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Interviewer: Marsha O'Mahony & Gabrielle Brace  
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Full transcription Interview with: Doris Kershaw  
0.00

MOM: Doris, could you introduce yourself please.

DK: Well, my name is Doris Kershaw, I was Doris Townsend, and I lived, I was born in Chandos Street in Hereford. And when my father died, oved to St Nicholas Street in Hereford. I went to Lord Scudamore School and left at 14 and worked then at Vivian's until I was married.

MOM: Can you tell me how you got your job at Vivian's and what you did there?

DK: well it was very interesting, because when I left Scudamore's school, we were divided in our sixth form into third year commercial English or third year practical. If you wanted to be a nurse or something in that line, then you went into third year practical. You went into third year commercial English if you wanted an office job and you learned Pitman shorthand and typing in the final year. And I had visions that I would be going to the Post Office because there weren't many jobs. There was the Post Office and there was Bulmer's cider works and I think it was Paynter Bros. and I decided that I would go into the Post Office. So, I went in for an interview and I had to do a very small exam about geography, which I passed. And the very last moment they asked me if I would take down a message that was coming from another room by phone. And I picked up the telephone by my right hand because I am left handed, and the man's face fell and said, 'I'm very sorry, we don't employ anybody that's left handed'. And I was so upset. And he said, 'well, we couldn't even employ the King of England', who was then George VI because he's left handed. Which sort of comforted me. Anyway, it all turned out very well because my mother worked at Vivian's of Hereford with Miss Durrant, when she was young. And miss Durrant said, 'well, if Doris would like to come and work here she can work here'. And I went, well I was a real dog's body, making tea and going to the bank and general things. But I did accompany Miss Durrant when

she went out photographing because all I did was carry the slides. And it was a 12x10 plate camera and I used to have to hand her the slides and put them in a darkened case. She took the photographs.

One very funny occasion I remember we were photographing the Dean and Chapter of Hereford Cathedral and as I lived in St Nicholas Street, Miss Durrant said, 'I'll meet you in the Close, there's no need to go to the studio'. And my mother said, as it's the Dean and Chapter perhaps you should put on your Sunday clothes. And so, I thought I looked the dog's body and went over to the Close and Miss Durrant was horrified because I hadn't a hat. So, I had to run all the way home and get a hat because I wasn't dressed properly to photograph the Dean and Chapter.

MOM: It would be really interesting to hear more about the studio. Who worked there? Whop was Miss Durrant? Did any men work there?

DK: None at all. I realise since we've heard all this about the Great War, there weren't very men around. But there was Ada Durrant, who was the photographer, and then there was Miss Gertrude Durrant, her sister. They lived in St James Road. And Miss Gertrude Durrant did all the finances, wages, everything. Miss Ada Durrant of course was the photographer. And one didn't realise then what a wonderful photographer she was. The photographs were amazing and she was a perfectionist. I've seen her tear up dozens of photographs.../

5.00

DK: .../in front of you when she didn't think they were printed well enough. And she always signed every photograph, and every photograph was scrutinized to make quite sure it was perfect when it went out to the customer.

No men worked with us at the studio. There was Mrs Brewer, who was the colourist. There was Isabelle Parry, who was the finisher. Miss Forsythe, who was a friend of Miss Durrant's. a lot of people, a lot of women worked there. the only man that ever worked at Vivian's was when they opened the polyphoto branch, which was in St Peter's Street opposite St Peter's Church and Patrick Seymour did all the framing. And that was the only man who ever worked at Vivian's all the time I was there. the photographs of the troops because of course we photographed Bradbury Lines and we photographed Credenhill. And all those troops were photographed regularly. They were mounted and printed at a printers in Bewell Street. As I say we had not contact with men at all, except the taxi driver, Mr Weaver his name was. Because of petrol rationing. Miss Durrant did have a car, but I suppose with petrol rationing she wasn't allowed to use it very much. And we used to have Mr Weaver from Marriots

garage, who used to take us everywhere. No signposts, so it was all a mystery which way we went!

MOM: And why was it just women working there? Could you paint that picture for us?

