I’ve got this blind girl on my arm, I said, can I have Suzie’s arm please? Crash, bang, big black eye. Goes back to the day centre, that’s it, I said, I never work now.’

**‘Why do you think that means you’ve never worked?’**

‘Well, in the state I was in, and that week, he turn around and said, Kathy, he said, you start work Monday. I said, oh don’t be so wet, you can’t kid me, I said. With a face like this? You’re going to try to tell me, that I’m going to go to work. He said, yeah I want you here half past eight Monday morning, I said, what paid wages as well? Anyway, that went on, sent me to a lunch club, at Greenwich.’

**‘So where was this that you were offered a job?’**

‘They was the day centre people, they got onto the phone evidently with the council, to employ me.’

**‘Right great. And and the incident happened with this boy when you were taking them on this trip to Eastbourne did you say?’**

‘Yeah.’

**‘So you’d obviously proved that you were really tough and could work with quite difficult patients and then they wanted to offer you a job. So they offered you… where was it they offered you a job?’**

‘The lunch club at Greenwich for elderly people.’

**‘Right ok, so tell me a bit about that job.’**

‘They’d come in with their lunch at twelve, they’d say, put your names and addresses all in the book, so if they didn’t come in, we’d get in touch with their family, and phone and let them know. If someone didn’t come down from upstairs, block of flats it was, if they didn’t come down, they’d say, go upstairs and see Mrs. So and so. Give a knock, if not, I’ll go and tell the warden. There’s no answer, can’t find the floor.’

**‘Right. They’d had a fall?’**

‘They’d had problems down there, downstairs. And you’d take them upto the home help upstairs, and they’d take them off me. One big block of flats and the only two people who ever worked there.’

**‘So you were one of the two people who ever worked there?**

‘No they were the home helps two home helps and another lady with me working in the kitchen. Come and have their lunch.’

**‘So these people were having falls?’**

‘They do, on and off that happen quite a lot, which I’m saying, people don’t go visiting, and things like this taken away, they find people on the floor.’

**‘How old were these people?’**

‘Pensioners, all of them. Pensioners, like a sheltered housing.’

**‘Right. So they’d come into the centre where you were working, for their lunch, right, and you were doing the cooking…?’**

‘The washing up, taking the dinners round.’

**‘Ok, and talking to the pensioners and tell me a little bit about what was it like, what kind of atmosphere.’**

‘Lovely. Really nice. Yeah, have a laugh with them.’

**‘Yeah, how many of you were there working there?’**

‘Erm, about three of us.’

**‘And about how long did you work there for?’**

‘Quite a few years that was, oh then they transfer me to Woolwich, another place, Woolwich.’

**‘Similar sort of job?’**

Yeah, must have been a good twenty years, say roughly.’

**‘In the place in Woolwich?’**

‘Yeah.’

**‘Right. And what was that like?’**

‘Very pleasant.’

**‘Yeah? Tell me a little bit about what it was like, so, they come in for lunch?’**

‘Yeah, they’d have a laugh, a joke, on a Friday they’d do their bingo. We’d get the dinner done earlier. So that they could all come in, then go on to their club.’

**‘And how many hours would they come in till?’**

‘Oh we worked till about 2 o’clock, from 8-2.’

**‘Ok 8-2, they come in in the morning, spend the morning there then have their lunch.’**

‘Yeah.’

**‘Ok, so you were helping to cook and wash up? What kind of, were they making hot meals for them?’’**

‘Yeah, but in them days they were, fresh potatoes, and put in the machine, potato machine, a cut the eye out.’

**‘And what did the potato machine do?’**

‘Cut the potatoes, peeling it.’

**‘Oh it peeled the potatoes?’**

‘Yeah.’

**‘Right.’**

‘They went out the window few years after.’

**‘The machines?’**

No, the potatoes. The idea of potatoes? They sent frozen ones in. And that’s when they cut the hours. Because we didn’t need that job. A shame again.’

**‘So the frozen potatoes were ready to cook?’**

Kathy: ‘Yeah. Plastic bag in the freezer.’

**‘Right, so they wanted to cut hours, once they brought in frozen potatoes. And did that happen at Woolwich…’**

‘Woolwich, all over the borough, because they delivered, every area had a little lunch club, they could go to.’

**‘So you weren’t working from 8-2 any more, was it…’**

’27 hours in them days it was, 27.’

**‘A week?’**

‘Yeah.’

**‘And that was after they cut it?’**

‘Then it went down to 25.’

**‘Oh, right, ok, and were there any other changes, so you worked in Woolwich for quite a long time.’**

‘There sure was, I tell you.’

