

Title: Mary (Name Withheld) Interview  
Creators: Rick & Julia Goldsmith  
Project: 'The Close in Living Memory: Hereford Cathedral  
Close oral reminiscences''  
Subject: Autobiography, Living and working around Cathedral  
Close in Herefordshire, Heritage  
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Identifier: Mary-(Name Withheld)  
Interview Date: 2010, Hereford  
Interviewee: Mary (Name Withheld) (speaker, female)  
Interviewer: Marsha O'Mahony & Julia Goldsmith (speaker,  
female)  
Camera & Sound: Richard Goldsmith (male)  
Producer: Julia Goldsmith  
Language: English

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Transcript:

(00:00)

Mary tells us about her first job after finishing at Lord Scudamore girls school in 1935, at the post office when she was 14. She worked there until 1949 she would work 6 hours a day and her wages were 12 and 6 a week. She gave her mother 10 shillings and kept 2 and 6 for herself.

(00:38)

The Post Office was on Broad Street, next to St. Francis Xavier's Church, Mary recalls she would go up to the Postmasters Office every morning to collect his mail and sort it. (01:02) When Mary was 16 she was transferred to the telephone side of the post office, taking her (Civil?) service exam becoming an official telephonist.

(01:18)

Mary describes how she would spend her half-hour for lunch - taking her sandwiches and going through the Cathedral, past the mappa mundi, through to the cloisters and sit there in the sun and enjoy the fresh air. (01:46) There weren't many people going through the Close during the day, during dusk in November it would become very eerie - when a fog came in. Ghosts were rumoured to be there, and when Mary and her Husband walked through there one night they thought they saw the ghost - but weren't certain! (02:09) Whether or not the mist came from the River Mary doesn't know, it could be frightening enough that people didn't walk through the close at night on their own. Though young boys used to get into the Cathedral and make peculiar noises to frighten everybody.

(02:35)

Mary can't recall if there were any particular origin stories for the quests, but the theory in the post office was that it was probably a prank - but none of the girls at the post office would go through the close at night.

(03:10)

The Post Office was opposite the Kemble Theatre, and near Passey Notts [Spelling] the corn exchange. On the corner was a Hotel, where Thorpe House is at the moment. Running down along Broad street was a row of houses and Hammonds the Hairdressers. Mary would go to Hammonds to have her hair done, following when they moved to Kings Street later on.

There was also a sweet shop called the Chocolate Box lower down on broad street run by a Mr. Jones whose son Mary was quite friendly with at the time. (04:32) Next to the Post Office itself was a dairy where there was a lovely old fashioned lady who would serve Mary a pint of milk in the morning that she would then take up to the Postmaster so he could have a coffee - as was a juniors responsibility.

(04:55)

Mary tells the story of how she met her husband, who worked nearby in a basement. She was running around the corner to the Post Office as he came up from the basement and they bumped into one another. They both apologised to each other, and he said that she apologised so nicely that he thought 'I must get to know her', every morning as she went past the door where all the equipment was he would be sat there and that's how they got to know each other. (05:40) Mary's husband went to Hereford high school leaving 1938 and they've been together ever since having 50 years of marriage until he passed away.

(06:00)

Mary and her husband decided to get married because he thought that if anything happened to him Mary would at least get a widow pension - he was very practical. They got married September 18th 1943, going to Blackpool for their Honeymoon. The reception was held at the Imperial Hotel with 60 people there, Mary's mother paid 60 Pounds. For their gold wedding anniversary they went back to the imperial hotel with most of their friends who were at the wedding where it cost 20 Pounds per person. (06:45) On the day of their Golden Anniversary they went to Holy Trinity Church to say their vows again, where the vicar came in and blessed them and kept them talking, when they came out there was a huge bouquet of golden flowers waiting for them when they came out of the church.

(07:35)

65 years ago today she was at a UPW (Union Postal Workers) conference in Blackpool when they announced at 3 o'clock in the afternoon that the war was over - everyone celebrated, and drank and had a happy evening.