DK: I think the reason it was only women was because of the War, the Great War and the men had all sadly killed or injured and marriages were quite different. And I think Miss Durrant was the sort of person who had a lot of friends and a lot of her friends worked at the studio. We didn't have many young people. They all seem to have been middle aged ladies. Perhaps that's because I was young and they felt elderly.

MOM: Were the other women who worked there all Miss too?

DK: Oh no no no. they were all Miss. Mrs Brewer, but Miss Forsythe, Miss White used to come. A lot of Miss. Miss Brown, now she was a printer and she was a very good printer and I think she was the head of the printing department.

MOM: You mentioned a Miss White. Was that Miss White of Mordiford?

DK: Yes it was. Miss White was a friend of Miss Durrant. She used to come in occasionally and do a bit of work, but she was more of a friend. I do remember she was very artistic. I can't quite remember who she lived with, but they were two very lovely ladies. And I've still got a handkerchief that Miss White gave me on my wedding day. And my granddaughter used, or took it, with her wedding dress last year in London. And Miss White gave me that handkerchief when I left the studio. But I think Miss white was probably more of a friend to Miss Durrant. Miss Marsh I think it was she lived with. It's just come to me.

MOM: what sort of decades are we talking about. What other photographers were working in the city at that time?

DK: Yes, I can tell you, Bustins.../

10.00

DK: .../was a very good photographer. He had a studio facing the Cathedral at the top of King Street. Mr Bustin took very good photographs and I think if there was any opposition it was from Mr Bustin because he was an excellent photographer. There was Hammonds in King Street. And Rumseys in Church Street. And they were all very good photographers. Of course, people didn't have mobiles and things so they had to go to a studio to be photographed, other than the Box Brownie, and the very early cameras. So, we were always busy.

MOM: I would be really interested to hear how the studio was

viewed? Very unusual for its time to have a studio with a female owner and an almost exclusive female team.

DK: I think it was always considered THE photographer in Hereford. And I think people from outlying villages all came to Hereford to be photographed by Vivian of Hereford. And very famous people were photographed by Miss Durrant: Sir Edward Elgar, Vaughan Williams, especially at Three Choir Festival times, very famous people, and they were all photographed by Miss Durrant. In fact, the Elgar Museum in Worcester where I live now, the photograph that Miss Durrant took of Elgar on the steps of Hereford Cathedral, signed by him. But that photograph was always in the waiting room at Vivian of Hereford. And I noticed when I went to the Elgar Museum that it must be a copy in the Elgar Museum now because the signature isn't on it. So, I think they must have sold the original.

MOM: Were you ever there for those photographs?

DK: Oh no I wasn't there when Elgar was photographed. Although I did meet Elgar. My grandfather was a musician and he was organist of St Peter's church in Hereford and he was very friendly with Sir Percy Hull, well he wasn't Sir Percy Hull then, Percy Hull. But my grandfather used to tune pianos and I used to meet him in the Cathedral Close often, I think he went for a quick drink in the Conservative Club on his way home. And I used to meet in the Cathedral Close, and this particular day I saw him talking to three people in the Close and as a child you didn't interfere, you stood back, and my grandfather said I want you to say hello these three people. And I shook hands with Sir Percy Hull, of whom I did know, roughly, sort of meeting him with my grandfather, the other person was Edward Elgar and the other person George Bernard Shaw! And they were attending of course the Three Choirs Festival. And that was the last time, I think, Elgar went, so I would be about nine, or something like that anyway.

MOM: Did you say your mother worked at Vivian's?

DK: yes, my mother worked with Miss Durrant when she was young. It was Jakeman & Carver I believe then. In Hereford, you went up the steps to the studio and there was the Cadena Café and then there was Russell's next door, which was a stationers, bookseller.../

15.00

DK: .../I think it was Jakeman & Carver, the name of the shop that she worked with Miss Durrant before as a young person. And my mother was a retoucher and finisher, so she retouched all the negatives and got all the wrinkles out. Would be very handy now for me! She did, she was the retoucher and finisher. When my mother sort of got older, Miss Durrant asked her to go back and

work for her, which she did. And she worked for her 'til about a couple of years before she died, because she worked there after I left Vivian's. and of course, I was the sort of the photographer for poly photo. I don't know if you know anything about Polyphoto, but it was in a studio opposite St Peter's Church and 48 positions for half a crown and sixpence. And they used to queue on a Saturday to be photographed, especially RAF and Bradbury Lines. And I used to take all those. And I took babies, I loved taking babies. Because with 48 positions you could just roll the camera. And I used to love doing that.

