

Friern Barnet & District Local History Society

TRANSCRIPT OF AN INTERVIEW OF MAUD SWAIN BY PERCY REBOUL RECORDED ON 20 MAY 1984

PR This afternoon I am interviewing Miss Maude Swain at her home at 27 Totteridge Lane N20 and while I am interviewing, and in case anyone should wonder, the background noise is her golden Labrador, Jason, who's munching a large chew.

Miss Swain, I know from letters I've seen that you take a great interest in the history of Whetstone in particular and that's what I would really like to talk to you about today, Whetstone and Totteridge area but before we do that I'd like to find out just a little bit about you. Where did your mother and father come from? Were they Whetstone people?

MS No, they came from South London around the Dulwich area.

PR When did they move to Whetstone?

MS They actually moved here in 1900 but Father had been working at St. John's Whetstone since about 1897

PR In talking about your father and about his job at St. John's Whetstone, this brings us on to his profession which was.....?

MS He was a musician. He specialised in organ, piano work and voice production.

PR Did he come from a musical family at all?

MS No. Oddly enough he came from a family of builders and architects. I'm very proud to say my grandfather built Dartmouth Naval College, St. Thomas's hospital and several other prominent buildings around London

PR Distinguished indeed, then

MS He really was quite gifted

PR So he was creative and this creativity came out in your father but in a different way

MS Yes, Father was interested in architecture and building but he had no particular bent that way. Not really Music was his love and music killed him.

PR We'll talk about that in due course but I think you were saying earlier on that he was really a bit of a child prodigy.

- MS He was. He was organist at St. Luke's, Berwick Street at the age of 11. One day he was prowling round London as a child, going into churches to listen to the organ and sneaking in and studying their construction and someone said the organist was very ill so the little boy piped up "I'll play" and he did. They took his name and address and the next day he was told that the organist had, in fact, died and would he like the job. I can produce testimonials from the Church of the Ascension, Lavender Hill and many other very well known churches. Father always boasted that he served all denominations because he thought there was more than one way home.
- PR I'm sure he was right but at the age of 11 he would still be at school, presumably. Did he go to school at Dulwich or round that way?
- MS Oh yes. He went to school there.
- PR Whereabouts? Do you know?
- MS I don't know. It was possibly one of the local forerunners of our present state schools probably and I do know that he had to work very hard and pay most of his tuition fees himself.
- PR He had formal tuition in music presumably? Did he go to one of the schools of music?
- MS No. He was educated privately musically. His university was Durham and he ran several musical colleges whilst he was still in south London.
- PR So were you saying, then, that the reason for him actually moving to Whetstone was because of the job at St. John's?
- MS It was. He was asked whether he would combine the offices of Organist and Choir Master, which had been separate up to then, but on condition that he came to live here and he first of all lived at a house called Ivanhoe, next door to Harry Vardon's. They lived next door. Then when these houses became vacant or were finished, they moved up here. The Vardons, I think, moved first. Mother and Father came up here in 1908 and this room was his studio. He had his organ behind where I am sitting and the piano was over there.
- PR So when he came to Whetstone they were already married?
- MS Yes, very recently married
- PR No children at that time?
- MS No children, no. I was the first child
- PR Were you born in this house?
- MS Yes, I was born in this house. If I might digress, Mother had difficulty in conceiving and she must have been one of the most modern of her day, when one never spoke of these things, but she went to a specialist, Dr. Neetby, a homeopathic man, told him the trouble and I was conceived shortly after that.

PR Were you an only child?

MS No, I have a sister three years younger than me.

PR Is she still living?

MS Oh yes. She lives in Cheam. He has two daughters and I have one great-nephew and two great-nieces and I am expecting another.

PR I see. Well let's talk a little bit about your mother. Where did she come from originally?

MS She came from south London too. They lived very near together in a road called Edith Road but I'm not sure whether it's Dulwich or not. It's the Dulwich area and very near to – is it the Hornby museum? Some such name as that.

PR The Horniman museum.

MS Yes. Father used to go up there for peace and quiet to do his studies.

PR I think you were telling me that you were 76?

MS 75 actually. I'm not 76 till next January

PR And you were born in January ...

MS 1909

PR What is your earliest childhood memory?

MS I've been trying to think of this and I think it was Father taking me up to the road to show me the last horse-drawn bus that turned round at *The Bull and Butcher*. I can remember sitting on Daddy's shoulders.

PR That's a nice memory, I must say

MS I think I was about 2 then because at the same time, I can't quite remember the order, I was told that I was going to have a little baby sister.

PR But of course by that time the trams would have been running to *The Green Man*. 1907 I think they came. Would you have remembered that? They were perhaps running in tandem with horse buses for a time.

MS Yes, they must have been because I can remember that and I can also remember the trams that used to turn round there – at least they could turn round there, and later they were extended to Barnet.

PR Indeed. That would have been 190..... well, a bit later but I think they came through originally in about 1907 or something like that. What do you remember about the house you are living in? This is the same house that you

were born in. What do you remember about its organisation? Did you have any servants, for example?

MS Oh yes. At one time Mother had three servants. She had a housemaid, a cook and a daily who used to come in as a sort of receptionist. She was working quite hard then at voluntary work for the church and looking after children then was quite a thing, you know and she did a little bit in the garden and she was still singing quite a lot but it was considered rather not quite the thing for a mother ...

.....
PR What was her name?

MS Lillie. She was of French and Irish origin and the Lillie comes from there.

PR This is interesting because I wouldn't imagine that your Father was paid all that much for being choir master and organist at St. John's. Have you any idea what his salary would have been at that time?

