

Friern Barnet & District Local History Society

INTERVIEW BETWEEN PERCY REBOUL AND MAMIE PALACE AT 72 WINDERMERE AVENUE, SOUTH KENTON 20 JULY 1982

PR Mamie tells me that she was born in the year 1909 which makes her 71 and my particular interest, and I hope it's hers as well, is to talk about The Orange Tree at Friern Barnet where she used to live and work. But, before we do that Mamie, I'd like to find out where were you born?

MP In Kilburn in Salisbury Road, I think, no Clarence Road. I beg your pardon, Clarence Road.

PR And did you go to school locally there?

MP For a little while, yes. I went to a sort of kindergarden thing

PR No particular memories of that?

MP Not very much, no. Oh yes, Miss Cheek. She was the headmistress at this school that I went to.

PR What was the name of this school?

MP I can't remember, a little private school tucked down in one of those roads off Willesden Lane. An older pupil used to take me there and bring me home, if she remembered.

PR You have a memory of Miss Cheek, then?

MP Oh Miss Cheek. Yes. She was a little woman. I didn't like her.

PR Was she strict?

MP Yes, she hadn't got a very nice manner from what I remember of her

PR What did your father do for a living?

MP He came from a very large family of 12 and my grandfather was a caterer

PR In the Kilburn area?

MP Well, Westbourne Grove first of all and then he took the Prince of Wales pub which was in Willesden Lane. I suppose he had it on a lease. I can't remember. I don't know. It was a little bit complicated because it was attached to the cemetery there in Willesden Lane and I think the ground was owned by the Ecclesiastical

Commissioners. I remember in the 1930s we tried to buy the lease or something. I suppose it would have been a 999 year lease. That was it; that was the involvement.

PR But you remember your grandfather do you?

MP No. He died

PR And had your father taken the pub over?

MP Yes, my father and one of his brothers were managing partners in the firm.

PR What year did he take it over?

MP Um...I really don't know but my father decided that there wasn't enough in it for two people to be managing it and of course all the rest of the family were in on the business so they all shared the profits so it was not a very happy arrangement.

PR Was your father married by this time

MP Oh yes, yes. I was born in 1909, you see and he being the youngest of the two that were running the pub he had to go into the army. I'm sorry I'm a little bit..... it's something that I'd forgotten all about.

PR This is designed to stir these ancient memories

MP And so he went to....Of course he wasn't a very strong, healthy man. He went to Mill Hill barracks in the Middlesex Regiment and I think he was in the cookhouse there which he didn't enjoy very much but he made the best of it. We used to go out to Mill Hill and see him.

PR Do you remember how you got to Mill Hill in those days Mamie?

MP I can't remember. I think we went on these open top tram things. They were very exciting. We used to like that.

PR That would be what, horse drawn?

MP Oh no, not horse drawn. No they were, I suppose electric, weren't they?

PR The trams were certainly.... They would have gone part of the way I suspect. Probably to Golders Green?

MP Yes, probably to there I think or probably to Church End, Finchley. I really can't quite remember how we got there. We lived in Clarence Road which was another road near the pub at that time and then when my father came out of the army he decided he would set up on his own and he took The Orange Tree at Friern Barnet.

PR Now before we get to that and this is, as they say, where the story really starts, tell me a bit about your mother. Was she a local girl?

- MP No, she and my father were cousins. She never talked much about her background. She had a brother and I think they lost their parents when they were very young and she never really spoke about it very much. The brother was killed in the..... he was in the army and he was killed in the world war.
- PR So you were saying then that your father decided he would take over The Orange Tree. What year would that be?
- MP That was 1919
- PR So you were then 10 years of age. Can you remember anything about the move?
- MP Oh yes. We had an Irish barman a The Prince of Wales. I don't know what his surname was. He was a great big chap and he always wore a bowler hat. It was a very difficult time and you couldn't get a moving van just like that when you wanted it. You had to book it up about 5 years in advance. So he knew a chap who knew a chap who'd got a horse and cart. It was covered in. So Pat comes round with the driver of the horse and cart, Pat wearing his bowler hat you see, and they loaded up as much of the furniture as they could on to this thing and then the horse wouldn't start. So Pat was asked to take the reins and run up beside him, you know drag the horse to get him going, which he did and of course lost his bowler hat. Finally I think they arrived at The Orange Tree about 5 hours later. We'd already got there and we went on the tram.
- PR So it was a bit of a disaster
- MP Yes, it was funny
- PR What about moving in. What were your first impressions?
- MP It was ever so exciting, you know, walking all round the house. It was peculiar, the way it was built.
- PR How was it built? Tell me about it.
- MP Most of the rooms were on the front of the house but there was one in the middle floor which was the spirit room and then the kitchen was also on that level. Then upstairs there were about 6 or 7 bedrooms, one of which was on the back over the stairway that came up at the side of the house. You know, a tradesman's entrance type of thing and I think that room was more or less over the back of it.
- PR Can I get this clear, Mamie, because it probably was fairly different to what it is today, I imagine. But the working part of it, i.e. the pub itself, how many bars were there on the ground floor? The bars presumably were all on the ground floor?
- MP Oh yes, yes
- PR What sort of bars did you have?
- MP Well there was a Public Bar, a Private Bar and a Saloon Bar
- PR Were they all divided with partitions?