MOM: Who taught you?

DK: Nobody! It was a machine that was very easy to use. You more or less turned a handle (laughing) you focussed it and you turned a handle. It was a very heavy machine actually and all the slides were sent to Stanmore in Middlesex to be developed and printed. And they were glass slides and so often they got broken.

Yes, I do remember the colour process because Miss Durrant was very very proud of it, where you put the three colours into one, and the first print that she did was of St George's Chapel, Windsor. But of course, it's a very beautiful photograph. She didn't another one that I have tried to trace but I haven't heard anything. It was something for the Women's Institute I think was a carpet or something like that, but that was one of the colour photographs I remember she did from this process. But I wasn't anything to do with the developing and processing so I haven't much knowledge about it really. But I do remember seeing the photographs of course.

MOM: What was she like?

DK: Miss Durrant? Scatty but lovely. Miss G Durrant was the grounded one. Miss A Durrant, we all called her Miss A Durrant, she was lovely but completely scatty. I remember her leaving a Leica camera in a cornfield. And she had this horrible dog called Timmy Baba, which she took everywhere with her. She called it Timmy Baba, which was very embarrassing. I remember my husband was in the Royal Engineers at Malvern. She went out to take his troop, he was a Second Lieutenant, and so he said, 'oh, I suppose I must ask Miss Durrant', of course he knew Miss Durrant because he came to collect me from work many time s. and Miss Durrant became quite friendly with him. And I remember we took this photograph of the troop in Malvern, at REE Malvern, and my husband said, 'oh, I'd better ask her into the office for a cup of coffee'. And so, he invited Miss Durrant over and she went in and all the men stood up, she had this horrible dog, and all the men stood up and she said, 'sit down! I know Mr Kershaw very well'. And of course, he was so embarrassed. It was the most dreadful moment of his life I should imagine. (laughing). No, she was the most lovely person. Very religious and she

attended All Saints church in Hereford and she played the violin. I remember going to a concert, where she was playing.../

20.00

DK: .../the violin in St Peter's church. She was a lovely, lovely person and she looked after her staff very well. But she had this artistic temperament I suppose really.

Well you see it was the end of the war. When I was at school blacking out the windows with tape and things, putting tape on the windows in case they shattered. So, it was the very end of the war. Well I was born in 1926 and I was fourteen when I went there, about 1940 wasn't it? Until I was married at 25.

MOM: you were there for ten years. Are there any moments that stand out for you?

DK: At Vivian's? Well the only thing really are the important people and I used to go with Miss Durrant to photograph them. Very famous families, you know. Lettice Cotterall. We went to a lovely wedding at Belmont Abbey of people who lived there. I think the was that during the war we were all just helping one another, weren't we? I would say we worked very hard and very late. If a photograph had to be finished, well we stayed until they were finished. There was no question of overtime or anything like that. We just sort of worked on. I was in St Peter's Choir during that time and I loved that. My sort of life was surrounded by music.

MOM: I am curious that Miss Durrant was selected to take photographs of all the troops. How did she get that contract?

DK: I think simply because she was the best photographer in Hereford. You mean the ones at Credenhill and Bradbury Lines? And then Malvern of course, because she came over to RRE Malvern. She was so well known you know?

MOM: during your working career with Miss Durrant, did you ever come across Derek Evans?