MS Yes, his salary then was either £50 or £60 a year

PR But presumably supplemented by other work?

MS Oh yes. He was teaching all day and into the evening. Also, Mrs. Goody, the vicar's wife ran a very exclusive finishing school in the vicarage. That's why the vicarage is so large.

PR What year are we talking about?

MS We're talking of the years prior to 1912 when Mr. Goody died and I can remember sometimes being allowed to go with Father out of the school. A lot of the pupils were from the colonies. One or two of them black and the sons and daughters of colonial students. She had little boys as well as girls.

PR What sort of age bracket would that be?

MS They'd be up to about 18

PR Did they board there?

MS Oh yes. A number of them boarded there. Some of them were day pupils.

PR What sort of education would they have got, do you think?

MS Reasonable for the time because in those days, as you probably know, it was the done thing if you possibly could to educate your children, particularly your daughters, at home until they were in their teens. If you couldn't afford that you sent them to a private school. If that was impossible they went to we would call the council school, the church school as it was then. Again, you will know, that was part of the Baxendale gift to the area. They Birleys, actually, who were relatives of the Baxendales, donated the school. I would say it was in the days when your governesses were not necessarily graduates and not

necessarily trained but you had specialists, like Father, in for special subjects. Possibly mathematics, always music, drawing and the like.

PR These were the sort of accomplishments for young ladies, were they?

MS They were, yes. I was educated at home until I was 9 and I was told how lucky I was to have a father who was a teacher and that was quite true. A number of people around here used to educate their children in this way. They had mini schools. The richest father would pay governess or the teacher and one or two little friends would come in and share the lessons and, of course, the expense was shared out. But every effort was then made, in those days, to educate either at a private school – the popular one was Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School or St. Michael's Convent in Finchley. There were one or two other schools roundabout that fell into disrepute because if you went there you might get the Measles.

PR Get the Measles?

MS Oh yes! Measles was prevalent then and if it was known that a private school who had children who had the Measles then it was avoided like the plague.

PR I imagine Measles was no more virulent than it is today, or was it? Was it a killer disease?

MS It could be a killer disease because they hadn't the antibiotics and the remedies to stop the complications.

PR I'm not sure that antibiotics have any effect on Measles.

MS Well they do on the ear.

PR Ah, sort of secondary things. I take your point. So that was to be avoided. Can you name any names of anyone who might have been running these little private schools One of the rich people in the area, you know?

MS Well beyond knowing the vicarage one so well, I don't think I can. I do know that that went on because Father used to go to them and he would have had one here for me but for the war. Of course, when the war came people moved away.

PR Are we talking about the 1914-1918 war?

MS Yes. And then he lost some pupils. When the war came people could no longer afford lessons. It was one of the first things a number of them gave up. Though he still had quite a big clientele, he had to find another job and he was very gifted at figures. He got a job in a shipping firm. A part time job.

PR Do you know the name of the firm?

MS Yes, Brown Jenkinson's. They still exist in the City.

PR I think, from what you say, you would have been comfortably off, compared. What would have been his income from all these activities?

MS It's a difficult question because of the change in money values but I would say about £600

PR On £600 you could afford three servants.

MS Yes. Of course, they had to be reduced to one when the First World War broke out and later on it had to be reduced to a "daily".

PR I'd like to have a look at a kind of typical day in the life of the Swains at about this time. From your own memory what time did the household stir?

MS About 7 to half past.

PR Were your servants resident here?

MS Two of them were, yes.

PR And what was the first chore of the day? Did you get tea in bed or hot water brought up?

MS You got tea in bed and hot water brought up and you also had the fires lit before anybody came down or stirred very much and then lessons started about 9 to half past.

PR You sat down to a breakfast, did you?

MS Oh yes

PR What kind of breakfast would you have had?

MS Porridge, which everybody hated; egg and bread and marmalade.

PR So you had a fairly substantial meal. Tea or Coffee was there?

MS Tea. Coffee was, at that time, not allowed in this house.

PR For what reason?

MS It was considered unhealthy (she laughs)

PR It's probably right, for all I know.

MS I remember the disgust when, at the time of their Golden Wedding, I introduced a coffee pot.

PR All those years later

MS All those years later, oh yes.

PR Anyway, let's get back to a day in the life..... When you mentioned fires I imagine that would be coal fires. How was the house lit?

MS By oil lamps.

PR No gas?

MS Gas came later. Gas then only in what was the kitchen. Oil lamps everywhere until 1932

PR Quite late.

MS Quite late, oh yes.

PR What about cooking? Was that on a range?

MS On a range on the kitchen range, yes and bread baked in the oven. Shop bread was not allowed

PR So the Hillside Bakeries were not viewed with too much favour by the Swains?

MS Oh no, no because it was baker's bread.

PR Did your mother bake bread because I think, curiously enough, that was one of the acceptable chores for the lady of the house.

MS Yes; baking the bread and making the cakes and the pastry.

PR Strange .I suppose they are such intimate things really, aren't they? Now what about hot water. Presumably no hot water taps or anything like that.

MS There's hot water upstairs and there's an old fashioned square tank in the kitchen and the water went up to the bathroom. Oh yes, I can't remember a time before there was a bath.

PR What was the bathroom like? Was it a combined bathroom and w.c.?

MS Yes, still is with a separate w.c. downstairs.

PR Did the servants have a separate w.c. and bathroom?

MS Yes, they used the downstairs one

PR Was that inside or outside?

MS It was outside. I've had it turned inside. I think if they'd been ill they would have been allowed to use the upstairs one.

