

Kenley Revival Oral History Project

Transcript of interview with Rose Baldwin

3 May 2017

Interviewer: Carol Tysall

Filmed by Coral Finch

Filmed at Rose's house in Old Coulsdon. Also present, Rose's daughter

I am Rose Baldwin, officially Rosina but everyone calls me Rose

Carol: And when were you born? 1924

Carol: And when did you move to the Kenley area? When I was about 8, I think.

Carol: And where did you live in the Kenley area? We lived in Godstone Lane, which is on Riddlesdown.

Carol: And did you stay in that area for the whole time? Yes, I stayed there until I was married apart from being in service, but I was in service in Kenley and Purley.

Carol: Would you like to explain a little bit about what you mean by being in service? Well I was a kitchen maid in Welcomes at Cumberlands in Welcomes Road which was a big house that had a cook, a kitchen maid, a housemaid, a parlour maid, laundry women, a chauffeur, 4 gardeners and it had a big garden, a huge garden, with a woodland in it and we had all those people looking after 5 people.

Carol: And when was that? What age were you when you went into service? I was about 16.

Carol: So that was during the war? Yes, yes.

Carol: so, you were in service during the war at Cumberland? No, I wasn't at Cumberlands during the war I was there just as it started. Because they dug a big hole and made a big room in the grounds for Fortnum and Mason to come down with vanloads of food to store in this place so that they had plenty to eat during the war. He also had a farm up near the aerodrome. I can't remember what that was called but my mother used to work there as a laundry woman. He also had properties up north and he had a business in Whyteleafe which was JB Edwards, but I don't think any of the family are around there now. I think one of the boys was a clergyman and I don't know what

happened to the others. The girls and the wife moved up to Warlingham because they separated.

Carol: so, once the war started you were working there when war was declared? Yes.

Carol: And then what did you do after that? I went to Purley into service there and then when I was 18, we all got called up. My father wouldn't let me go into the forces because my 3 brothers were in the forces, and I had to go into a factory in Purley Way and we made parts for aeroplane clocks we did all the little screws and nuts and bolts and tested condensers. I don't know what they were used for, but it was a horrible job. You had to test them in a petrol tank to see if there were any holes in the soldering around the top.

Carol: do you remember the name of that company that you worked for? No idea at all. I remember the factory and getting off the bus and going over to it, but I just can't remember the name of the factory.

Carol: And what type of workforce was there? Was it mainly young people like yourself? Well yes a mixture of boys and girls, well men and women we were really I suppose, 18 but there were some girls from Caterham and some girls from Purley and we all used to catch the bus over Purley Way in the morning and it had a gas cylinder on the back cos you couldn't get petrol and the bus conductor used to say "upstairs girls get your head down and I'll wake you up when you get to your stop which where do you stop? where do you stop?" and he'd come round and wake us all up at our stops and we'd get off and he did that every morning for us when we were on night work.

Carol: You said it wasn't very pleasant doing the condensing work but was it very hard physical work and that's why you were tired? Yes, it was great big machines you had to do steel work on, and we used to get lots of air raids over there and lots of bombs dropped around Croydon aerodrome.

Carol: So, you were close to Croydon aerodrome, were you? Yes

Carol: Right in the target? Yes, right just down the road from the Croydon aerodrome opposite what they call 5 Ways now. But I don't know what the factory's name was.

Carol: And did you work there during the whole of the war? Yes, well no. I came out I was so ill with anaemia that I got out and I went to work in Purley then, for a lady and I was right by Croydon aerodrome then right at the top of Russell Hill. We got bombed up there and because I wouldn't go in the shelter I had a ceiling come down on me and my boss came and broke the door down to get me out and he said "well you're not sleeping in anymore, I'll buy you a bike and you can go home every night". He said I can't be responsible for you, so I used to cycle home every day and come back every morning.

Carol: so, where were you living to cycle to Russell Hill every morning? I was living at my mother's in Kenley and cycling up to Russell Hill every morning but then I got married and I stayed at my mother's because we had nowhere to go as we couldn't get a house or anything. My husband was in the army: he was mainly around different airports and places of interest because he was in the artillery on the guns so he travelled over the country and he had three brothers and they were all called up together as they were in the Territorials and they started off on Coulsdon Common and all got split up and sent all around the place. I think one went to Egypt, the other one went to Belgium and he stayed in this country, fortunately.