DK: well I had heard of him but I didn't know him personally. No, I didn't know him, but I had heard of him of course, because he was one of the leading photographers, wasn't he? Was he in Commercial Road? Somewhere there? I didn't really know much about him. You see I was married in 1951 and left to go up to Yorkshire so I probably didn't know him very well. I expect you've got some recollection of Pauline Seymour. Because Pauline was Miss Durrant's right hand as regards going out and photographing because she drove.../

25.00

DK: .../And she drove miss Durrant. Miss Durrant of course took my

wedding photographs to my lovely husband Cyril. And we had the group, and I rather hoped that Miss Durrant would be on that photograph, but of course she was taking it, but Miss G Durrant is in the photograph. And they both came to our wedding reception at the Castle Pool Hotel and the wedding at St Peter's church, where I was in the choir. So, we had the full choir and my roses came from the Wye Vale nurseries. Mr Williamson gave them to me, because Wye Vale then was a very small company. And John James who worked for Mr Williamson was in the choir. He was in the RAF and sang in the choir. And his wife, Jean Haunt her name was, was also in the choir. We were robed and all our robing required ten coupons each, which the congregation provided.

I enjoyed working at Vivian's so much. And that is of course why I stayed so long. Miss Durrant was a wonderful boss and always very considerate. But she was a perfectionist and everything had to be done absolutely as Miss Durrant required. But I loved my life there, going out and photographing families. I loved my time at the polyphoto taking polyphotos, and of course it was a gift shop as well as a photographers. So we sold our prints and our pottery. I think I gained an awful lot from working at Vivian's. just loved it. Having not had a higher school education, I felt I learned so much from the time I left school and when I left home.

Well I was very fortunate in a way to be bought up by my grandparents because my father died when I was five years old and we had gone to live with my grandparents who had been members of the Rowing Club for fifty years. And we spent our lives really on the River Wye, we just loved it. When I was older I learned to row and we used to row as far as Belmont and Breinton that was as far as we rowed. Had lovely picnics and rowed most days after school. And I was very friendly with a girl called Barbara Jordan and Barbara Jordan's family owned Jordan boathouse the other side of the river. but Hereford Rowing club, really go ??? (indecipherable) up on the other side of the river, that was Jordan's' side. And Hereford Rowing Club, we all knew Mr Crissal, the boat man. We always went up in two large boats because we were a large family. And then we used to row as far as Breinton, Belmont, and take our picnics, light fires, which I suppose we wouldn't be allowed to do these days. And we had the most fantastic time. I just loved the river. I didn't see the sea until I was nine years old and went on a choir outing to Weston Super Mare and the tide was out and I thought 'oh, if this is the sea I would rather have the River Wye!' (laughing) But still it was lovely. I spent most days after school on the river. my grandparents used to use the river so much. They used to go off to work and I used to go and meet them after work and we had a lovely lovely time.../

30.00

DK: .../ But I think the highlight was when my cousins came down



from Bradford in Yorkshire. And they used to come down by train. Now, before they came their clothes arrived in a great trunk and it was delivered by GWR horse and cart. We were always so excited when that horse and cart arrived at our house with their clothes for a fortnight. We spent every minute of the day on the river. and although they've travelled the world now, they still say it was the best time of their lives. Just loved the River Wye. Oh, we had such fun, we had such fun. We lit camp fires. I remember they always came the August bank holiday for a fortnight and so you can imagine the food, because we would be, my grandparents, my mum, my two brothers, their family of four, their son's family of four. And we all met up up the river and we had these wonderful, wonderful picnics. And I remember August holiday weekend. You can imagine the catering. Burton's Bakery were up Berrington Street and then you turned right and they cooked bread. We used to go there and buy 17 loaves! That lasted us until the weekend. They were all hot. We used to take a massive picnic up the river as you can imagine. I can see now, my grandfather used to carve ham. My grandmother used to collect the bread. With my mother and my aunts, they had their salads and everything. A long line and we all had this wonderful picnic. Such happy, happy days.