PR But one gathers, particularly from the *Upstairs Downstairs* type of thing, that here was a very strange relationship between servant and master. Were there certain things that were not to be spoken about in front of the servants? Were you brought up in that tradition?

- MS Oh yes. Any quarrels must not be mentioned in front of the servants, any disputes, any gossip. That was about all, I think.
- PR Do you think there would have been a fairly paternalistic outlook on them as far as your father and mother were concerned?
- MS Yes, very very much so. They were very pleased to come and work here. Mother was very very strict
- PR Strict in what sense?
- MS Everything had to be done perfectly. Every bit of brass had to be clean, door handles, front door every day. She was very demanding but she was very kind and very compassionate and would look after them herself if they were ill.
- PR What about their I'll use the word "welfare". I hesitate to use the word "morals"? Did they have to go to church on Sundays, for example? Was that expected of them?
- MS It was expected of them but I don't think they were absolutely forced to but in those days everybody did go to church
- PR Yes, that's something I want to talk to you about later in view of your close association with St. John's but the servants you had, were they local girls or had they come from other parts of the Country?
- MS No, they were local. There was a dreadful fracas here when the Irish came and to have an Irish servant, that was really infra dig and, of course, when the Catholics came..... I will never forget (laughing).
- PR When you say: "When the Irish came", in what sense do you mean that? I mean was there an influx of Irish?
- MS There was an influx of Irish about the end of the First World War Quite a lot of the houses around here were taken over and let out to the Irish and between the wars there was more of it. Six little cottages across the road here were inhabited by them, taken over by the Council and then let out to these Irish people and I think they had a very raw deal.
- PR Yes. I would think that, to draw a parallel with today, it's rather like the coloureds or the Indians coming into Finchley. I mean there's been an enormous influx of coloureds, haven't there and I think it has to be said, and we would certainly admit that there is prejudice. People look a little bit askance at this.
- MS It makes me very cross because I've had to move around a bit myself and I'm very very sorry for these people. We have an excellent Indian family next door but I feel they are being driven into their shell for no reason whatsoever.
- PR And that would have been something similar with the Irish you were talking about?

- MS Oh yes. They were regarded as thieves and generally given a bad name. Thieves, prostitutes, what you will.
- PR Now talking about Whetstone and the area generally through your young eyes, I think you said you were privately educated here at home till nine. Where did you go from there?
- MS I went from there to Barnet Grammar School and Father was very dissatisfied with my performance. There was a very very unfortunate period in the history of that school when they had a very old headmistress.
- PR Could we have her name?
- MS Abbott. A bit of a crank. She had been an excellent woman in her day but she did become an eccentric old woman. So, I was taken away and I was sent to Finchley County School but we had to call it Mr. Carr's school because the word "county" was dirty socially. That would be about 1919.
- PR So you were really educated at Finchley...
- ...
MS At Finchley County and at the end of my school career I got a scholarship to (I can't make out the name of the place. It's *something du Francais*). I went there for my year. After that, well, school was over until the last years of my army life when I went to college in the evenings and worked for my Social Science degree and then, after that, I finished education.
- PR Well we'll pick those points up in due course, Miss Swain, but I want to come back to these impressions of the area and it's clear to me that you are very observant in these matters but what struck you about Whetstone then, say, compared with Whetstone today? If I may just lead the conversation..... I would imagine that the gap between the rich and the poor was very much greater than it is today, almost certainly. How did that express itself, for example, in the way people dressed and conducted themselves?
- MS The way people dressed and conducted themselves generally. I feel that the general attitude was more like a family than it is now.
- PR Do you mean you cared about.....
- MS Yes, it was a caring time. It was before the days of the health service and I think that far more people minded about the poorer people. There was talk of The Lower Orders but not very much and it was a question of what you were and what you did and what you'd achieved generally rather than how much money you'd got which, I regret to say, is the prevailing attitude today.
- PR Would that have been rather vulgar, would it, to judge things by the amount of money the people had. It was their worth in other ways?
- MS Their worth in other ways, yes. What had they contributed to society.
- PR To be fair this sounds very much to me like a church-induced point of view

- MS No. I would deny that. I would say that the church had a terrific influence round here but I would deny categorically that that point of view is church.
- PR There was a lot of poverty in Whetstone, was there not?
- MS Yes there was. I can't quite explain that. There was poverty but I don't think any more than anywhere else.
- PR I shouldn't really say this but I've got the view, doing a number of interviews with poor and not so poor, that to be poor was an accepted thing. It wasn't such a social stigma as it is today perhaps. I think this is perhaps in a way what you're saying. You know, O.K. you were poor. That's bad luck but do what you can to help people along.
- MS That was the attitude. Yes, that was it and I think people made a great deal of effort to help themselves. I think they could have been helped more to help themselves but I think a great many people didn't realise there were other standards.
- PR You see one very worthy lady once used the phrase to me about the deserving poor which I think is vaguely Shavian but I was fascinated that she should break the poor into two distinct groups: The deserving poor and the undeserving poor which I strongly suspect would have included the Irish people that you're talking about.
- MS Well I think there's something in it. I think that it was a question of we help those who help themselves.
- PR Yes, indeed. That's exactly it, isn't it?
- MS I don't think there was any sort of malicious patronage about it. I'll be as strong as that but I do think anybody who was prepared to work could get work and could get help. I think it was people who wouldn't ask, who sort of regarded people who had, you know, got along a bit and were holding their own as the; "they". I don't think there was too much of that. I do know that Mother did help some terribly hard cases living in what we used to call the Station Cottages.
- PR Thos little cottages behind the station now pulled down.
- MS Now pulled down, yes, and in Rasper Road, Sherwood Street and Green Road to a certain extent, you had a number of these people and you also honestly have a number of people who just drank all their substance away.
- PR Yes, I'll come on to that later because that certainly was a social problem but I think that one of the things that one sees in talking to people such as yourself, that women did have a very very hard time of things then. Would you like to comment on that? I think particularly the working class. It was dreadful drudgery with hatfuls of kids and so on
- MS Oh yes. Birth control in any form was considered indecent. That has nothing to do with religion. It was considered absolutely wrong. It mustn't even be

spoken about and women were expected to take their place in the home. You were terribly modern if you went out to work. Until after World War I every women had to work. There were the exceptions who didn't, and they were despised by those who did.