MP Yes, yes and the Private bar and the Saloon Bar had these little swivelling window things, you know the wooden thing going round so the people in the other bars couldn't see each other. I can show you, I've got some pictures in the box which might depict those.

PR So you had three bars downstairs. Did each bar have its own entrance?

MP Yes, from outside

PR I have an unhealthy interest in lavatories. There were lavatories on the ground floor as well?

MP Yes. When we went there there wasn't a ladies' toilet. Ladies didn't use public houses. There was a gentleman's sort of double urinal and a sit-me-down one and a washbasin I think. There was a skittle alley there as well

PR Oh was there. Tell me about that. In the back was it?

MP Yes

PR Was it a separate building?

MP Not really no.

PR It was closed in though?

MP Yes. It was adjoining with the Billiards Room

PR So you had a Billiards Room and a Skittle Room?

MP Yes

PR So I'm getting an impression now of the 3 bars and at the back of those and presumably anyone in the pub could use these sports facilities? You had a Billiard Room. How many tables were there?

MP Two

PR Two. And then you had a skittle alley as well?

MP Yes, that adjoined it. That was a club, that was run as a club

PR A private club or could anyone in the pub use it?

MP No, no. They had to be members. It was like Freemasonry you know. At one time it was a very flourishing thing and they used to go and play matches with other pubs. The freemasons at Hampstead, I think. That was one of the places that used to have a skittle alley as well.

PR Was there anything Masonic in the thing?

MP No, no. There was a Skittle Association and there were quite a number of trophies attached to it and that sort of thing. In fact I think I did have one of the miniature trophies in here.

PR We'll have a look at that a bit later but when you say skittle alley, I mean this was the old fashioned country skittles of the nine wood.... Not a table skittles? This was a wooden ball?

MP Yes and it had a thing round with rope. I don't know quite how to describe it

PR Was that to pull the skittles up?

MP Yes, to stop them because some of the cheeses that they threw were ever so heavy. They didn't throw a ball, it was a cheese, a round...

PR I've never heard of that. Like a flat Edam cheese?
At this point Mamie has left the room and has come back with one of these cheeses and I think the best thing I can do, because I've never seen anything quite like it, is to describe how this was done. She has explained it to me. The cheese is a disc of very hard wood shaped like an Edam cheese. It's about 12" wide and at its widest point is about 3" thick, made of hardwood and very heavy and she tells me that it was held on the flat of the arm, really rather like a discus I imagine, between the elbow and the wrist and I imagine held on to by the fingers and it didn't touch the floor at all, it was hurled straight at the skittle and in really was just like a discus throw. Did they spin on one leg or anything like that?

MP No, they took about two or three steps and then threw it.

PR As they say, you live and learn but skittles you were saying was a popular sport. How many were in a team?

MP Um.....

PR No matter but you played other pubs in a skittles league?

MP Yes. I believe there was one of the pubs in Whetstone. The Black Boy

PR The Black Bull?

MP The Black Bull, I think. I believe they had an alley there many many years ago.

PR Yes they did. I have heard they did so that would confirm that. So, Mamie you were describing, when you moved there, the basic layout of the pub with these 3 bars and you were talking about the Billiard Room and the skittles. What about the Billiard Room? Did they in fact play Snooker as well?

MP Oh yes.

PR Was it a very popular game?

MP Oh yes. I think they paid so much an hour for playing a game and we used to employ a marker at one time.

PR What did he do? Clean and brush the tables?

MP Of course the tables had to be ironed. There was a long flat iron. Oblong iron.

PR How was the table lit?

MP Gas first of all, about 3 green shades along if I remember rightly.

PR Was that suspended over each table?

MP Yes. Actually amongst my things there are some pictures of it I can show you.

PR I should love to see those. Now I think you were saying there was a second floor and what interested me is that you mentioned the words “spirit room”. Tell me, how many floors were there in the pub? Three?