Carol: so, he was on anti aircraft all the war? Yes, all the war. He went down to Southampton Docks for a long time because they were very important during the war getting the goods backwards and forwards and he ended up in Scotland at the end of the war but he went all round the coast all round Kent and he didn't like it but he put up with it.

Carol: and what did your brothers do? My brothers: one went to Egypt, one went to Italy and the other went to Germany in the tank corps and he married a German girl but they all came back safe which was marvellous and my husband's brothers they came back ok they were both abroad but we were very lucky really.

Carol: Can I go back to when you said you were bombed? Did you get injured as you said the ceiling fell on you? The ceiling fell on me, but I was alright it didn't hurt me at all, but my mother got bombed in a shop on Godstone Road. They bombed the waterworks and I was at home then. I was expecting my daughter and dad said he could see the main road from where we were, and he said the Godstone Road looks as though it is covered in milk. So I said "milk?" and he said "yes they must have hit the waterworks" so I got dressed and went down and our old dog was swimming across and he found my mum

underneath this shop and they'd pushed her down into the cellar, and the fridge they'd got had fallen on top of her and the lady that owned the shop, but as it happened the Canadian army were marching along Godstone Road and they helped get them out and they were both okay but years afterwards my mother had a lung removed and they think that was the damage from the fall but we had no windows no ceilings everywhere up the road was the same all round Kenley. It was a terrible raid that raid, but the worst one I experienced was before when the war first started. I was out for a walk with my friend and we walked over the downs came down at Whyteleafe by the Rose and Crown which was, and we were watching all these planes in the sky and I said "oh they look just like silver fish up there don't they, Dora?" She said "yeah" and then all of a sudden, they were machine-gunning us. We dived under a hedge, a thick hedge, where the gasometers were, I don't know whether they are still there now and a lady came out of the house opposite and said "for goodness sake girls run over here, our shelter's not finished but we'll get down there". We got there and she's got this big apple tree and all these apples were falling down on top of us where the machine gun bullets were hitting them and when we came out, the poor old soul her house was absolutely she had no roof no windows no ceilings and she just stood there and cried.

Carol: [And that was actually machine-gunning rather than dropping bombs?](#)

They were dropping bombs on Kenley aerodrome as well but I think what they thought they were going to get was the gasometers but because we were right near them we were lucky not to get shot but it was something that stuck in my mind all my life and I still can't believe it now when I see planes going over now I think how silly we were to even attempt to go out for a walk. I mean we used to sit up in the garden and watch them cos our garden went up on a steep hill onto the downs and we'd sit up under the plum tree and watch them raiding Kenley aerodrome and we had no fear at all. I mean we hated the air raid shelter in the end and mum said "no good keep on moaning" that we'd better go in under the kitchen table so she made a bed under our great big thick kitchen table and my brother and I, we slept in there as we didn't like the shelter and the old dog used to come under with us. And dad had chickens and ducks and geese and rabbits, and they all survived.

Carol: [Can I just ask why didn't you like the shelter?](#) I didn't like being shut in such a small space. I've been up to Croydon library with Heidi's girls

and I've let them go in them but I've never liked going in myself but they used to love going in there and they used to get on the bunks and going to bed and have a good morning up there. It was the damp and the closeness, and all being huddled together it was all horrible.

Carol: *And was that an air raid shelter that was just for your family?* Yes Yes. It's what they called an Anderson shelter. We had them up here when we first came up here (Old Coulsdon) we had prefab where the flats are, and they used the old Anderson shelters as sheds for us, but I didn't like going in there really even when it was a shed

Carol: *Did you ever go up to Kenley airfield itself?* Yes. We used to walk up there quite a lot.

Carol: *Even during the war?* Yes. My dad was a great one for going and getting mushrooms and showing us the flowers and the trees and that. We used to walk up from Whyteleafe station up through the woods or else we'd go up Welcomes Road and walk up from there or else we used to go to the Wattenden and dad used to go in there and we used to sit outside as we weren't allowed in then and he give us a lemonade and biscuit and we'd sit there until he was ready to come out.