(08:21)

Mary talks about fire watching at the Newage Cafe that was next to the Library - going across at 11pm with their little sleeping bags, boys in one room and girls in the other. They would have to be there so many nights a week, being trained to respond if there were bombs falling and so forth. All through the war Mary would go once a week to do fire watching beneath the cafe was a chemist's shop that Mary would get her hair permed at.

(09:31)

During the war years Mary was on the air raid position, relaying the warning codes by ringing and informing the various departments around Hereford. It was very interesting work, and occasionally the girls would listen in to some of the calls about what went on in Hereford during the war.

(10:17)

Mary would also go as a relief to Leominster where there was a big American camp at Barons Cross, each week they would send a coach to the Post Office to pick the girls up and take them to the camp. Mary recalls missing the bus one time and accepting a lift from a lorry, only realising after accepting that it might have been risky - but it was perfectly alright.

(11:10)

On the Saturday before D-Day Mary went to visit her partner for the first time since their honeymoon. When she got there he said 'I think things are on the move Mary, you've got to come to the rendezvous three night running' she saw him on the Saturday and the Sunday, but he wasn't able to be there on the Monday or Tuesday. (11:45) On Wednesday, the morning of D-Day, Mary woke up at 4am to the sky buzzing with aeroplanes, she grabbed her brownie camera and took a picture of the sky with arrangements of all the different types of planes. She showed it to her doctor who got it enlarged for her. The noise was terrific in the air and the sky was black with planes.

(12:49)

D-Day was a wonderfully bright day, not a cloud in the sky. After seeing the planes fly over Mary thought that she better get home quickly. She didn't hear from her husband for weeks and weeks as, although he wrote letters, they weren't being transported back to England. He came back having seen some awful things, they must have gone to Belsen Camp after - Mary recalls that there was no counselling after he returned, he just went straight back to work. Mary thinks people don't realise the reality of that today.

(13:56)

Mary's husband came back saying he could never trust a German, having seen terrible things during the war. He used to shout in the night, but never spoke about the war with Mary, but she's gathered bits from the Diaries he left behind. (14:22) When he came back on leave Mary arranged to meet him in London, going to the Russell Hotel and staying overnight. At 4 in the morning she had a phone call to her bedroom saying 'where are you?' - He had gone back to Hereford! Mary got a taxi back to the train station and got back to Hereford about 7

O'Clock in the morning. (15:12) Mary recalls Paddington Station being full of soldiers, all of whom were very nice offering to carry her bags and making her journey nicer. It was 2 years until her husband was de-mobilised.

(15:30)

Mary goes into further detail about when she heard that the war had ended. In blackpool representing the UPW with 4 men from Hereford. Sat in a conference at the Winter Gardens when the news landed - they didn't get home until about 3 or 4 in the morning . They danced and laughed and celebrated all night long. She recalls that at this point her husband was out in Northern Germany.

(16:22)

After Mary's husband came back from the war in 1947 he was sent to the repeating station, now the Early Learning Centre on Friars Street, he was there for 46 and a half years when he retired. He worked under a fellow named Ted Wellington taking Ted's position when he left. (17:00) When he was in the repeater station he would be able to measure exactly where faults in the line would be so that repairs could be made with accuracy.

(17:37)

In later life Mary used to go and help the three choirs every year with Mrs. Cyril Franklin who was in charge of the catering. On the Sunday of the three choirs Mary would be able to sit right up in the stalls to listen to the music - afterwards they'd dash around the Shire Hall to get the refreshments. On the last night Mary would always volunteer as all the singers would come from the three choirs into the Shire Hall to have supper and they would sing and have a lovely time - finishing at about 1am when Mary's husband would pick her up.

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This film was made by Catcher Media for the Hereford Cathedral Close project in association with In Our Age and supported by The National Lottery Heritage Fund.

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