MP Three

PR So can we go through the second floor then. What was there when you moved there in 1909.

MP We would call it our first floor and you went up the staircase, twisting up and the first thing you met when you got up the staircase was the bathroom and toilet and then you went towards our lounge and then the corridor turned sharp left and there were two bedrooms on the right and we came to the dining room then and that was the end of that corridor and opposite the bedrooms was the Spirit Room.

PR What was the Spirit Room

MP Where there was like a high counter thing against the wall then there was a cupboard which had some pumps, peculiar sort of pumps and taps and apparently spirits were in these vats.

PR The vats were in this special room?

MP Yes and they were piped down to the counter

PR I see so it wasn't like the beer drawn up from the cellar. It came down

MP Yes. I remember how the tubes came down. We used to turn the tap on and the.....

PR How did you measure them out then?

MP I suppose we had a measure. Then very shortly afterwards they brought in these optic measures and things. I don't know whether I'm right in saying that we actually used it as a Spirit Room. I think probably the days of draft spirits had gone.

PR Because that was the point you were implying, of course, a most interesting one because today, and I suspect for many years, it's been in a bottle, large or small, with one of these optical measures. The Spirit Room you are describing would have been the old style with Brandy in casks

MP Yes

PR But did your father or any of the potmen ever go in there to refill the

MP No, no. I don't think they ever used them

PR It sounds as though it must have been discontinued

MP Yes. I know the pump things were in the cupboard there and I think eventually they were taken away. I don't know what happened about the barrel things, whether they were left in or what. Can't remember that

PR So that's, then, the second floor is it?

MP Yes

PR What about the third floor?

MP That was the bedrooms. You went up this staircase, they bent a bit, and on the right was one bedroom then leading out of that was a long loft which took some of the water tanks and there was a window looking out the back, just a skylight. There were supports half way round the middle and eventually my mother had that covered in with some sort of...not cardboard exactly, I forget what they call it. Not hardboard

PR Chipboard?

MP Yes, something like that and it was made into a room when mother married and then he had a son of course and they used it as a nursery.

PR So it was fairly large accommodation.

MP Oh yes.

PR Had it at one time been an inn do you think?

MP Could well have been because it was very old historically

PR It is very old and it surprises me. I mean I

MP It goes back for.....

PR Well I think to Tudor times

MP Yes, I think it must do

PR But were you aware of the great age of it when you went to move there?

MP It didn't impress us

PR It had obviously been rebuilt. Whether it had been rebuilt completely or.... Did you ever see anything really old there that struck you as something from past ages?

MP Not really, no. 1909 I think that it was rebuilt. I think there are some pictures amongst the collection.

PR Of the previous one?

MP Yes, I think so.

PR. I'd certainly like to see those. So when you had it it was only about 10 years old when you moved in so it was fairly new then.

MP Yes. And there were the stables and things along that side.

PR Tell us about the stables

MP There was a garage and stables and one or two other rooms and places and there was a man named Jovey Finch who was a greengrocer from The Freehold. He had the stables and they used to keep their horses there, obviously, and their carts and then there was another part at the end and at one time people named Blackmoor and Emmerton had it. They used to produce their photos there. I think they were commercial photographers in some way or other and they used to do their work there.

PR Was that behind the main road? Behind the pub?

MP Yes. Not actually behind, it ran along the side.

PR I'd like to get that clear. Along the side, that would be down Friern Barnet Lane, would it?

MP Yes, that's right. I could draw you a rough little plan

PR No, no, that's alright because we'll have a look at the pictures presently and that will make it absolutely clear. Now, did your father employ any people or was it essentially a family concern?

MP Oh no, we had staff

PR How many?

MP Sometimes two or three barmen, I think and we took over an elderly barmaid, Miss Walkington. She'd been there many years and she used to have her hair done in a peculiar hairstyle with a bun on the top

PR Like Old Mother Riley?

MP Yes. Obviously it had been done in that style for so many years. It very rarely changed when she said could she use the bathroom to wash her hair. When she came out it still stood out. It didn't go flat (*Mamie giggles.*) She was quite a character. She'd apparently had an unhappy marriage or something. The people that had the pub before us, the Greens, she worked for them and we took her over and she worked for us for a few years.

PR The Greens. So you took it over from the Greens. Where did they go to, do you know?

MP I can't remember whether father Green died there. They had a house in Woodside Park, if I remember rightly. They had a son named Frank and I believe they had a couple of daughters but I know my brother and I were very impressed with Frank because he was a few years older than us. He went to Hatfield College. I can remember that and he took us over to the local sweet shop, Mr. Carter's, and while we bought a couple of penn'orth of something he bought half a pound of Dukes Jellied Almonds. Funny how you can remember things like that. We were so impressed. Well we were so much younger than he was of course. This boy with all this pocket money to buy all those Dukes Almonds.