PR It seems incredible today but really the horizons, one is tempted to say, were limited by marriage which seemed to be the be-all and end-all. I mean the myth of marriage and the myth of the fairy tale ending of marriage, wasn't it?

MS It was and once you had a husband to keep you it was thoroughly indecent to go to work or to do any more than to look after your husband and your home and your children

PR That would have been frowned upon.

MS Frowned upon, oh yes. In fact you wouldn't be socially acceptable if you did that sort of thing.

PR Can I just talk a little more about the area? Would you mother have patronised all the local shops here? Tell me something about the shops around here

MS Oh yes. Whetstone was practically self-sufficient. You had your laundry, you had your coal merchants, you had a choice of grocer, you had a very good baker – Hillside Bakeries forerunner of, which was Harper's shop – you had your tobacconist, your confectioners, your drapers. Dressmaking no. You made your own dresses usually. You had to go to North Finchley for ready mades but you could get practically anything there. You had also, to come on to the professions, you had your doctor, who really minded, you had the District Nurse living next door, who wasn't perhaps as trained as she might have been nevertheless she was a caring person.

PR I'd like to names names as we go through this. The shops I can establish

MS I can tell you the shops. Wills, Cullens, Gallants, you want any more?

PR No, that's O.K. but what about the doctors now?

MS Dr.Imthern at the top of the road

PR Corner of Totteridge Lane

MS Now he moved into a bigger house nearer North Finchley and he was succeeded by Dr. Langford Jones who was instrumental in getting the old Woodside Home replaced by a monstrosity but that's another story. The nurse's name I've forgotten but I did know her quite well. She was very popular.

PR You also mentioned the vet who was one of the great characters of the area. There would be a lot more livestock then.

MS Yes, Mr. Holmes. He lived on Totteridge Common. He used to come round nearly every day with his ambulance. A horse-drawn vehicle divided into

compartments where he collected the cats and dogs. He brought his own supply of medicines. There was rather a wicked joke that he used to charge a prodigious amount for a dose of Epsom Salts but a large number of patients recovered so he did very well.

PR How would you let me him know if your animal had fallen sick?

MS Few people had telephones. You had to go up there or write. He was very good and he had quite a good voice. Father used to accompany him and his wife had quite a good voice too. There were concerts up at Copthall, nearly next door to his.....

PR Yes, I shall want to talk to you about entertainments in the area. I will make that my very next subject but we were talking about the shopping and I'd like to just conclude that section. You were making the interesting point that it really was self-contained and you wouldn't... possibly an occasional trip to the big stores in town?

MS Yes, you went to Selfridges for anything very special but you could get most things in Finchley. We had various dressmakers round the place, and tailors.

MS You would either take the tram or walk. We thought nothing of walking in those days. You would get tram and bus to Selfridges but you didn't very often go there simply because it wasn't necessary.

PR What was wrong with the Underground? Did you frown on the Underground for any reason?

MS Oh no but the Underground came so much later. You see you had the steam train into Kings Cross or Moorgate. It was very much later, about the 1930s roundabout, give or take a year or two, that the Underground came and replaced the steam train.

PR But the buses and trains were plentiful and relatively cheap, were they not?

MS Yes. We could get to school for a penny on a child ticket

PR That was to Finchley County?

MS To Finchley County. You had a season ticket and went by train up to Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School. The season ticket was very cheap. I can't remember how much but you had it term by term

PR Just before I get on to the entertainment side Whetstone has always been famous (or notorious, depending on how you look at it) for its number of pubs. You must have some stories about those. Drunkenness was, on the whole, greater in those days than it is today would you think?

MS I wouldn't think so. It was a bit more obvious and there were fewer young people getting drunk, much fewer. They were mostly old drunks

PR Would you have ever gone into a pub or been allowed in a pub?

MS Goodness no! (*laughter*). Not until World War II and then, of course, when I was doing air raid work as Air Raid Warden and that sort of thing, it was quite the thing to slip into the pub for a bit of chat and a bit of relief. You had half a glass of pale ale or something like that.

PR Was your family teetotal in fact?

MS No, no. they were never particularly keen on drink.

PR Did your father smoke?

MS Yes, and my mother smoked

PR Cigarettes?

MS Cigarettes and father had his pipe and a cigar when he could afford one.

PR Do you remember what sort of tobacco he smoked?

MS Players Navy Cut and St. Julien later, I think

PR Your mother smoked cigarettes so she must have been rather...I was going to say "forward" but that's not what I mean

MS Modern. She was modern in outlook in many many ways.

PR Was she outspoken about such things or was it something she kept to herself?

MS She was moderately outspoken. Things to do with sex, of course, were very hush hush but she had a good knowledge and she would talk with people who really wanted to talk but she wouldn't joke about sex

PR But then you sort of implied that she was what might be called today a social worker so that was part of her social duties

MS Oh yes, that was part of her social duties as the organist's wife

PR Can I come on to this business of entertainment because this is surely one area where there's been an enormous change between then and now? I mean how did you in fact entertain yourselves, let's say around the time of the First World War?