**‘So, obviously the potatoes were quite a big change, what else kind of changed over those years?’**

Over the years, then they started bringing in pre-packed food. Meals on wheels. All that.’

**‘So rather than people coming in to the centre.’**

‘Yeah, there was a few still coming in, but there was the ones that still needed it.’

**‘Ok, and did you take the food out, you didn’t do meals on wheels…’**

‘No no, those girls used to come in vans, plastic boxes like this. And they’d pack them, like that, and they’d put this cap thing on and into the van. And deliver them to wherever, they had a list of peoples, who they had to go to. They needed them.’

**‘Ok, and did that mean that fewer people were coming in to the lunch centre?’**

‘Yeah, erm, didn’t do it because of that. As the prices went up, forget how much they were, they went up so much, and they started dropping off.’

**‘The prices for coming to the lunch centre?’**

‘Yeah.’

**‘So were the pensioners having to pay?’**

‘Yeah.’

**‘Ok.’**

And their sweet they’d get.

**‘For, was it a kind of subsidised, quite sort of cheap. But then the prices went up?’**

Yeah. When the wheels come in, they started pre-packed food, they stated shifting us out. Moving us out. To elsewhere. The town hall I think ended up.’

**‘Ok explain, so you lost your job there at the Woolwich centre, but you worked there for 20 years? And during that time, how many people were working there?’**

‘Three, three of us.’

**‘Right, and then eventually, all of you were made redundant?’**

‘Erm….. I don’t think so. No, think they made us redundant. They started cutting again. Then to 25 hours, but they’d be short round the corner, which was the town hall, Calderwood Street it was, where Sainsbury’s is, big block of flats there. Just round the corner is the town hall, the phone would ring, and say, Kathy? Can you come round and help us out for about an hour? I said, yeah, alright. Leave the other ladies to get on with it, we’d go there, from the night before, there’d be functions in that town hall. It would be number five, there’d be washing up the floor, washing up to the ceiling nearly.’

**And, you were doing extra work at the townhall?’**

‘Yeah.’

**‘And who was that work for?’**

‘Greenwich again, functions they used to do in the town hall. All the officers used to come in, you know, for their lunch.’

**‘So it’s Greenwich, council building?’**

‘Yeah.’

**‘Right.’**

‘Go round there, all the staff come round for their dinner time, helping out with that.’

**‘But you were mainly washing up for a function like before?’**

‘Yeah.’

**‘Did you get paid extra for that?’**

‘Yeah, that was hour’s overtime.’

**‘Right ok, and erm, so what kind of functions were they having?’**

‘Oh, they’ll have, I’ve still got one of the letter there indoors. Thousands, come from abroad somewhere, some big function. They’d put on for them.’

**‘Right.’**

‘Yeah. All there was to see. There was a bit of a waste. And all the coffees and teas and biscuits. They’d be put in each room. They had big flasks.’

**‘And there was a lot of waste food from these?**

Yes. ’

**‘And a lot of washing up?’**

‘Yes. So it was. I don’t know how I’ve done it. I bet the thought of losing the job, with me. I couldn’t afford mess about, like some people do. The first thing they wanna look for is a good excuse.’

**‘So you ended up working for Greenwich council for 20 years?**

‘27 years’

**’27 years?**

‘Yeah.’

**‘Right. So you were working in the town hall for functions and then you were still working at the lunch centre as well?**

‘Yeah. It was only round the corner to the town hall. I could just put my coat on just ran.’

**‘Which job did you prefer, did you prefer working at the lunch-club?’**

The lunch-club. Yeah. They were great.’

**‘So there were three of you. And did you do all the work between you? all the cooking?’**

‘The cook did most of the cooking. We had to count up the money as well. We had to serve up as well.’

**‘OK. And what was your specific job in that role?**

‘Washing up.’

**‘Mainly washing up.’**

‘Yes.’

**‘And also you got to talk to the pensioners as well?’**

‘Yeah.’

**‘What kind of things did you talk about?’**

‘Everyday things. As I say, about their pension. We’d have a laugh about the weather. What they’d done the day before. And the years have gone on there. Yeah. And then they started getting rid of more people.’

**Interviewer: ‘So you noticed just fewer and fewer pensioners coming along?’**

‘Hm [in agreement]. That’s when they decided there wasn’t enough people coming along to their places so they decided to get rid of them.’

**‘Do you think people went for meals-on-wheels because it was cheaper?’**

‘No, they weren’t any cheaper. It was just that the people that needed it, you know. They’re still cutting that out now, I hear.’

