

Reference 1 - 29.73% Coverage

Yes where your job was please?

Umm Well how I got picked, I was at Chelsea School of Art and Design, Manresa Road in Chelsea with quite a few wellknowns like Henry Moore, Graham Sutherland, John Piper, Barbara Hepworth etc. A representative from the government came to the headmaster for him to recommend somebody they thought that was honest straightforward and capable of taking an important post loosely to do with art. And I was recommended and this was in the spring of 1939 so it was about six months or so before war broke out on third September 1939 and er they traced my family back and I had to be British right the way through and I was offered this job and erm they wrote a letter and said how much I would be paid a week and ...****

Do you remember how much you were paid a week?

Thirty five shillings a week which was a lot of money because I believe the standard wage for the men was a pound a week. If I remember rightly and my father said I remember it my father said no it's not enough. And I think the reason why, looking back now he just didn't want me to go. He wanted me to be at home. So I went down to White Hall and told them my father wouldn't let me work and came back and he changed his mind. So I went back down again to Whitehall and course traveling was easy in those days and umm they were very nice about it and I started in the spring of 1939.

5.53

My first job I worked on my own and I think it went on for almost a year and of course when war was declared I worked twelve hours a day an practically every day and I loved my work. And what it was I was in a dark room and I had these photographs that our pilots had been going out quite a time before the war taking photographs of the main cities in Germany. I had to block out, the first one I had, the first big photograph I had and it brings back, I was going to say happy memories because I honestly loved my work what I did during the war. Was the map of the Thames that opens up on the television three times a week of Eastenders! And that was the first one I had only it was a bit bigger and I actually saw it the original in the Cabinet Rooms down Whitehall quite a few years ago now, and I had to block that out. So what I had to do was to leave like main things like rivers were good so that the pilots were guided. Remember it was dark so they had, it was easy for them to detect the way because in those days when war broke out we only had about half a dozen aircraft. We hadn't got the pilots so they took these young boys from Oxford and Cambridge and trained them within a few weeks to jump in the aircraft and go off. And that was, I was dealing with all these photographs and umm cos I had never been abroad but I managed.

You said you had photographs of Germany - what were you doing with the photographs?

7.53

Well you see when you got photographs you got all the houses and the buildings where if you could block them out black and just leave a river like the Rhine and Danube and things like that it was easy they could follow the river to where they were going. That was my first job with the government. But I think I had three or four different jobs during the whole five years of the war and I loved them all.

Would you like to tell me about any of the other jobs that you did?

Well I can remember, I think this was after they wanted me to go up to Harrogate for a certain job er indefinitely and I got me train ticket to go from Kings Cross everything was laid on for me. And from where I was, although I worked on my own in a room - there were two other people a lady

and a gent round about my age and I remember the boy was named Colin. And they were going to meet me at Kings Cross and we were going to go up to Harrogate and be met by some government official and er my mother didn't want me to go. I can understand why now, looking back, why she didn't want me to go because my brother and sister were evacuated and there was only me left there and she pleaded with me and she didn't want me to go and I said I was going . I remember it as plain as anything. The war was on and I think it was the second year of the war, but it was quite early in the war. I got down to Kings Cross Station and saw Colin and this other young lady and the train was there and I don't know what it was I couldn't get on the train.

9.50

I just couldn't, I turned round and I went back again home. Then from there I thought well I had better go down to Whitehall so I went down and I told them what happened and they were extremely nice about it and for two or three weeks I used to go down just to show myself each day. I got all my money no problem at all but I do remember, during the middle of the war I was asked to go to Berkeley Square on a project there. Different men in the other rooms used to say to me, 'Miss Wise once they send you somewhere like that your be there indefinitely.' I said, 'No I've been told I'll be gone there for six months.' And they said, 'Don't you believe it.' Believe me it was six months to the day! I remember working at Berkeley Square and I had about four or five men under me and I was very, very young. And what I had, I had the measurements of different buildings which I'm not going to say where they were and I had to work out - cos I had studied architecture at Chelsea, er I had to work out, because I had studied architecture at Chelsea. I had to work out how many cases, if a case was a certain size, they could pack into a certain warehouse or room. How many guns and tanks and goodness knows what so that when they moved from A to B they knew exactly how many they were going to take to fix into that space.