Carol: *So, were you aware of what was actually going on at Kenley?* Oh yes, because we saw the airmen down at Kenley hotel as they called it. Mum used to work down there; she used to clean down there every day, so she got to know quite a few of them.

Carol: *so, were you aware that there were lots of foreign airmen there as well?* No. We had lots of Canadian soldiers but I think they were stationed at Warlingham somewhere because if you went to the Orchid ballroom they were there or if you went to the cinema they were always at the cinemas but in those days you couldn't afford it. I mean you would have to save up. When my friend came home from the WAAFs we used to go the Davis Theatre to the afternoon tea dance and meet them in there. But my dad used to say you're not to have anything to do with them, you're to be in by 10 o'clock or else and it was or else.

Carol: *Do you mind me asking how did you meet your husband?* I met him. I knew him as a boy at school but had no contact with him. Apparently, we lived just down the road from him when I was a baby and my mother knew his mother and father and so did my dad. I went home

one Sunday afternoon, as we used to get one Sunday afternoon a month, and I went home and Dad said "it's a lovely afternoon/evening and we'll go out for a little bus ride" so we went up to the Midday Sun at Chipstead and as we walked in the door, Mum said: "Good lord look who's there" and Dad said "Who's that? And Mum said "don't you remember them they used to live in Riddlesdown Road where we lived. "Oh yes" he said, "I remember now, that's the Baldwins". Anyway, I didn't think anymore of it. Dad has his drink and that and at half past nine Dad said to me "come on get yourself home and you've got to get back to work". I went out and got on the bus and I'm sitting in the bus and this soldier came out and he said "where you going?" and I said "I'm going back in service where I live now" and he said "I know your Mum and Dad" and I said "Well I don't know your Mum and Dad" so he said "oh yeah, they used to live near us" and he said "I'll take you home" and I said "no you can't do that you'll have to go and ask my Dad first" and he went and asked my Dad and Dad said "yes, and make sure she's in by 10" and that was that.

Carol: So, was that early on in the war? No, I think I was about 19 then.

Carol: so that was about 1943? Yes, and he was already in the army and he'd been in for a few years because he was the first to be called up.

Carol: You've given us loads of information. What is your most vivid memory of the war do you think? The one that you have in your head the most. Being machine-gunned and that poor old lady crying about her house. She said my husband had this built for me and brought me here as a young bride and I've lived here all these years and they've done that to me.

Carol: And happiest memory? Walking over the downs going in the bluebell woods with my young sister. I used to take her over there because she's 10 years younger than me and she used to want to go everywhere with me and that's why I have a photo of her in the bluebell woods. And going to school at Roke was lovely.

Carol: You said you could see the attacks on Kenley airfield from the top of your garden. Perhaps a bit more on that? You saw the planes coming over as they came over quite low over the downs and then they would swoop down and there would be these terrific bangs and then they would swoop up quickly very fast high up in the sky and they just looked like little fish flying away.

Carol: Did you see any dogfights going on? Oh yes, we used to sit and watch those, but we weren't afraid at all.

Carol: Did you see any planes come down? No, I never saw a plane come down. We sort of took it all in our stride. It was the same with rationing if you could get things, you got them if you couldn't then you went without. I mean you'd darn things you would put sides to middles on the sheets and then when they didn't finish there you would cut them up for pillowcases. My mum used to work miracles with a bit of material and her old machine and the wash days were a nightmare. She had this great big old mangle and this great big old flat iron on the gas stove and couldn't get coal half the time, so we were out in the woods getting all the wood to put on the fire. I can't remember us ever being hungry or cold. The Canadians were marvellous when we got bombed. They sent some food parcels and beautiful patchwork quilts all made out of odd scraps of material and they lasted for ever. I mean when my Mum and Dad died, we found them still in the house as good as new. It was marvellous. You just had to go down to the Memorial Hall which was by the Police Station and collect them and they'd give them to you. The WVS used to do it but you used to queue up for fish, you used to queue up for bread, and queue up at the butchers, and be lucky if you got a sausage or a slice of liver extra.

Carol: So, where were those shops that you used to queue up at? At Kenley.