And then we used to swim in the river of course. I mean, we did know the river, where we swam, very very well. We all learned to swim in the river. Grandfather used to always say to us to walk up and swim down. And then we knew that we were always in our depth, and we always did that. And I can see where we moored the boat. I remember one night we had a tremendous thunder storm. I think it was a well-known thunder storm because it hit the water tower in Hereford and opposite it was what's called Walls' farm. And the boat was filling with water, the storm was so heavy. We had my grandfather with us I think. Amnd he said, no, it's not safe, we'll moor the boat. And we moored the boat at Walls Farm. And I can remember because it was as black nigh. And we sort of scrambled up the bank and through nettles. Ad these people, I don't know their name, they dried us all out and took us home I'm cars, which of course was all very exciting because we didn't have a car. And in the meantime, my mother and my aunt were worried about us being out in this weather in this tremendous storm. But they started walking up the river path to see if they could find us and saw the boat moored and they knew that we were all safe. I can remember very very well indeed. But that was our only experience of a very very bad thunder storm. Can you believe that it killed a horse over by the water tower? But it was a very serious storm. You could see the boat filling up with water.

MOM: Tell me about your swimming costumes. Were they woollen?

35.00

DK: Well I had a swimming costume made out of a cardigan!

(laughing) Because it was wartime. And they were horrible because they used to sag. You can imagine, can't you? Once you'd had a swim they were sort of all drooping. We all had swimming costumes and we all wore white because we belonged to the Rowing Club. White and grey, yes. The Hammonds from Hammonds Photographers, they were brilliant oarsmen. I can remember when my cousins come down from Bradford and used to say, 'oh, those are the Hammonds. We'll race them back to the rowing club which we always tried to do.

MOM: We were chatting before about how the river brings great pleasure but also, on occasions, tragedy? For example, the evacuees story?

DK: Oh yes, that was dreadful. Terribly. Of course, it was very cold and the river was iced over. I can't quite remember exactly where it was but it was the river that flows past the Arts School, well what was the Arts School in Hereford. And these boys from Birmingham, I think it was King Edward's Grammar School, I have a feeling it was called King Edward's anyway. Sadly, went through the ice and they couldn't come up of course the river flowing underneath the ice. I don't know how many of them drowned. I remember walking up the river bank the following day and there was just one cap, it was full of ice, and it belonged to one of the boys who unfortunately had been drowned. We were very sad about that. It was dreadful, dreadful.

MOM: did you say you went to the Art College at the Pavilion?

DK: It was on the Castle Green, actually on the Castle Green.

MOM: Did you ever play in the river there?

DK: No. it was very deep you know. I used to paddle when I was very young at the Victoria Bridge because that had a beach of pebbles, and I used to paddle there. but the water was really deep underneath the art school there. So, I don't think I ever went in there. My grandfather was particularly careful about where we did swim or paddle, because the current is quite strong.

Of course, I went to the art school I also lived so near the river that we walked most days through the Castle Green over the Victoria Bridge and back the other way and over the Wye Bridge. And people used to dive over the Victoria Bridge. It was very very dangerous because there were shallow bits but there was also the currents of the streams. It was very unwise but people did do that. Also, I remember between the rowing club and Breinton there used to be some quite large trees, Hunderton it was called. And they had ropes tied to these trees. You used to swing across the river on these ropes and drop from the ropes. And really that was quite dangerous but it was just considered fun. I'm afraid I was a coward and didn't try any of that. I

mean we just loved the river. we used to make camp fires. I know when we used to go to Breinton.../

40.00

DK: .../we used to walk up to the church and the field going up to the church was always full of mushrooms. Used to get up very early I the morning gather mushrooms. We used to get carrier bags full, not just a few mushrooms. We'd get there before the farmer, and then we'd have a dip in the river and home for breakfast. It was my brother and myself that used to do that. We shared a bicycle. I didn't have a bicycle so I used to go on the cross bar of his bike. Used to cycle up, get the mushrooms, have a dip in the river and then cycle home.

MOM: I'd love to ask you about the May Fair. Did you ever go to the May Fair?

DK: Oh yes, that was the occasion of the year was the May Fair because we had our first ice ream of the year at the May Fair. Used to go to Rogers Café and we used to have a little sort of bowl, a little metal bowl, with a wafer stuck in the ice-cream. Oh, it was such a treat. That was the May Fair. And then when we lived in St Nicholas Street, the Wall of Death was in front of our bedroom window. And we had window seats in our bedroom and we used to hide behind the curtains and listen to the terrible roar of these motor bikes going round and round and round this wall of death. And then there were of course roundabouts, all up to the Cathedral, all along Broad Street and then in the High Town. And in the High Town there was some tradition, I've forgotten what it was, a sack of grain or a sack of something, was exchanged at the beginning of the fair. And then the carousel of the horses, we used to call it the big horses, the horses that moved up and down, it was all in the same place just in front of the old house.