PR So you had one brother, did you?

MP Yes

PR One brother and that was your family?

MP Yes

PR You were 10, presumably you were still going to school?

MP Yes

PR Where did you go to school when you moved into the area then?

MP The girls' grammar school which was in Torrington Park, the Friern Barnet Lane end. It was the first house along and part of the grounds overlooked Friary Park.

PR What sort of education did you get? Was it a good one?

MP Very poor, I thought. I didn't like it very much

PR Where did your brother go? Was he older than you?

MP Yes, he was 15 months older. He went to the boys' grammar school in Friern Barnet Road which is opposite St. John's church. I don't know whether it's still there. I suppose it is.

PR I'm not sure. I know the one you mean though

MP Next door there was a And then Barclays Bank used to be on the corner of Ramsden Road, I believe it was.

PR Let's talk about the area now Mamie and how you remember it. Now you know the pub was in a very commanding position on Friern Barnet Lane with the, what today is, the bus stop but what was it like when you first moved there?

MP If I remember rightly those shops which are along Woodhouse Road – don't believe they were there when we first went. I think that was rough ground. It had been a mansion or something there, I think at one time.

PR What was that crossroads like? Tell me about it in your own words.

MP The old Priory, which is now the Town Hall, I think that must have come out because the road was narrower there.

PR The house was still standing then, though.

MP Yes, yes. Of course it was the Council Offices then

PR Oh was it? When you moved in it was Council Offices?

MP Yes. It was long before they built this lavish Town Hall

PR What was Friern Barnet Lane like because they are fairly modern houses down next to the pub

MP I think, if I remember rightly, those on the left weren't there when we...

PR I would have thought so. But was the road Macadamed or was it just a dirt road?

MP No, I think it was Macadamed the next to where our property finished it was an open piece of land with a great dip in it. I don't know whether it had been a sandpit or something. Funny how these things come back to you. I hadn't thought about that for years.

PR It was a big pit, was it there?

MP Yes, if I remember rightly, a sort of sandy pit

PR As a child did anyone suggest what it might have been?

MP I can't ever remember.

PR What about Woodhouse Road in those days? Was that fairly countrified?

MP Yes. None of those shops were there then. There was only Queens Parade which on the opposite side.

PR Was that there then?

MP Yes. Witherick's which was a sort of funny drapers shop, a double-fronted shop.

PR Is that coming down Colney Hatch Lane, do you mean?

- MP No, no. In Friern Barnet Road, opposite where the Town Hall is and there was a butchers, you know the whole parade there and there was a sweet shop run by a man named Carter. His grey hair stuck out like a golliwog. I remember Frankie Green took my brother and I over there in the afternoon to introduce us to Mr. Carter. I told you about the Dukes Jellied Almonds.
- PR What other shops were along that parade?
- MP The greengrocers, Woodings, I think. The chemist. An old man named Cox had the chemist and I think that was a post office
- PR A post office come chemist. That's not usual. What was the chemist shop like in those days?
- MP He was a most unsanitary looking man. Awful. It was him and his wife.
- PR Would you buy medicines there, for example?
- MP We always gave it the cold shoulder if we could. Then just to the corner was a biggish shop which was a house agents, Boustreds, and that's where the shops finished then until you got round to the then there was the garage around the corner. I think there was an open bit of ground after the Boustreds place was.
- PR Not to worry because we can always get that from old directories. Over the Colney Hatch side, Colney Hatch Lane was still there. What was down there, do you remember?
- MP I don't think there was anything. Those houses on the right, I don't think they were there.
- PR No. What about on the left, though?
- MP Yes, was it Priory Villas? I can't remember. They were there, I know, the little houses.
- PR There were in fact some little thatched cottages there. I wonder if you remember them? I'm not quite sure when they were demolished but I have an old picture of them. Two very nice fully thatched cottages on the left as you went down, where the garage is today on Colney Hatch Lane.
- MP I can't recall those. A little further down was a big place which was a school for naughty girls, apparently, so they said. I think that had a laundry and that sort of thing for them. I'm very vague about them but I do remember the school for naughty girls. I think eventually Bayers the medical people took it over for something or other.
- PR Were the trams coming through at this time?
- MP Yes
- PR So down Woodhouse Road from North Finchley there would be trams? What do you remember about the trams?

MP I remember driving our Peugeot car round by Woodhouse School and got caught in the tramlines and car went over on its side.