MS Well before the days of wireless, of course, you made your own entertainment. You developed your own talents. That's why a number of musicians weren't doing so well. You learned to play or to sing or to recite. You played Whist, Bridge perhaps.

PR This was all within the household or visiting friends?

MS Visiting friends and a lot of the entertainment again was centred round the churches. You had your various church organisations giving their pantomimes at Christmas.

PR What sort of organisations would these be?

MS The churches had their Sunday Schools, the guides and the scouts, the Girls' Friendly Society – the butt of a good many jokes but nevertheless it did a job and I believe still does.

PR What was it?

MS It was a club for working class girls to meet other girls who belonged rather as patrons than as full members and it aimed to give them somewhere to go, some sort of education in the evenings or the weekends. The people who ran it, ladies and other girls too, used to find out about the lives of their mates and if they needed help try and get it to them somehow or other. It was a Christian based organisation and a little bit starchy. Very worthy – it did a job.

PR I imagine a lot of the girls were in service and therefore came from all over they place.

MS No home other than the place where they lived and it was one way of keeping them off the streets.

PR What else? Let's talk about some of the other entertainments outside the home. I mean did you, for example, ever go to Barnet Fair.

MS Yes, there was the fair. Roundabouts, swings, coconut shies, peddlers

PR Did you every go to the side stalls, the bearded lady and things like that? Were you ever allowed to do that?

MS We weren't allowed but I'm not saying we didn't go.

PR Is it something you remember with affection though, Barnet Fair?

MS Oh yes. I think it's a tradition

PR It was one of the great social events wasn't it?

MS Yes, and people came from far and wide and other fairs too in the area

PR What sort of thing?

MS Fetes and the sort of fairs that you get still at St. Albans every Saturday and I believe there's one in Barnet too.

PR You mean markets?

MS Markets, yes

- PR Then you had church fetes, flower shows that kind of thing?
- MS Flower shows, church fetes, yes
- PR What about theatricals? Was there much of that going on?
- MS Not so much round here. It did go on and there's been a society in Finchley for quite a while, years and years and years. Amateur dramatics in schools. They did a lot more for their pupils and other young people in after school activities.
- PR What sort of plays would they put on? Can you remember this far back?
- MS Most of the plays were classics or semi-classics. *School of Scandal* I can remember. Jane Austen dramatised, quite a lot of that; Shakespeare from time to time. Very little modern stuff. An occasional Bernard Shaw – *The Apple Cart* I can remember.
- PR What about choral societies? I presume your father would have been involved in that, or would he?
- MS Oh yes. A lot of them. I can show you the programmes.
- PR He would have played, presumably, a key role in things like that
- MS Yes. He did a tremendous amount of organising concerts, conducting.....

FIRST SIDE OF TAPE RUNS OUT.

- MStook place in the Congregational Hall in Oakleigh Road which was then a very very large hall. Concerts were held in the church then we had the church room which is now replaced by St. John's Church Hall. The church room was on the opposite side of the road and there were frequent concerts there for men, women and mixed.
- PR Would that be for religious and secular music?
- MS Yes. Secular but usually the more serious type. Not necessarily always but usually.
- PR Did your father have any belief in the need to spread the message of music, if that's the phrase, to the world generally? In other words it wasn't just for the few?
- MS Yes. He was very very keen on developing the voices of all the boys. I can remember that in the church there were the voluntary boys and the paid boys. He used to insist that the paid boys had exactly the same care and training as the voluntary boys.

- PR I've often wondered whether people such as your father ever found anyone with real talent, undiscovered talent. Did he ever mention that at all? I mean a naturally gifted singer, for example.
- MS Yes. There's one round here now. Reggie Ring. I don't know where he lives. I met him in Woolworths the other day and I can remember his rendering of *Oh for the Wings of a Dove*. I can also remember a bit of a tragedy. We had a boy, the son of the Sunday School superintendent. He trained him with loving care and got him to All Saints, Margaret Street as a boarder in the school and when the boy hadn't got father's support he completely collapsed. It was very very sad. He'd have done much better if he's stayed up here.
- PR Did your father ever take you to concerts in town to hear the great singers? Did you ever hear an opera, for example, when you were young?
- MS No, not very much. It wasn't the practice as it is now and in the evenings when he would have done it I had so much homework that it was practically impossible.
- PR Did you have radio and gramophone?
- MS Father hated the gramophone It was a canned voice but he did get reconciled in the end and he would go down to Harry Vardon's house and listen to Harry Lauder occasionally.
- PR The Music Hall was perhaps past its best then. Did you ever see the old time music hall at all? Did you ever go to Holborn or one of those other places.
- MS Not with my parents. On my own I did. It is considered a frightful disgrace to admit you had been to a music hall
- PR Did you ever go to the old Golders Green Hippodrome?
- MS Yes. To go to the Golders Green. It was quite the thing and I used to go there on my birthday and sometimes take a few pals with me.
- PR Any production that sticks out in your mind at all?
- MS I don't think so. *School for Scandal* one year, I can remember that.
- PR Who took the part?
- MS I can't remember
- PR The cinema was in its infancy but there was quite a lot of it, wasn't there? Tell me about the local cinemas you remember.
- MS Next to the *Swan & Pyramids* and the Odeon but I wasn't a great cinema-goer myself. I did go occasionally.
- PR Why was that, because most people love it?

MS Well I think that, there again, having so much to do. I didn't dislike it when I went

PR One of the big events then and, fortunately, still today was Christmas. What was Christmas like in those early days in this affluent household in Totteridge Lane. Was it something that everyone looked forward to?