And one of the men he was in his middle age, about fifty. Mr Jones was his name and I was only a youngster and he seemed to have a soft spot for me. He kept wanting to kiss me and I said if you do I shall slap you round the face, well that's not like me because I was really shy and in the end as he went to, I'd warned him enough times. I gave him quite a slap round his face well somehow or other it leaked out of the office and em I had to go to, I can't think of the name of the head of DSR. The chap that was connected with the, oh I forget what you call them. That go over from the Isle of Wight to Portsmouth, the Hovercraft. The chap to do with the Hovercraft and I thought to myself whatever am I going to tell my mother I was absolutely petrified. So when I, knocked on the door, walked in the room he said, 'Come in sit down Miss Wise.' I was quivering absolutely shaking and I expected the sack and put it shortly he admired me for my guts, what I did, and he really admired me that he promoted me.

Well we were on different scales to do with pay and I was speechless I couldn't say anything then Mr Jones had to go up and 'course he was absolutely reprimanded and he was told one more time that he would get the sack. I didn't even know what promotion meant or anything because all I done I went to college straight from school and I had no idea but I did when I got my payslip it made a difference to me money. Er though I remember that I cant think em no it wasn't Cockrill but I know it was to do with, I know he was up on the fifth floor of the building anyhow I had six months there and then I was transferred back to Whitehall.

Now the main building that I was in all the time was Millbank. Next to it, the building next to it was ICI. Now the building that I spent more or less all my time in at Millbank is where MI5 is as now right by the Thames. It was Thames House right by Lambeth Bridge that's right.

You said a little while ago Gladys that you didn't want to say where these buildings were so does that mean you that had to sign the official secrets act?

14.27

I had to sign twice a day. It was normally they bought the paper which they gave me one when I left, they said they shouldn't, but they gave me one as a momento. I had to sign eight o'clock in the morning and two o'clock in the afternoon after lunch. Normally I had lunch from one to two but when, there was different times, most of the time I was working on my own that I could go and

have lunch when I liked but I liked to be organised. I've always been a very organized person and so em, I usually go from one to two. I think it was about well it was the last two to three years of the war after Berkely Square.

Because I had to go into the Air Ministry down Whitehall 'cos the the buildings now in Whitehall are all different where the Air Ministry was at one time was the Ministry of Health and they built a new building opposite for the Ministry of Health. When I came back to what they say Whitehall but it was Thames House at Millbank there I was put on charts records. It may have been longer than three years and I used to have all these different and that's when er I really literally worked round the clock . I had me own bed there. I could stay there every night but there were certain lengths of time that I just wasn't allowed to go home like with the Battle of Britain, D-Day, the Bouncing Bomb. I remember all about that umm Wallace he was always coming in and all what went on. And of course they did the practice of the Bouncing Bomb over at Twickenham. Though but everything was just top secret but I was keeping the records though, that's the part I did feel sad at different times umm when the Bouncing Bomb took place I stayed down Whitehall cos I had to for quite a few days. And of course that had been going on preparing that for years and years and there were arguments going on, apart from Churchill and Wallace with other big airforce commanders. And I remember the night when the planes left to do that and I don't know, there were two other men with me and we were listening. Well I don't know if it was the rain, we were listening to something and we were literally holding our breath when that was taking place.

17.48

But I kept the records of the planes that were lost, the planes that were hit, I had their files sent to me umm when they were killed and that's the bit I found sad. Cos they were only, well the youngest was about seventeen but most of them were the age of nineteen to twenty-one very, very sad. But everything I had sent to me, even the different notes that Churchill sent to me, like thanking me. Because at the end, I'm trying to put it short all these records that I had to keep I had to hand them over at 12 o'clock on a Friday for Churchill to have them at 2 o'clock after his forty 'winks'. He used to have his nap lunchtime and I was always so organised that I had the week to myself to do it all. But what I did as all the information came in I kept up to date with it every day so there was no rush or panic on the Friday. But very often he used to write and say thank you for this that and the other but everything that you had sent to you, you had to... your name was on it and you had to sign that you had read it and received it, and it went back to the source from where it came from, you know.

19.28

I remember erm when I was waiting that must have been when I came back I wouldn't go to Harrogate, they found me a job in what they called the Registry for about a month before this other job came up and went to Berkeley Square. In the Registry when erm they put out about saving your pots and pans and railings for making er, aircraft and ammunition and one thing and another. And of course a lot of them came to our building but anyhow I was in the Registry which is like a glorified Post Office. And our building, it's, our building was the third safest in London and 'course it was quite something down, three floors down course we had twelve shops in the building, so you didn't have to go out. Well you could do your shopping and hairdressers. Not only that we had a fantastic restaurant which was subsidised and I was having roast beef and two veg every day, I had the best of food.