PR That was a bit later, presumably

MP Yes but that was the strongest memory I have of Woodhouse. I think those houses, they were sort of council type houses, they were there on the right.

PR I will come on to those in a minute, Mamie but I would like now to talk a little bit about the sort of people that you were meeting. Have you got any memories of the sort of people that used to come into the pub? You were obviously very young then. Did you help in the pub even at that young age?

MP I used to force myself to...I had to think of an excuse to get down to speak to my mother so that I could see what was going on.

PR What do you remember? What interested you about it?

MP I don't really know. I can't put my finger on it really

PR Well, as you got older then. Let's go up into the twenties. Presumably as you got older you were expected to help in there, were you?

MP Yes. Unfortunately not long after we went there I became ill. I had tubercular peritonitis in the stomach which they didn't think was curable but it was eventually. I went to very good specialists and I was taken down to a nursing home at Westcliffe. No, I was taken ill when I was at Westcliffe, that was it. My mother realised that I was ill. I had a big extended tummy and she spoke to the people in the hotel and they recommended a doctor and they took me to him and he was very nice. He came up to The Orange Tree eventually. I had to stay down at Westcliffe.

PR How old were you then?

MP I suppose about 11 I would think. Soon after we went there. This trouble was in the stomach. I wasn't allowed to walk very much more than necessary so I had to be wheeled about in a spinal chair so that I could get all the rest that was necessary. I used to be parked outside The Orange Tree in this damned chair.

PR What is a spinal chair?

MP A long, wicker basket thing. Flat. An outside pram. Have you never seen one?

PR No. So it was rather like a stretcher was it. You were out flat, were you?

MP Yes. Most of the people that had to use them were laying really flat but I didn't have to. I just was able to have my shoulders up a little bit.

PR Tell me about the people you used to meet. The sort of people that came into the pub. What sort of customers did they have?

MP Mostly very pleasant and nice. Nice class of people.

PR Presumably it was an age of much more class consciousness than today. Presumably the public bar had the working class people? Tell me about them.

MP Some of them were very nice and there were one or two characters

MP I can't for the moment and I used to go round and play Dominoes with some of them. They were jolly good old chappies.

PR What did they do? What sort of people were they?

MP Navvying types, you know. Some of them had their little clay pipes which they smoked upside down. Did you ever see that?

PR I didn't. Did the pub actually supply clay pipes?

MP Yes. I don't remember whether we sold them or gave them or what.

PR But you sold the tobacco as well?

MP Yes. Old Holborn

PR Was that pre-wrapped?

MP Yes it came in a roll and I think it was about tuppence ha'penny if I remember

PR I think some pubs used to give the clay pipe away. Do you remember where you got the clay pipes from.

MP No, I can't. We used to get a lot of our cigarettes from a firm named Robinson. I think they were wholesalers in that block opposite the main entrance to Colney Hatch. Do you remember that block of shops there?

PR Yes

MP I think there was a wholesale tobacconist there that we got our stuff from.

PR Going back to the Public Bar with these reeking tobaccos, were pipes at that time more popular than cigarettes?

MP I think they were but I think cigarettes were coming into their own more. They used to have Woodbines in fives in little flat packets.

PR Were they big drinkers in those days?

MP They mostly drank pints of mild ale which I think was about fivepence.

PR We never talk about the beer you actually used to sell. It wasn't a Free House was it?

MP No. We were tenants of Huggins, they were the original brewers and then they sold out to Watneys.

PR So it was, in fact, a Watneys house?

MP Eventually, yes

PR How much beer a week could be consumed in a pub like The Orange Tree?
Did you have a delivery once a week?

MP Yes

PR How was the beer delivered?

MP In an old horse and cart thing. They used to have special drays and it was quite a thing. They had to put a ladder on this dray which went from the pavement up the yard place and there were two big trap doors that opened and rolled these things down. They used to tie a rope round them and there was a metal hook in the wall.

PR What do you remember about the draymen?

MP We used to always have a cold meal for them – the nice draymen. Some of them weren't so they didn't get the meal. My mother used to call up to the kitchen. I think they used to have cheese and things.

PR Sort of a Ploughman's lunch? But they were amazing men, weren't they?

MP Oh yes. Some of them were really good characters. Most of them were very nice. They must have been strong. When we were first there they used to come up in horse drawn vehicles. I think there were two horses. I'm not sure. Nosebags used to be hooked on the back of the cart.

PR How many types of beers did they..... mild you mentioned.

MP Yes. Then there was Burton. I think there were two kinds of Burton. Ordinary Burton and Best Burton and there was Bitter and of course Best Bitter. I think that was about the extent

PR What about bottled beer? There was nothing like there is today was there?