MS Everybody looked forward to it and the greatest punishment was you would have to go without your Christmas dinner. It never happened but one year I was naughty and so we weren't taken to the pantomime.

PR The pantomime – that was one of the great features of Christmas, was it?

MS Oh yes.

PR Where did you go to see the pantomime?

MS The Lyceum as a rule and I can remember Dick Whittington. Babes in the Wood I liked. I've forgotten where that was on but I remember being taken to see it. Father didn't think it was as good as Dick Whittington

PR But what about Christmas itself? Was it much more of a religious event perhaps than it's become?

MS Oh yes. Very very much more

PR Because your father would have been quite busy at that time in professional terms.

MS Yes, for about a fortnight and for weeks before Christmas he'd be getting ready for it. He would go round with his choir boys, you know. They would be practising carols and a special carol service. We never kept Christmas on Christmas day because of church but we used to have it afterwards on the next day always. That's when we had the turkey.

PR So you had your Christmas dinner on Boxing Day.

MS On Boxing Day, yes because of his commitment to the church.

PR He took the carol singers around the area, did he?

MS He took them around the area.

PR Did you go with him on those jobs?

MS Oh no, it was boys only

PR What sort of area would they cover, just the parish I suppose?

MS Just the parish, yes. The old ladies' home of course, Woodside House and I think more or less generally he'd go round to the church wardens, they'd sign

to the vicar, they would arrange to be there when he was home and that kind of thing and probably the mum of one of them would give them a snack

PR Were you a close family in the sense that you visited each other's homes at Christmas or was it a big family get-together or was it just yourself and your immediate family?

MS Just the immediate family but there were one or two who did come over, father's brothers, mother's sister and so on but they were married and had children of their own and it was a bit of a way to travel so we were mostly here. I can remember the sweets and the nuts and the jellies and the odd glass of port

PR Is there a Christmas present that you remember, that sticks in your mind and gave you a lot of pleasure at the time?

MS My dollies always and in the war, I must tell you, my soldier suit.

PR This was the First World War. Tell me about the soldier suit.

MS The soldier suit was a piece of cardboard tied at the back with buttons all round the front. Some, what do you call them- leggings.

PR Puttees

MS Puttees yes and a hat, a forage cap. I can remember also having a cannon, a toy cannon and after I had that whenever there was an air raid I used to get up and fire this cannon

PR I see. This was your way of defending the.....

MS Yes and I can remember the only time I didn't do it was in March 1918 when the bomb dropped in Totteridge Lane

PR Yes, of course you are only a few yards from that. You remember that do you?
MS I remember it and I remember the school teachers came down to see whether we were alright. I proudly met them out here and took them and showed them the crater

PR What are your actual memories, though? Did you hear the bomb falling or anything like that?

MS I didn't hear it falling. I heard the bang.

PR Where were you when it happened? I mean did you tuck yourself under the stairs or anything during the air raids?

MS No, no. Mother and father used to say the Good Lord would look after us. We were all upstairs. I was the only one that got up.

PR What time did the bomb drop?

MS It was about two I think, in the morning. Between two and three because I can remember it getting light and I can remember the police then who were sort of acting as Air Raid Wardens

PR How did they announce the alert in those days? Was it whistles or something like that? Or was it rattles?

MS No, it wasn't rattles.

PR I think it may have been whistles. No matter

MS I can't remember. It's a funny thing. I can remember the air raids and this was a Zeppelin, of course, and rumour has it (I don't know whether it is true) that he was caught. He dropped the bomb here to lighten his load and went off. I can remember the Zeppelin at Potters Bar. I saw that come down

PR In flames at Cuffley, yes

MS Potters Bar and Cuffley

PR Oh there were two were there?

MS Yes. I can remember the one at Potters Bar breaking and, being a callous little bitch, I just laughed. I can remember them selling pieces of the commander's waistcoat the next day and bits of the fuselage.

PR Really! The commander would have been dead.

MS Oh yes, they were all dead. They're all buried in Potters Bar cemetery.

PR Well, well. You think that was a genuine piece of the commander's....?

MS I think it was

PR One of the things that surprises me about that war is the really virulent hatred of the Germans. I can't pretend that we didn't hate them in the last war but I never cease to be amazed at the loathing and fear of the Kaiser's lot, the Huns.

MS It was dreadful. As a matter of fact I nearly left home because I was friendly with a German boy who wasn't German at all. He was born of an English mother in England but his father was German.

PR A German name

MS A German name, Kaufmann, yes. I was about 19 or 20 then I suppose. My first boyfriend and I got into such trouble but I went teaching.

PR Yes, extraordinary. Bricks were thrown through windows just because people had German-sounding names. You mentioned the Woodside Home which, of course, has intimate connections with St. John's parish and old man Baxendale. What can you tell me about the Woodside Home? What sort of part has it

played in your life? It was originally Baxendale's home, wasn't it? He lived there.

MS Yes, part of the family lived there. There were a number of houses along the High Road: The Woodlands, The Grange, replaced by blocks of flats now, that were sort of country seats, or town seats I should say of businessmen who had their real headquarters up north. Baxendale's was Manchester. When the travel facilities became easier they didn't need these houses and old man Baxendale, having given up his church (you know the story?).....

PR Yes, I do

MS ... bequeathed that as a home for old ladies which was a den of snobbery. There was the upper house and the lower house. The lower house was for the one-time servants of the people in the upper house. Well it was very badly run and this Dr. Landford Jones, fresh out of the navy at the end of World War I, went in one day and fetched the Sanitary Inspector and as a direct result of that they couldn't get it up to standard at all, it was closed for a time. It was facing on to the High Road. It was knocked down and this monstrosity built at the back without any regard whatever for the feelings of the people who lived in this road

PR You're talking about the Second World War now?