Carol: In Kenley along that parade they had a butcher and everything there? Yes there was a bank, a grocers, a very posh grocers, a post office, a hairdressers, a butchers, a chemist, a very good chemist, and a lady that ran a little shop where you could buy buttons anything, piece of cloth anything, whatever she got wool and she'd let you pay for it so much a week if you wanted to. And she made my elder daughter's christening dress out of a piece of parachute that she managed to get, and she made this beautiful little smock dress for her.

Carol: So, was your eldest daughter born during the war? Yes. She is 72 now. We used to walk to Purley and back.

Carol: Did you ever go up to London? I went once and that was to take Chris and that was after the war up to St Thomas's to have her tonsils out. We never went to London. I think it was only coppers on the tram as the trams used to run in Purley then. We went to Croydon occasionally. It was a penny on the tram then to Croydon. We'd go down the market and we always went to the market at Christmas to

buy all the stuff for Christmas and go into Kennards and they had an alleyway where they kept all the pets and you could have a donkey ride and that was thrilling that was.

Carol: *And that was still during the war?* Yea. Grants was a very posh shop and Alders came later. The lady I worked for used to do all her shopping in Grants and she said "you really can't wear that coat any longer it is much too small for you, I'll take you up to Grants and I'll buy you a coat and some shoes and some gloves". So, she did, and I said, "my dad won't be very pleased about it" and she said, "you can tell him you'll be paying 6d a month". I went home with it and my dad wouldn't let me in the house with it because I hadn't paid for it. I had to hang it on a hook outside. She also got me to get her sister in law who owned a hairdresser and beauty parlour in Coombe Road to cut my hair properly and show me how to put make up on. I went home with that on and I was only allowed in the back door to the sink to scrub it off before I could sit at the table. He was a tartar.

Carol: *So out of the 2 works that you did in service and the factory which was the harder?* The factory it was the smells and the atmosphere and...

Carol: *And the stuff that you made in the factory were all being used in the planes?* Yes, they were all parts for the clocks that went in the planes, but I was on a drill and I was so tired I fell asleep and I was just drilling through my engagement ring when the chap on the next bench saw it. He turned my machine off otherwise I would have lost a finger.

Carol: *So, you had some narrow escapes in the war?* Oh yes, I have had many a narrow escape. I still do, don't I? I get through them and I am still here, and I shall be 93 next week.

Carol: *So, I think you have done absolutely brilliantly on your interview so shall we call it a day there?*

General conversation with her daughter about Kenley and her memories.

Rose: I remember when I first came here we had a doctor, Doctor Jackson, and he had a friend I don't remember his name and he got killed going into 1 of the shelters up there but Dr Jackson was alright and he had a practice in Caterham for years. He was a Scotsman and he was absolutely wonderful. (Discussion of this doctor and where his practice was)

Daughter says that she remembers Rose talking about being up on the common and the skies would go really dark and it would be the planes were coming across.

Rose: You would look up into the sky at night and it would be very black and then all of a sudden you would see these little silver things and you'd see lights and you'd see these things dropping and then these huge explosions and we used to say I wonder where that one's landed and the doodlebugs when they came you could hear them from a long way away and then all of a sudden the engine would cut out and there would be this huge explosion and we had one of those on the waterworks which was just down on the main road opposite us and the damage that they caused was unbelievable . I don't know how big there were, but they looked big they looked about half the size of this kitchen really when they had left the plane and they used to go along as though they were motorised, I suppose they were, I don't know.

Carol: [Were you good at recognising the different planes? Could you spot a Lancaster or a Spitfire?](#) No. I knew the spitfires because they could dive and twist and turn and they seemed to machine-gun a lot more than the German ones. You could watch the German ones coming over the downs to Kenley and then you'd suddenly see the ones from the aerodrome take off and then you'd see the battles up in the air.

Daughter: you also said that when the Lancasters were at Kenley then you could feel it.

Rose: The whole ground shook especially if you were that side of the railway Welcomes Road and that way. We used to go up Hawkhurst Road a lot which leads up that way as there was a lot of woodland up there and we used to go collecting wood up there and the ground really shook when they took off.

Discussion of road which they actually lived in. The road where they lived was off Godstone Road near Kenley on the Riddlesdown side.