**‘Right. But some people couldn’t come any more because the prices were too high?’**

‘They’re not well, or something. they can’t get out. That’s when they’re putting them on the list for meals-on-wheels.’

**‘Right.’**

‘At the same time, as some had to have a diet one. Serve it up the night. We’d do it all there then. Before those frozen ones come in.’

**‘Do you think that was the main reason why the day care centre closed down eventually?’**

‘Yeah.’

**‘Because of meals on wheels?’**

‘No, they still do meals on wheels. Only they recon for the needed. But I do hear they’re going.’

**‘So why do you think people stopped coming?’**

‘Because it’s an expense, the prices kept going up and when they dwindled off that’s when they decided they’d do it no more, that’s why they’ve done it.’

**‘And why did the prices go up?’**

‘Don’t ask me. As I say it’s like everything else today. If you’re trying to put a price on it, if they’re not making it ...’

**‘Were they initially something that was affordable meals?’**

‘Yeah, yeah, as I say affordable diet, fish or something, nothing special’

**‘was it the council who put prices up?’**

‘Yeah. And when it dwindled, that’s when they decided no more lunch clubs. They sent me to Woolwich Common, meals on wheals was standard, cooked on there, one potato there then you’d have leaks like that, seal them up, box them up, put them on a plate. When the girls would come in, the boxes were already packed...Woolwich Common ... Upper Plumstead.’

**‘So you ended up working at the centre that made the meals on wheals but you didn’t get to meet the pensioners?’**

‘No.’

**‘No. So it’s been 27 years all together. When did you leave the lunch club?’**

‘I packed up a good 7 years ago, I remember.’

**‘How long did you work there before you then went to move on to the meals on wheals place?’**

‘I can’t exactly say the day.’

**‘Yeah, but more or less.’**

‘Anyway, after all that a woman came over and she said: “I have to send you back to Woolwich Town Hall”, that’s it. And:, “You only worked 20 hours.” I said: “Hold on, no, 25”. The man said to me: Go over to the personnel. It’s all on record”. I goes over there. I said: “have you got a record for me,?” “How many hours?” “25.” Goes back. Got this contract. Anyway, there’s this big meeting in Greenwich Town Hall. And they said: “Anyone has anything else to say?” I said: ”Yes. I’ve got a contract here stating 25 hours, according to the Rent Office, Borough Treasuries”. I’ve still got my bit of paper. You can’t do it. That’s when they decided to send me to the school.’

**‘I just need to clarify things a bit. You worked at the lunch club and the lunch club closed down after a few years, more or less. Do you know how many years?’**

‘As I say I’ve done 27 years in the town hall ...’

**‘... but it was quite a long time at the lunch-club. Then it closed down. Then you worked on meals-on-wheels where you were packing the meals, when you were packing the food, putting the lids on, and sending it out. And then after that you went back to working in the town hall?**

‘Yeah. And that’s when I said about the hours. And that’s when they decided... there was a union meeting, that’s it. Union found out about it. They made an argument about it. That’s it. Because this woman was saying about the 20 hours. The union stepped in when they heard about it. They had to pay the money back. They had to give me a contract for 25 hours. The union stepped in when they heard about it. That’s when they decided to send me to the school on the 25 hours.’

**‘Right, so tell me, what you did in the school?’**

‘Again washing up.’

**‘Where was the school?’**

‘Ah, I wasn’t allowed to go in late coz I have to eat, you see. So she said: “Are you on the meal?” I said:” Yeah.” “So you have to go in early then at 8 o’clock”. So I could sit down at 11 o’clock, have a lunch and get up again and work on. Yeah.’

**‘So they gave you a lunch?’**

‘I used to get in, again bringing stuff out of the oven. And salad I used to cut up and do all that, and the bread. By then the cooker. Do make things coming out of the oven. Putting the tins and things in the sink. The other ladies they come in about 10 o’clock. Time I go, getting the washing out, hanging it up. They would go straight on and do whatever they wanted to do.’

**‘So you were kind of doing extra preparing work for the other... ’**

Yeah, for the other ladies who were coming in at 10 am.’

**‘You were doing that to make up the hours?’**

‘Yes, because I had to eat. As I say. And because I was allowed in early hours, during the summer months, when they closed for holidays they used to send me down to Birchmere, the workmen’s canteen? They are there. To make up the time. Because of the 6 weeks holiday. [Laughing]

**Right. So tell me a little bit about the school canteen, what it was like working there?**

‘Very pleasant. Busy. About 12, 11 o’clock. I had to get up, go out help the girls, get the tables set up, all that, and serving.

**‘Was there a good atmosphere?’**

‘Very pleasant. Yeah.’