PR The First World War. When you say: "this monstrosity" ...?

MS The present Woodside Home.

PR I see. I thought that was built fairly recently

MS It was. It was finished fairly recently but it took a long time to do it.

PR. I see. Well I won't even mention the Ever Ready Building to you because you'll throw an apoplectic fit. Really, it's the horror of horrors, isn't it? That's something that I do want to preserve for posterity – our outrage at that. I must be one of the worst things in London

MS Well I can tell you, before the first Woodside House was demolished father used to be able to leap over the back here, walk through the gardens, for which he had the right of way, to the church and there's a beautiful lake and lovely grove of trees. It was really a nice home. Talk about the monstrosity, the very firm that had that put up (trustees) I asked to value my house because I would like to have moved over to the south of London – came down "huh! This wants modernisation and look where it is". (*laughing*)

PR But going back to the old Woodside Home, were the old servants expected to carry on looking after their erstwhile masters or mistresses?

MS To sort of befriend them and do odds and ends for them. You see what would happen what would be an old maid like me would have had a companion. It was indecent to live alone in this days. And when they couldn't look after themselves any more they would go there and the maid would be dumped in

the downstairs and the other one upstairs and I think they were made to go to St. John's church.

PR You mentioned The Grange, do you happen to remember who lived in The Grange when you were young?

MS It might have been a family Passmore. They lived over there somewhere. I think either The Grange or The Woodlands.

PR The other one that interests me and I haven't found the answer to yet was going down past *The Black Bull* there was the something hotel, it was run by the Italians. I'm sure you'll remember. I think did they go to St. John's school? Just past *The Black Bull* there were some tea gardens. It's an Italian sounding name I just can't remember it for the moment.

MS No, I can't. I know who you mean.

PR I rather think it was an old house similar to The Grange

MS Twentymans.

PR No Twentymans was a bit further down. It was between *The Black Bull* and Twentymans. I suspect it would have been a rather nice old Victorian house which was then taken over as a hotel and tea rooms. It happened to be a centre where many Italian people came on Sunday on their outings to meet other Italians and eat spaghetti and play tennis and other strange things from what I heard. Can you remember any outstanding characters from the area?

MS There was Mellor, the first school master. I remember him vaguely. Then came Berry and after that I sort of lost track.

PR Yes. Mellor was interesting in the sense that his son, who was also a teacher, was the deputy head at Woodhouse where I went. I think he wrote the words of the school song, which are not very good but nevertheless it's stood the test of time. The school did have a big part to play. In talking to some of the pupils of that school as I have, they were very happy days for most of them. I think it's a great tribute to the quality of the St. John's school

MS It was rough, of course and it was a punishment to be sent there if you didn't do your lessons at home or at the other school properly and there were a lot of kids not only ragged but rough and so on

PR I think they gave them a good education by the standards of the day.

MS Yes, they knocked it into them

PR Certainly I have pictures of the kids in the classroom and they seem to be reasonably well turned out

MS And Berry was quite good.

- PR I want to ask you about some of the little farms locally because there were many dairy farms. I think you knew my old friend Harry Broadbelt didn't you?
- MS Yes, and Ellen
- PR That's his wife – no.
- MS There's Broadbelt and Broadbent
- PR I didn't know that. Broadbelt was a farm just where the police station now is. That was his with his old uncle who committed suicide. The A1 Dairies was Mr. de Rivas
- MS That's right. Well he had his farm along the High Road as you go to Barnet on the left and then later on they took on that shop. Then there was the Manor Farm that still exists in Finchley and several odd ones round about and in Totteridge as well.
- PR Yes, there were lots of small private dairies and that sort of thing. They went to the wall I suppose in the '20s. United Dairies bought them up. Do you remember the film studios that were up the road here?
- MS I remember them but I never had a great deal to do with them simply because I was teaching away and working away but they were where The Woodlands is now and they were there at the beginning of the last war. I can remember the gun site of course in the Second World War.
- PR Have you got any memories of Sweet's Nursery?
- MS Quite a lot I can remember Mr. Sweet. He was a great supporter of the church, and Mrs. Sweet and their relatives the Fewings who lived there.
- PR Where did the Sweets live, incidentally?
- MS They lived in Friern Barnet Lane. Which house I don't know but they lived along there and his nurseries, of course, adjoined and his grapes were famous all over the world, as you know. Then there was Harpers where the Hillside Bakeries is now.
- PR Did you know old Mr. Harper?
- MS Oh yes. Father used to sleep there every Friday night. He came up for choir practice and did a bit of teaching on Saturday, slept there Saturday night and went home Sunday and mother used to sleep in Friern Barnet Lane in the Grangers' house. They were sort of caretakers of the church room.
- PR They were a well known family, the Harpers. Any other families you would associate with? What about politics in those days and elections?
- MS Well in this household you spoke only of one and that was the Tory party. I can remember the name of the Liberal man, Robertson. He got in for a bit but

to you know, for the life of me, remember who the Tory M.P. was in those days.

PR No, it's a matter of record but the first one I remember wasn't he the Chairman of the Church Commission, Sir someone. This would have been the Finchley constituency still would it not?

MS Yes, it would have been Finchley then

PR Sir John Crowder was it?

MS That's it!

PR I think he was Member for many many years. Was there very much excitement on election night? Did you ever go to the count or stand outside the Town Hall?

MS No, not at that time but you had canvassers round the door all the time. You were escorted or driven or taken to your voting place and canvassing was done a lot more seriously than it is now.