Reference 2 - 6.41% Coverage

Going back to the work you did in London what about the clothes you wore for work?

Oh, I'll tell you what when I was in the Registry er, course everything was top secret no matter where you were. I can remember it as plain as anything I'd been working there about.... I liked it, it was something different but it wasn't, I wouldn't like to say I'd like to do it permanently because I like something arty to do, but I quite enjoyed what I did. And 'course what I couldn't get used to there was so many people around me and I was used to working on me own. And one day there

was this young chap, well I say young, but short chap come to see me. Everybody was called by there surname and he said, 'Miss Wise', I was sorting out, I think it was the personal post and everything was coded. It didn't matter what it was it was all code, code, code. And he come up to me and said to me 'from tomorrow my code is changing from what you've got to this, so please make sure that my correspondence from tomorrow is sent with this new coding on' and it was Lord Montgomery. He was going over to Alamein, I do remember that and I was only there a few weeks in the Registry and I happened to meet him. And there again I was so shy I was speechless so I didn't say anything though.

23.07

Sorry Allison – what was it? Oh the clothes I wore. Well I was told before I started with the Government that they were requested I wore black. They didn't mind a little touch of white or something like that. This is most unusual I'm in this because normally I wear a lot of black they'll vouch for that in my voluntary work. I love black and I think that's where it originated, I had to wear black, you never saw jeans I don't even know whether they had them in those days. But I've never worn them myself to this day. I had a nice black two piece and yes I always had to wear black and I always remember going to work that's when I went home. I always wore a hat and gloves. The men wore black jackets and pin striped trousers with a shirt and collar, even in the war. And one thing I do remember clear during the war was when I was working at Berkeley Square for six months, I wanted, I had a job with my coupons er really. I wanted a pair of stockings they wasn't tights in those days and from Berkeley Square, course I know my London so well. Berkley Square, I walked from Berkeley Square one lunch time, this was between one and two. Up to Selfridges and I often told some of the directors this in the past at Selfridges this was one lunch time I walked up there to get a pair of stockings.

Reference 3 - 12.80% Coverage

You said you had to wear black for work what about after work when you went out to enjoy yourself?

I didn't go out to enjoy myself. I just went out for a walk. As far as I can remember I was wearing the same clothes, except we had a helmet to put on or something or other and we were up on the roof. Which is the Home Office now, I believe it's the Home office. That was the Air Ministry because I belonged to the ministry, I was called in before the war but I came under the Air Ministry. Because the Ministry of Aircraft Production wasn't formed until the war broke out. During the five years of the Ministry of Aircraft Production I had five ministers. My first minister was Lord Beaverbrook. I've let it be known, I just didn't like him. I loved Sir Stafford Cripps, he was a little man, with his glasses and he just had a different disposition. The only thing is with Lord Beaverbrook he started when the Ministry of Aircraft Production was formed and he had to do.... He was ruthless. He had to do something, we hadn't got the aircraft but the public didn't know that. I mean they were getting bluffed all the time that we were well equipped but we were not. Because I think that the government always lived in hope that the war would never come, it would never come to war. Just lived in hope. That's why we were so badly equipped. But Beaverbrook he did a marvelous job the first year but I just didn't care for him. Because there's one way of handling staff, if you handle them well you get more out of them. I mean, I gave all in whatever I did during the war because I thoroughly enjoyed what I was doing.

But I spoke, it was only two or three months ago, I went to memorial service at Westminster Abbey. I forget who it was in aid of, but it was partly connected with the last war. There was one airman that was badly burnt that was sent to East Grinstead because I had all their names and what happened to them. He looked at me and I looked at him and I walked across to him afterwards and spoke to him. We had a lovely chat together and I saw Winston Churchill looking at me, this was the grandson. So when I'd finished talking to this chap that was really badly burnt, it was terrible. I turned round to Winston Churchill, because he was still glancing at me. I think what it was, at my age I stood out being a woman. He put his hand out to shake hands and said Good

Morning to me. I said, 'I'll tell you something, I've always wanted to speak to you.' He said, 'Oh, that's interesting, why?' So I told him. I said, 'Your grandfather across the road there, I was one of his Chartists', course that was what I was called when I was doing all these charts. When I had all this information on what planes we lost and airmen and everything else and I kept up to date with the information so that I had it ready at twelve o'clock on the Friday. Churchill used to like, instead of going all through papers he used to like to just glance at a chart and see how it was going and so I had a lovely talk with the grandson Winston Churchill that time, that was only two or three months ago actually.