**‘How many of you were there working?’**

‘[Counts] about five of us. But I was only asked to do that up to 10 o’clock. Like I was doing the salads and that. Bits and bobs.’

**‘Did you have any interaction with the children at school?** ’

‘The teachers were out there, they had to deal all that.’

**‘So you didn’t have to’**

‘There were meal supervisors; they used to collect the plates and things. ’

**‘And where was that school? Was it in Greenwich?**’

‘Thamesmead.’

**‘Thamesmead. Ok. So, and then in the summer you went and worked in a men’s canteen?**’

‘Men’s canteen. ’ [laughing]

**‘What was that like?**’

‘Very pleasant. We had a washing machine there so it wasn’t too bad.’

**Interviewer: ‘So a men’s canteen. What was the place?’**

‘Birchmere it’s called, Thamesmead.’

**Interviewer: ‘And what work was involved?’**

‘The workmen would come back there for lunch, they used to. Now that’s gone. That’s all gone.’

**‘What would the workmen be doing?**’

‘Painting, you know. They would send them out doing the odd jobs. Road sweepers, they’d all come in. All the vans was down there, you know. You name it. Road sweepers, you name it. Always coming for their lunch.’

**‘And washing up kind of jobs. There has been a lot of washing up.‘**

‘I do, I know.’

**‘But you did talk about how the potato machine changed things. I was wondering, what about dishwashers? Did that change things at all?’**

‘That didn’t, funnily enough. sometimes I think they’d take more time, actually. By the time you put washing in, Then you’re putting it all into the machine; waiting for it to go. Used to take a lot longer, I think.’

**‘Right. Ok. So that wasn’t something that kind of affected you, the need for your services.’**

‘No.’

**‘No. Ok. And when did washing machines start coming in? Do you remember?’**

‘I can’t remember now.’

**‘Did that make a difference? did that make your work easier?’**

‘I suppose so. It wasn’t quicker.’

**‘Was there any other kind of changes?’**

‘I left seven years ago. And I think it just starting drifting away, starting to get rid of it all. All the canteens. The Mens’ canteens.’

**‘The Men’s canteens? So how did that work? How big was it? And what kind of food?’**

‘Quite big, quite big. As I say. That was built. That dwindled off at Woolwich Town Hall. That dwindled off with all the staff came over. When that got built...’

**‘Sorry, so the workmen’s canteen closed down, did you say...’**

‘Mm’ [in agreement].

**‘Was that because the workmen weren’t coming so often?’**

‘I know, I know.’

**‘Or they were getting their lunch from somewhere else?’**

‘As far as I think they were probably a lot getting it from somewhere else, as time went on.’

**‘What kind of food were you offering there?’**

‘They were fresh food that was, all fresh.’

**Hot meals?’**

‘Mm’ [in agreement]. ‘Hot meals. And cook. With a couple of other ladies. And I was only filling in ...

**‘In the summer.**

‘Mm’[in agreement].

**‘And you said that work dwindled off?’**

‘Not long after I left.’

**‘Yeah. And what about the town hall. Were you working there at the same time as well?**

‘No, not then

**‘No. But you were saying the work dwindled off at the town hall. And why was that?**

‘All the office workers got moved. I think down that way. Then they decided. No staff is using that town hall now. Terrible.’

**‘Which town hall was this?’**

‘Woolwich.’

**‘Woolwich Town Hall.’**

Because they have the new building there, haven’t they. At Woolwich. A lot of them workers in that town hall were in that other building.’

**‘Right. So no one used that building for functions any more.‘**

‘Thousands used to turn up there. Big Nicholas’ market. Whatever money they made they dwindled it away for some unknown reason. Nicholas’ market every year. Thousands used to turn up. Tudor Barn, that was another building. That dwindled away. The places where they were making it. Someone is trying to run it down I think.’

**‘Right. So tell me about this Nicholas’ market. So people come into the town hall ... ‘**

‘For charities every year. All upstairs. Loads of stalls. You couldn’t get in the door for people. Yeah.’

**‘And the Tudor Barn as well?’**

‘They used to have meals there. They had a restaurant there. People would go there and have a meal there. In the evening or other.’

**‘And is that in Woolwich?’**

‘Eltham. That.’

**‘But there has obviously been a kind of change.’**

‘Mm’[in agreement].