MOM: What about some of the stalls? The dancing girls? The fattest lady?

DK: Oh yes, they were horrid. The fattest lady, the biggest lady or the bearded lady. I wasn't allowed to go into those. But they used to stand outside sometimes and, you know, sort of encourage people in to all these stalls. There were of course the children's roundabouts, which were very sweet, coconut shies. We always had a coconut. And roll a penny. But we used to save up for the May Fair, we used to save our pocket money for the May Fair. And I remember my brother's god father was Augustus Edwards, the Furriers of the West that had the concave windows in his shop in High Town. And I don't know if you remember those, but they were concave windows in his shop. And he used to give my brother pocket money because he was his god child for the May Fair. So, my brother always had more money than me which

was a bit of a pain.

MOM: Augustus Edwards, that's quite a name, isn't it?

DK: Well he was called the furrier of the west, wasn't he, because he sold fur coats and things.

I remember one of the lovely carousels was situated always in front of the old house and that was the first roundabout that was put up. Every May Fair that was the first ride put assembled.

GBS: Just wanted to ask you about what an amazing era to grow up in and have experiences.

DK: I feel that we've all been very privileged to live in the era that we are living in.../

45.00

DK: .../with so many changes. I was five when my father died. I think as a result of the first world war, and my brother was six and my younger brother was two. My father was a jeweller and cutler in Hereford, called Townsends. And we had to live with my grandparents, because he was only 40 when he died, and of course it was hard for my mother. But I feel so privileged really in a way that I lived with my grandparents, because my grandfather was a musician, which brought me into the musical world. and I loved my choir, which was St Peter's Choir in Hereford, and he was the organist and choir master there. and my experience at Vivian's. I was so pleased that I was rejected by the post office because it gave me such a wonderful opportunity to meet people I would never have met in an ordinary sort of job and I feel so privileged that I have lived in an age with so many changes. It's been wonderful. I've loved young people of this generation. I think they're maligned in many ways, but all the young people that I've come into contact with I feel are such wonderful young people, have wonderful careers. And are so interesting. At the back of my home is a primary school and I am so interested in all of the things that they do now. I feel very very pleased I have lived in this particular era.

GBS: Do you think it's got anything to do with living in Herefordshire in that age?

DK: Oh yes. I still think the Wye is still the loveliest river. it's still much nicer than the Severn, even though I live in Worcester. The Severn is a trading river, whereas the Wye is so so beautiful. The Wye is such a beautiful river from Plynlimon to wherever. I think it's really lovely. well my childhood was so so happy and it was made by the river I'm, sure.

GBS: What was Herefordshire like when you were working at

Vivian's and whether it has changed a lot?

DK: I haven't seen Hereford very recently. Oh, the High Town was such a busy busy place of course. When I worked at Vivian's we were next door to Market Hall and every Wednesday and Saturday all the market people from outlying villages came in with their baskets of eggs and butter, flowers, plants. And the market hall was a very very busy place with butchers and fishmongers, sweets, stalls. It was a hive of industry and people used to come to Hereford from outlying villages because it was where they could get things like their furniture and everything else. They could come to Hereford on Yeomans buses. It was a busy busy place. I remember the Market Hall particularly and then of course there was the cattle market. And all the farmers bought in their animals and they were auctioned off and sold. I think it was Wednesday was market day and when we were small children.../

50.00

DK: .../we were always taken to the market to see the animals on a Wednesday. It was a very exciting place to be.

GBS: Evaluation question.

DK: I think there's a very good reason for archives these days. I think I would never have believed you would have come and asked me these questions and that I would have had photographs that would have interested you. And of course, with digital cameras and with mobiles people take hundreds and hundreds of photos on mobiles. My grandchildren do. And no one is going to see them again probably. Whereas all these archives are our history. I'm sure in years to come they will always be there and that people will be interested in them.