MP Not the variety, I suppose. I can't remember when we started having lager.

PR Oh we can forget about lager. What about things like Guinness and stout?

MP Oh yes. There was Imperial Stout, that was a little bit cheaper than Guinness

PR And Brown Ale I think?

MP Yes. I've got a feeling that Brown Ale didn't exist when we first went there. I wouldn't be certain

PR But as well as dispensing drink, and one assumes you used the old fashioned pumps which now the brewers have been pushed to bring back again.

MP Have they really?

PR Oh yes, of course they have. By popular demand. And we haven't talked about the cellar and I certainly want to do that a bit later but did your mother supply food as well. Was it food and drink then, or just drink?

MP Well we used to do a few sandwiches. You know, we'd have them in one of these things with a big glass lid on it.

PR Did you help to make those?

MP Eventually, yes. I was in charge

PR Where did you get your hams and your cheeses and things from?

MP Oh Goodness knows – Gobels, I suppose, the local grocer. John Gobel

PR What did you charge for a sandwich in those days?

MP I can't remember honestly. I think it was about tuppence or something

PR And the beer was what a pint?

MP Mild was fivepence a pint and stout and Burton and other things were a bit dearer

PR Did you ever have occasion to go into the cellar?

MP Oh yes. It was quite a big cellar and on the right it was boarded off, partitioned. Spirits were kept in there. One time we found two little cuts through these partitions where the Whisky was kept. This little bit of wood slid out very handily so we soon got that put to rights and we moved the spirits to the other side, to the brick wall so that couldn't happen again. Also I think there were some big vats there of something, spirits of some kind I believe. I suppose the stuff was drawn up by the pumps I was telling you about in the spirit room maybe.

PR Do you think it was drawn from the cellar up into spirit room and then dispensed down in the bar?

MP Yes, I think that's right

PR We were talking about the cellar which really is the key to the whole place. Presumably your father had a great deal of experience about cellar keeping

MP Oh yes. He'd been brought up in the trade as well. He was quite good.

PR You feel that he knew everything there was to know?

MP I should think so. In his heyday

PR It was a very skilled job, in fact

MP Yes.

PR Were there any other things about the cellar that we can usefully learn?

MP Um.... They used to have to tilt the barrels sometimes. When they wouldn't come up from the pumps somebody would have to pop down. There were various tilting devices that they used to put under them. With some beers you only had little tiny firkins.

PR These were the special strong beers?

MP Yes

PR Special brews. Let's get back to the counter. Was the pub usually fairly crowded because it's a good position there isn't it?

MP Oh yes. I think it was. It had it's quiet moments but there was quite a regular trade.

PR Was there any specialwell Christmas is an obvious time of year when pubs are extraordinarily busy but tell me about Christmas in a pub. Was it hell?

MP It was really, yes. You usually got some fools who had been somewhere else drinking and they got bad tempered drunk and would then start picking arguments with people. It would upset the atmosphere

PR This was the sheer drunkenness of it. They drank very heavily around Christmas, didn't they?

MP Yes

PR What was the opening on Christmas then?

MP I think we used to close Christmas night, I believe

PR Christmas Eve?

MP Oh Christmas Eve. I don't know about the early days but in later years they always used to be granted an extension of licence till about midnight, which we used to bless

PR What good for business, you mean?

MP No, it was a nuisance because people, a lot of the regulars would drink and get quarrelsome.

PR And then were you open Christmas Day?

MP Yes, I think we used to open midday and then close Christmas night

PR Boxing Day you were open again?

MP Yes. I think we could have opened Christmas night but I think my father used to feel we were entitled to a little bit of.....

PR Yes. It must be very hard work

MP Oh it is. It's not a good life really

PR You were inferring that sometimes you did have trouble and fights and things broke out. That must have been very hard to deal with

MP Yes, sometimes you got the odd quarrelsome one in

PR What did you do in those circumstances?

MP I think there used to be somebody about that would help out and push them outside

PR Did you ever call the

Here the tape ends the first side.

PR Now you were saying you preferred to handle these difficult situations yourselves. I'd like to get back to the clients though. Can you name anyone? Can you remember anyone from those early days? Did any professional people come in there, for example?

MP Um.... I can't think. In later years, of course, I used to run these things called Jam Sessions for jazz musicians and of course we had quite a lot of the well known people.

PR Yes, that was much later though. When in fact did you give up the pub?

MP In the early nineteen fifties, I think. About 1954/55 if I remember rightly.

