



1. Evacuation



2. Gas Masks & ID Cards



3. Rationing & Memories



4. Questions & Answers

The following is Part 3 of a transcript produced from a tape recording made in 1983, when Margery Kelsey (née Chambers) spoke to a class of children at Pyrford Junior School in Surrey, about her experiences during the Second World War.

Part 3 (of 4) - Rationing and Memories

Teacher: “Can you explain to them what you remember of rationing. Because we’ve done a little bit of work on rationing.”

Margery Kelsey: “Rationing, oh yes, right now, rationing, that was very severe. You know..... it’s no good me talking about half-pounds now is it, because they all know grams. You know a pack of butter let’s talk it like that. That used to be half a pound (I believe it’s something different now). But a pack of butter, if you cut it in half and then half again so you get a quarter of it. That normal pack which you’ve got at home, that’s how much one person had for one week, that small piece. Again I was going to say an inch, but you’re all into centimetres aren’t you (this tells on me doesn’t it). So it was just a very small piece about as wide as that and as deep as that.”

“Then you had margarine, you had twice as much margarine, you didn’t have jam you had a book of coupons so you could buy with – you probably had about sixteen coupons a month and it would be perhaps four for a jar of jam, more for a tin of syrup. A lot of poor people bought syrup because there was very little sugar. So you sweetened things with syrup. Fancy just think of it, sweetening your tea or coffee with a spoonful of syrup. There wasn’t much sugar probably about half a pound, a small bag of sugar for a week. But one’s mother usually did all the shopping and had it all in bulk and it was shared among the family.”

Teacher: “Did you find you went hungry?”

Margery Kelsey: “We didn’t go hungry, no. But it was said afterwards that we were all a much fitter lot of children, because we hadn’t eaten all the things that you probably eat now. There were no crisps; difficult to get sausages, you only had a very small amount of meat a week. There were always vegetables and if you could grow your own then you did eat vegetables, a lot of vegetables. There was bread, some people made their own, but you didn’t buy cakes; and of course there were no sweets. We didn’t have any sweets for about two or three years; and we all used to say what’s happened to all the sweets. And then they brought in a sweets rationing system and you had coupons. If you had a grannie, well that was fine because grandmas never wanted theirs they always gave them to their grandchildren. But, if you could find the sweets you could use your coupons on them.”

“And clothing. Now I went to a school where we all had to wear a school uniform, but as the war went on, obviously you couldn’t buy these things so you just wore anything. But that was difficult because as children, as you know your feet grow and you have to have new shoes and if you’d only got a certain amount of coupons left and they had to last a whole year. You had to have the essentials: such as shoes and a coat for the winter,skirts, trousers; and boys, well that was difficult because they were always growing out of them or getting holes in them, so that was very difficult. But somehow we all got by..... somehow.”

“I have brought some pictures and..... oh yes, I was going to say, milk was a difficulty, so the government arranged - you know they had all these big arrangements - to have powdered milk (now it wasn’t a bit like - what’s the thing we have today in powdered milk - coffeemate) it wasn’t a bit like that. It looked the same - it was a creamy white powder, but yuk! It wasn’t very nice. And it went lumpy and you could taste the powder. But, we cooked with it. The same with eggs, you couldn’t get eggs. You were allowed one a week. But often the grocer didn’t have any eggs. So you had a similar tin, exactly the same only it was red. And that was a dried egg powder. It was....well we got by. It was not too bad when we scrambled it. But you couldn’t have a boiled egg, you couldn’t have a fried egg, you couldn’t have a poached egg. You could probably make an omelette but it was a bit powdery. But.... as I say, we got by. Rationing was very difficult”.

Teacher: “You had to make do didn’t you?”

Margery Kelsey: “Oh you did make do. We had things such asclasses forevening classes “make do and mend” and you took all your last year’s or three or four years old clothes along and you’d be told how to cut it down for your younger children, add to it, and you know we did;you put pieces in at the bottom, you cut perhaps off a..... cut the hem, inserted a wide piece of matching - not matching - a contrasting material and then put the hem on again. And it didn’t look too bad. You let it out the same way. I don’t know what the boys did with their long trousers. But, well people got by; I expect your grandparents would be able to tell you some tales on that”.

Teacher: “Thank you.”

Margery Kelsey: “When I left my billet in Wales they gave me a very nice book, it’s a birthday book and they wrote in it, this lady did, fifty years ago, “to remind you of the days you spent living with us during the evacuation of children from London in...” and she left a, it was “in” something “war”. We didn’t know then what it was going to be called so she wrote in “in Hitler’s war”. But in fact we now know it as the Second World War. And she wrote in Hitler’s War 1939-1945 (but she couldn’t fill that in, I have since written that in. So that was rather a nice memento I had from the lady I stayed with in Wales”.

Teacher: “And is that for writing all your birthdays in?”

Margery Kelsey: “Oh yes..... and I’ve done just that, it’s full of all my children’s and grandchildren’s birthdays, in those days it was all my school friends. So you can imagine - it’s now fifty years old. I’ve never had another strangely enough. So that’s rather a nice memento that I’ve kept all this long time.”

“At my school we used to have a magazine every year, this was before the war and during the war and then when I left my school I joined, the old,my school was called the Roan School, so it was calledthe Old Roan Association and I go to it from time to time, but I certainly subscribe and get a magazine every year; and just a few years ago there was a photo printed in this - this was 1985 - and it said on it “Ammanford Park” (that was where we were in Wales) “1940” and it mentioned (because it was a boys’ school as well as a girls’ school I went to, but we were two separate schools) and there were five boys there and four girls and the editor asked “can anyone name who these girls are?” One of them was me - so I wrote.”

"In fact it was my younger brother who was that baby in the war. When he grew up he went to the same school and he got this magazine and he saw it. So I wrote to them, and in fact there's lots of writings in here about: how we all managed during the war, what we did and how we did it. And then also about VE Day which was the end of the war and all the great excitement. In fact this one girl – she's not a girl now – she wrote: "I was a Roan girl during the war years. The school had been evacuated to a small mining village called Ammanford. The local grammar school girls called us 'Blackuees' because we came from a large dirty city." And I remembered that when I read it, they did call us 'Blackuees' not evacuees..."

"I made lots of friends and I kept up with the people I stayed with right until recently when the lady died. And my younger sister she still keeps up with the family she was with, and she goes to visit them, they come to visit us. So lots of good came out of it. We did join in and thoroughly enjoyed all that part of it. But it was very sad at the time. Lots of youngsters did cry and want to go home. Yes – my sister did."