Right so you used to prepare all those charts for Churchill...

36.48

Yeah that's right, that's right

So you were, you were an integral part of what was going on at the time?

Oh I was really the top, top secretary, well I had to sign twice a day and I tell you something, em, what's the name Bletchley Park there only signed once a day, you can check that I know it's right. And another thing is, it's only just been re-filmed, I'd spoken em, in the past, I do know somebody that worked in a firm, em actually it was my son-in-law, that worked for a firm at Uxbridge which is the air RAF. But it was a private firm and it came under the Ministry of Defence actually. And he was one, this a few years ago now, quite a few years ago and I only told the odd person that the House of Commons, got built, but got bombed, Houses of Parliament. *Nobody believed me, but I know full well, was it about, must it be about must be three, four or five years ago, my son-in-law checked, well I wouldn't say a thing like that if it wasn't right. Well it's just come out in a book, for the very first time, I was there when it happened!* And em, I was round the other, I was literally there and it was a Saturday night the weekend, and em I had gone home on the Friday and came back on the Saturday and em, I was down there and it happened and I was really upset to think that the House of Commons had been hit. It didn't affect me Buckingham Palace or even other people's homes, but I don't know the Houses of Parliament, it did. And course I was round by the bridge there and it was all rubble and one thing and another and I wanted to get across and of course there was police everywhere and one thing and another. Roped off and one thing and another and I said to the policeman, 'I've got to get into work'. He said, 'You can't, you can't go in through there.' I said, 'Look'. I showed him my ID and I remember clambouring over all the rubble and one thing and another eh, yes it's true, it's only recently it has been released, that has, eh....

[<Files\\HFRT017 Mary Webb>](#) - § 2 references coded [24.74% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 22.66% Coverage

Do you, in terms of the war effort what did you get involved in?

3:10

Well we belonged to em, em I was a guide in the Ranger and we used to you know the old technical college, technical, Science and Arts Institute. We used to run dances there for the Forces funds and also at the Scout hall in Wolverton and the forces used to come from Horwood. You know where the aerodromes were all around they used to come to the Scout hall to the dances and to the Science and Arts institute to the dances in the lorry loads you know yeah and we raised quite a lot of money that way.

So you were quite young when you were doing that?

Yeah I started work when I was 15 in 1940 and I worked then, everybody then at Wolverton House, which was known then as Old Wolverton House. And it was a Sindea shipping company Sindea Steam Ships London, Limited that was evacuated to Wolverton House during the war. And

when I left the Technical College, they, well before I left they asked if anyone was suitable for junior shorthand typist to go there and work. I went for an interview with my friend and they decided to employ both of us, so we started at, that's where we started work at Wolverton House as junior shorthand typist.

I never knew that was there...

4.15

No, no people say, 'Oh so you worked for the education?' and I say, 'No, I was there before then.' You know, that was where I first started work at fifteen years. Twenty second of April 1940 and I was there till, well the war ended with them you know. And then they did want us to go back to London, but with all the travelling and the expenses of you know accommodation you know and one thing or another we decided not to go.

But how many people were there working there?

Well there was.... there were three Indian men, Mr O' Rourke was the Managing Director, Mr Wanklewaller and Mr Delal were the under ones and I suppose there were one, two, three, four, about five typists, shorthand typists yeah.

So what would you do, the job of the company was what? Was it like arrange cargoes and did they own ships?

Yes, they owned ships which were requisitioned during the war and used to em, we used to do the sort of Provident funds and all that sort of thing yeah and the Managing Director lived at Old Wolverton House, with his wife and three children. They had a maid, who made us pancakes on Shrove Tuesday and they had a very big grapevine there and they used to bring us dishes of grapes when the grapes were ready and that sort of thing.

So there was just the three typists?

No there were about five typists.

Five typists and the three sort of bosses as it were.

Yeah, yeah.

Did, I mean were there any times when you heard about the ships I mean they were, presumably they were torpedoed?

Oh yes one of two were, yes, yes. They nearly all began with the word 'Jala'. J, A, L, A, like Jala Khrishna, Jala Raj, Jala this and yeah.

Reference 2 - 2.08% Coverage

I will tell you another thing we did at the Scout hall, we had these nets and we used to thread, bits of green and khaki material in them you know to go over tanks and things like that we did that for a little while and we also knitted socks and balaclavas, didn't we.