PR So you had a very long time there

MP Yes

PR I certainly want to talk about those jazz things because this is now coming into my age and I used to go to The Orange Tree really to hear the jazz.

MP Oh did you? We weren't there then, were we?

PR Yes, I think in the 50s.

MP I've got some interesting photographs of some of the bands.

PR Great artistes

MP Yes.

PR I'm trying to think of his name. the blind....

..

MP Oh George Shearing?

PR George Shearing

MP Do you remember him standing on the top of that little platform with his accordion waving backwards and forwards? Can you recall that?

PR I can't remember that I must admit but I remember he was there. George Shearing, one of the great legendary names. Who else did you have there?

MP Um... who? Quite a number of them. It became such a well known place.

PR It did but how did you... apart from one other which I think was The Ferry Boat down Lea Bridge Road somewhere

MP Yes, I think they copied us. We started it

PR Music and pubs have always gone together but to get the reputation that you had for jazz music is perhaps a bit more surprising.

MP Yes. I was always very interested in it and from a young age I wanted to play the drums. I took piano lessons.

PR So you're musical yourself then?

MP Yes. I played the accordion as well. Then eventually, when I met up with my husband, he played the accordion. He was a very good musician. That was in the later days, you know.

PR But something must have turned your mind to having jazz musicians. What was the beginning of it all.

MP I think it was drums attracted me and I remember there used to be a music shop in Finchley, Mallinsons, and I remember getting this jazz thing, funny little drums in a case and fiddling about with those. After a couple of weeks I thought they were toys and so the old man, he was the one I could get hold of for that sort of thing in those days so I told him the tale and he took me and bought me a drum set. Again, I suppose it was from Mallinsons. At that time I was having piano lessons.

PR What sort of year are we talking about here, Mamie?

MP Now when? This must have been pre-war.

PR Sort of '38,'39?

MP It would be before that I should think

PR So this was your interest in music?

MP Yes. I'd been having piano lessons for a good many years. I used to go down to Willesden. There was a gramophone music shop there and my mother knew the father of the man that ran it. Langley, his name was and he had a daughter who was a very famous piano virtuoso, or whatever you call it. She wasn't very old and eventually I

went to her for music lessons. The moved over, funnily enough, to Wembley, Preston Road and I used to come all the way from Friern Barnet to Wembley for my music lessons. And then she started a little ladies band. Something happened on one occasion and I started beating out a rhythm to something and she got a bit shocked because I was interested in this sort of music and then it seemed to evolve from that and she began to develop this interest and she started this little band. I remember our first engagement was at the What's the name of the pub now? Oh dear! It was the daughter's 21st birthday party. I can't remember the name of it now offhand. Just by the railway bridge.

PR Which railway bridge? At Southgate do you mean?

MP No, this was at Wembley

PR So you had this little band then? How many of you were there?

MP There were three of us, a violin and piano and me on the drums.

PR Three ladies?

MP Yes. The Brooklyn Ladies Syncopaters we were called. I don't know why. Then it progressed.

PR You're on my subject now. What did you used to play? What were the hits when you first started? It was syncopated music?

MP Yes. Oh gosh

PR The Gershwin type of thing or was it a bit more jazzy than that?

MP I think it was a bit jazzy, you know. I honestly can't remember

PR What Tea for Two?

MP Yes, it could have been that sort of thing I suppose. I've still got a little bundle of my music but it was the music that I used later then

PR Of course what we're talking about the music wasn't written. I mean it was a style of playing the music wasn't it. But there were great tunes – Berlin, Gershwin. The Fred Astaire, Ginger Rogers era but hotted up for the Brooklyn Ladies. I wish I'd heard it. Were you popular?

MP Yes

PR What did you get paid for a gig like that?

MP I think about ten bob or something like that. It was a lot each. We did two or three gigs at the whatever this pub was called. Then somehow or other we got on from that and used to go to quite a number of masonics and that up in town. You know, all the best places shall we say, or a lot of the best places.

PR They danced to this did they, or sang to it?

MP Yes. I got the bookings for one of the Welsh societies. I think the London Carmarthen Society or something and I remember I had some Welsh friends and I knew that I'd got this gig for my little band. I didn't tell them. I thought we'd see what happened. My friend was very highbrow, very la la at these social does. She came in looking like this and then she saw me. (*screams*) I said "And I thought you were a lady". It was so funny. I'd forgotten all about those things

PR It sounds as though you got quite well known. Were you married then, Mamie?

MP I don't think in those days. I was married during the early part of the war

PR So we're really talking about just before then. It seems to me that you enjoyed that. You look back on that with affection

MP Oh yes, they were great days

PR How did you used to dress for these things?