**‘What do you think has kind of changed in that area?’**

‘Everything, everything. As I said, they used to send people. When I was at the day centre every year they’d say: “Go to Eastbourne or Westgate. And there’s a number of handicapped down there. The following week they go down to collect them, and bring them back on holiday, which was lovely. And this is where this all started again. This governor said to me: “Oh, someone said: oh you’re going on holiday,.” I said “I don’t know”. Now they said: “Can’t Kathy go down there and help out?” That’s when they said: “how’d you feel about it?”. I said: “Well to be honest. When I go away I’m doing it.” So then they used to send me down there again. Helping out. Move wheelchairs around ...’

**‘And who sent you down there?**

‘Greenwich. The Day Centre. Because someone had said I’d been on holiday. Doing this, doing that. And I’d do it. You know. Help out. Coz I wasn’t going. “Can’t come down? Go as a helper?”’

**‘So you were going as a helper?**

‘Mm’[in agreement].

**Was this while you were still working’**

‘No’

**‘No. This was before you were working at the canteen?’**

‘Yeah. Yeah.’

**‘Ok. So obviously the kind of job you were doing have changed because they have kind of gotten rid of people or they have shut down completely. Can you tell me a little bit about what it was like living in that area and what changes you noticed? Because you said people also don’t go to the town hall any more. Have people moved away from the area? What do you think has changed in the area? What sort of work has changed?’**

‘I’ve got a few number of people living upstairs at the moment. What is going on. They’re not really living there. All different people keep coming and goings. All different people. People upstairs kept saying to me: “They are not really living there. All strange faces come”. The council know. They are not taking it up. They think they’re subletting, that’s what is going on at the moment.’

**‘Right. Do you think fewer people are really working in that community? Perhaps they have got jobs elsewhere or they are making money that way?**

‘Oh yeah. Definitely.’

**‘Do a lot of people in the Abbey Wood area, do they now work in the City or further up in London?’**

‘Up in London.’

**‘And is that because there are fewer jobs in...’**

‘Greenwich.’

**‘When you first moved there, did almost everybody have a job in that area?’**

‘Yeah. As people said they used to be queuing up for jobs like cleaning and things.’

**‘Did it feel it was a lot easier to get a job in those days?’**

‘A lot easier than today.’

**‘Yeah. And how did that kind of change the atmosphere of the place. Is it still a friendly and nice place to be?’**

As I said, they are all the same age group practically. Nearly all the same age group.’

**‘Who were?’**

‘Where we lived. Yeah. As I said. It was all nearly the same age group.’

**‘OK. As you when you were going through your adult life.’**

‘As they move out. I’m not racist. But they are...’

**‘Who is moving out?’**

‘As they move out. As people move out, the younger ones are coming in and they are nearly all foreign.’

**‘Right. So you’re saying people of your generation are moving out of Abbey Wood?’**

‘Or have passed on...’

**‘Or have died. But there are people coming in?’**

‘A few of them.’

**‘And you are saying most of them are immigrants, the people who are coming in?’**

Yeah.’

**‘So that’s another change that you have seen. When you first moved there you said it was quite a friendly place?’**

‘Yeah, it is still...and as I say, apart from me and the other lady, they’re all private. A lot of them have bought them. Downstairs. The last three years my life has changed because we’ve got wonderful neighbours. He is Irish. I’ve gone out one day. Gone out. Gone shopping. “Oh, who’s been here?” Someone’s put flowers in my front garden.

**‘Right, and who is done that?**

‘My neighbour, my next door neighbour 3 doors up from me.

**‘So do you talk to your neighbour?**

‘Yeah, we go out quite a lot together, me and his wife. He worries about her. And I think he likes her and me together. So if anything happened, coz he works shift work with the busses, he knows that she’ in good hands. And they’re the same with me. I was taken bad one day. I had gotten up and the neighbours see me. He’s done no more. He got in touch with them “You’re not going nowhere, you. You’re going straight to hospital. A couple of years ago that was.

**‘Is this a younger couple?**

‘Yeah.

**‘Right. So even though there has been quite a lot of changes, it’s still a friendly place and you feel people kind of look after each other?**

‘Yeah. Coz they’ve been there for quite a while, some of them. As I said, there’s 2 or 3 from the old school. Like us.

**‘Let’s just go back to the work again, so you worked about 27 years for Greenwich Council? But you did lots of different things, didn’t you. You talked a bit about working at the lunch-club and the town hall at the same time, then the school, then the Mens’ Canteen at the same time as the school. And then was there anything else after that?**

‘No, I think that was it. I finished when I was at the school.[Laughing]

**Right are there any other changes you noticed.**

Yes when my mother was alive she used to worry so much that’s how I started going out on Greenwich Council Coaches

**You went out on Greenwich Council Coaches**

To different clubs in the evening

**This was extra work**

No no just pleasure clubs and different things going.