Rose: They were at the highest point. They had 25 steps to go up from the main road and walked along a little bit of road and then 20 steps to get up to the front door and then we had 10 to get up to the back door and if we wanted to go up to the back garden we had steps all the way cos it was like that.

Carol: [Is it still there?](#) Yes. Don't look like when we lived there. Dad had the most beautiful garden, lovely rockery and that.

Carol: the animals that you mentioned you kept in that garden? No, we had a bit of field at the side which the council let us have for a £1 a year and Dad used to have his chickens out there. And we even had a goat out there, but it is all taken into the downs now. It belongs to Westminster Council (sic). And there was a big schoolhouse at the side of us in the grounds and there used to be a little school, church school, but they've all gone now. The house is still there though it has all been done up now and you wouldn't recognise it. Then we had allotments in front of us and then we had waterworks cottages on the main road and then there was a bit off the main road which was all council houses.

Carol: So, when the German planes were coming towards Kenley were, they flying over your house? No further up. I think what they were really following was the railway that goes right under the Downs and I think when they were bombing that is what they were trying to stop cos there is a big tunnel which goes right under the downs and if they could have stopped the trains there..

Daughter: They used to fly up from Brighton and from Dover as well but essentially up the Brighton line and they could get to Kenley and Croydon at the same time. Rose: yes.

Daughter: There would be a limited amount of planes that could go back up and that's why we lived down in Hartley Down and all along the railway track are still the pillboxes. The plan was to get the tanks in and drive them up the railway lines. So the rest of the country put pillboxes all along the major lines to stop the tanks from veering off so that's why they are where they are because of course if they had cut across land from where we are, they would have been straight into Kenley.

Rose: You see the Godstone Road is between two railways and if they could have stopped them and not only that if they had got the gasometers that would have caused a terrible explosion

Carol: The other thing that intrigued me was that your dad was able to say that you're not going into the army and get away with it. I didn't realise that you could offer to do an alternative. I thought if you were called up. As long as you did something it didn't matter. As soon as you were 18 you had to do something: Land Girls, WAAFs, air force or naval or nursing.

Carol: yes, my mum was a land girl.

Daughter Because the Purley Way had so many factories it was interesting.

Rose all factories.

Daughter: all factories were turned over to war work and you had the aerodrome there so that whole area was a real heartland which is why they tried to bomb it.... And Biggin Hill is also down the road. They tried to swamp that area because if they could have had taken out Croydon Kenley and Biggin Hill there is nothing protecting London.

Rose agreed.

Daughter: And that's why they would swarm over and they particularly attacked Kenley and Croydon because Croydon had a large amount of munitions factories there so it would have been like a double strike if they had taken out the airport and the production line as well. Rose agreed.

Daughter: so, had mum been living in Yorkshire you probably wouldn't have had a choice but because she was living in London and could get to it so easily it was a case of having a local resource and this was a case of optimising it. If you were out in the middle of nowhere you would have been joining the services or the land army.

Rose: We had a girl that was living with her aunt in Croydon and she'd come from the Isle of Skye in Scotland and because she was living with her aunt she was called up into the factory and she was on the next bench to me and she hated it, oh she did hate it. And I said to her "well it's something you've got to put up with" and she used to cry every morning and every night "I want to go home to my mum; I want to go home to my dad". I said "well unless you can walk there, love you can't go" but on the whole it was quite good really. We used to have a singsong.

Carol: The other people I have interviewed (I have only interviewed 2 others) have both had quite a lot of very positive memories of working together. This was it.

Daughter: dad was in TA and he was too young to be enlisted at time of war and he got signed up and the recruiting officer went round to say to him we can't take you as you're only 17 but after an argument with my Nan he said you'll be safer in the army than you would here so they took him and went into the army at 17 and a couple of months.

Rose: not only that he went in because he was in the Territorials and his 2 brothers were in the Territorials and they were called up earlier than

everyone else and the main camp was on Coulsdon Common that's where they all congregated before they were separated into different units. The Guards' barracks up there was a very big stronghold then. I've seen the queen go up to the barracks a couple of years. She used to come up every year to visit the guards.

Carol: that would be the present queen so that would be a bit later on? Yes, when we first came up here, we all used to congregate on the main road to see her go by.