MP Evening dress. At one stage we had little dress trousers and those little jackets that came to a point at the back

PR And you all dressed the same way?

MP Yes

PR So you were getting quite professional. You didn't have an agent though?

MP No

PR So you were on drums, there was someone on violin and there was another on piano?

MP Yes. We used do all sorts of sizes of bands, you know.

PR Oh you used to augment on occasions?

MP Oh yes

PR How many up to?

MP 10 pieces

PR Always ladies?

MP No, no. Invariably I was the only woman then. Used to create a bit of excitement. Generally speaking women don't make very good jazz players but there was Gwen Rogers, she ran a women's band. I don't know whether that was in the thirties I suppose.

PR I've not hear of that one.

MP She was quite famous in her day. She ran quite big shows.

PR Of course Ivy Benson was the great one. A whole band of women. I'd like to develop that story. So you were saying that you'd obviously got this talent and this interest in jazz music. Did you actually take over the pub from your father and mother?

MP No, no. My father died about 1940 I think. My mother then took over the licence and we continued there till 1955.

PR So it was in fact post-war and when you were married did it come to you that you ought to get some musicians in to entertain

MP We'd always had a bit of entertainment. We always had something going on.

PR What sort of things?

MP We used to run talent competitions.

PR Did you organise those?

MP Yes

MP That was in the lounge?

PR Yes. Anything outstanding that you can remember about those?

MP Not particularly. We used to get one or two well known people to....

PR Give me some names

MP Well if I could find my albums in there

PR Mamie has just produced what she calls her Black Book and in this book there's a remarkable thing. There's a list of names. It's rather like the sort of book you sign when you go into a hotel. A visitors' book and the first page I turn to Steve Race, no less. I'm sure there are others. I'm not up in the musical world. Going back to those early fifties, Mamie, when I first remember this and I was saying I remember there were people like George Shearing. Were there any other people of that fame? Pick a few names just to whet our appetite.

MP Well there was a trombone player that was very good and I can't think of his name.

PR What did you used to pay them when they came down?

MP Oh, didn't pay. They came for these jam sessions you know.

PR They came to practice their music

MP Yes. There used to be crowds of them playing all at once.

PR And you enjoyed it. I can see from the look on your face you did.

MP Yes

PR What did the neighbours say?

MP We were very strict on stopping the music by, we'll say 11. It might not have been as late as that. We could go on till 12 you see but we used to study the neighbours if we could. They didn't like it very much sometimes but it was understandable if you were trying to get to sleep. At time you see they'd built that little block of shops and flats to the right of The Orange Tree in Woodhouse Road. I don't know quite when they built those. I can't quite remember

PR No. Of course it has one other claim to fame which I have just remembered. It was in The Orange Tree that I first saw a television set.

MP Oh yes, a little one.

PR Because those were the extraordinary days when television sets were really quite rare and you had one in the lounge. You'd take your beer in and you'd sit round a table.

MP It was a dreadful old set, wasn't it.

PR An old black and white one. Did you install that, do you remember?

MP Yes

PR Because that was a popular entertainment wasn't it?

MP Yes. They used to set all in rows looking at it. It was a dreadful picture. It served its purpose, you know, people enjoyed it.

PR Indeed they did. Have you got any other memories of the area Mamie? I want to say just on this tape that you and I talked on a previous occasion on another project I'm working on about the war. I know you played a very active part in the WVS and I'm hoping to talk to you later about that in another context but other than that I'm just wondering if the twenties and thirties there's anything else that you remember about the old Orange Tree or the people who came there or incidents?

MP Not off hand. Probably as soon as you've gone I shall think of lots of things

PR You see I would have thought that running a pub it was a very eventful life. On the whole you don't seem to be too enamoured of the life.

MP No I think I had enough of it.

PR Why was that?

MP I don't know. The people were sometimes difficult to cope with, especially in what we called The Short Age. I think that would have been during the war. I don't know

whether it was during the war or after the war when stuff was in short supply. You got grumbles and groans and that sort of thing. I suppose one always seems to remember those sort of things rather than the nicer parts.

PR You're glad to be finished with it really, aren't you?

MP Yes. I'd had enough. It was so.... I don't know.

PR Its hard work

MP it is hard going. Yes. You're never free

PR What did that do to your social life as a young woman?

MP It was practically nil, really.

PR Still you had your music

MP Yes

PR Well, Mamie, I think at that point I'll call a halt to it and if anything occurs to you I'd obviously be delighted to hear from you but I really come away with this impression of the syncopated jazz which I shall always cherish. Thank you very much indeed.