PR Yes, there wasn't the direct communication than there is now by radio and tele and so on. But you weren't, in that sense, a political activist. I mean you had political allegiance but you weren't a political activist, were you?

MS No, no and you see most of the philanthropic and the caring work was done through the church so the sort of welfare side of it didn't come into it then.

PR You know the old adage "the church is the Conservative party at prayer". Does that follow your understanding of experience. I mean were those people....?

MS For those days, yes but not now. There was only Liberal and Conservative. If you were church you were Conservative because it was the done thing and if you worked for the squire, sort of thing, then you must vote but the chapel....

PR Non-conformists generally.

MS Yes.

PR Well historically that was what it was about wasn't it? I think it was part of the non-conformist tradition to be, well Liberal. It was the only way of expressing it in those days

MS Quite.

PR What do you think it all looking back? You've been here all your life really. You've possibly lived a longer continuous existence in Whetstone than anybody.

MS I'm not the oldest person though. I'm feeling younger than I've ever felt.

PR Why is that?

MS I think because I've no real worries. I'm not opulent but I can live. I have my dog to look after. I have friends. I have interests but through my life there have been a lot of worries and that has told on me.

PR Has Whetstone meant very much to you. You've lived here a long time. Do you like the place?

MS I like it now because I want to fight for it.

PR You think it needs fighting for in this year of Grace 1984.

MS I think it needs a hell of a lot of fighting for.

PR What's wrong with it? Tell me.

MS I think Whetstone itself could be a community as it was having been shaken out and aired as it needed to be but I have the feeling that anybody who's got a few thousand to spare and wants to get a few more thousand can get a plot of land or knock somebody else's buildings down and obtain a plot of land with no trouble at all and its only a matter of form to get planning permission to put it up. They may be very rebellious indeed

PR No, we share views entirely on this.

MS But that is my feeling

PR So, by implication the old Whetstone wasn't like that. It was the sort of balance that you liked? Is that what you're saying?

MS Yes. There were things that wanted improving. There were people who were very poor. There were people who needed to be told to pull their socks up and help themselves but there was a feeling of friendliness. It mattered what you were, how you tried to live your life, how sincere you were. Now all that matters is how much money have you got.

PR Why do you think it's changed then?

MS Well I think that people have improved financially, bought houses around here and sort of tried live another type of life, introduce themselves into another sphere without the necessary background.

PR Yes. Whetstone, like Finchley, is extremely cosmopolitan now. I mean we have all races and religions and creeds

MS But I don't think that that matters. I think it's the attitude of man to man.

PR I would like to agree with that but I'm not sure. I think most people find it difficult communicating or being sympathetic with someone of a different religion or race.

- MS Maybe I'm lucky that way because I've had to meet people in my army life, in my business life, in my life as a social worker. I think people could make more effort. I hate to see people shunned purely for the colour of their skin.
- PR Oh yes. I'm not agreeing or disagreeing. I am just wondering if it is a fact of life. You mentioned your army life. This is something we should talk about.
- MS Well I was in the army. I taught.
- PR What sort of years were these?
- MS I joined up in 1941. I came out in 1950. I served as an officer in the WRAC, as a regimental officer and on staff duties. If I might say so I had to refuse promotion above captain because my parents needed me here. Father had become ill and then mother needed care and support. I needed to be here.
- PR Is it a time you look back on with affection because it's a rather unusual career isn't it?
- MS Army? Yes but I was with people, you see and helping people until I had to ask for a staff job in the Foreign Office but even then I was happy. It was interesting and I was studying for my social science degree and therefore I was able to do something I liked, again, with people.
- PR So if you could go back and have the time all over again would you have things differently at all? Or have you been happy and contented largely?
- MS Well, I've had a variety of jobs. I've had to adapt myself to circumstances. I would have loved to carry on with my dramatic art but unfortunately the war prevented that. Elocution and drama.
- PR Let's talk about your aspirations to drama. When did it manifest itself?
- MS I'd always taken a great interest in vocal work and I had an ear for music, but I had a peculiar nerve where performing was concerned. I was all very well sitting down beside father playing but when it came to trying to do anything outside –no! But with voice production it was a different thing and I realised, as father did, there is a good many poor little rabbits could be helped to lead a normal sort of life by being taught to speak and express themselves and a good many minor physical illnesses can be cured by breathing correctly and all that sort of thing. So I went to the Guildhall School of Music and took a job (very poorly paid) at Clark's College so that I could get up and down to London to lectures and my classes. Unfortunately, in 1939 when the war came and father had a reverse financially I just had to give up a lot and just as I got my full qualifications I had to slip out of it and of course once you lose that you've lost it forever more. I'd be no good as a performer.
- PR But you would like to have taught drama?

- MS I would like to have taught it, yes. I do a bit of verse speaking occasionally now in a purely voluntary capacity. I feel it's a shame to waste all that experience.
- PR Yes, tell me about that on this rather sad day when John Benjamin has died. Does poetry, for example, mean very much to you?
- MS Oh yes, it still does. I'm afraid I haven't kept up with the times all that much but the poets I love, the poets with good rhythm and that sort of thing....
- PR The ones you can really enunciate?
- MS Yes. Kipling I loved Tennyson – I know it's old fashioned. Thomas Hardy.
- PR But on the whole these are people with something to say.
- MS Exactly. They had a message to put over.
- PR Is there anything else you would like to talk about before we close? Any hobby-horse, or bete noir?
- MS The borough accounts is the bete noir. I hope their left ears are all burning.
- PR I think on that delightful note we'll end. Thank you very much indeed.

Transcribed by Patricia Cleland
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