

Mrs Gwendoline Kitchener nee Hancock

Born 1915



I was born on the 29 April 1915, at 39 Wilton Road, Shirley, which was next door to the School and I was one of 11 children – I was the sixth daughter but my mother lost her first daughter – I attended Shirley School from the age of 5 till the age of 14 when I left and the teachers I remember were Miss Fryer – that was the last teacher, Miss O'Dell the physical exercise teacher and Miss Cornish who was just well there and Miss Knight who was the head teacher – I didn't like her very much – every Empire Day we used to have a tableau – all the children dressed up as the countries of the Empire – I have a photograph here – and Miss Hawksworth always used to sing Land of Hope and Glory and of course we were all very proud of the Empire but of course it's not there anymore is it?

used to go on Southampton Common all day so they never had to have the grass cut and it was never overgrown. I went by the other day and it is all overgrown with bushes now. Next to Peggy Weekes' farm was the gasworks sports ground and we used to go up there scrumping apples from Peggy's farm and she used to say 'oh I daren't let my Dad – let him catch me' and we had ever such a lot of fun – it was all innocent fun and we used to spend all our holidays on Southampton Common. We would go there after breakfast. Mum would make us sandwiches and we would have our lunch – we would come home about 8 o'clock and have a wash because of course there were no bathrooms and we would go to bed – I mean we weren't any trouble to our mothers back then because we were just out playing all the time. Easter Days the Hot Cross Man used to come round with a barrow with all the hot cross buns on it shouting 'one a penny, two a penny hot cross buns' so somebody would go down and buy some and we would have a cup of tea and a hot cross bun on Easter Sunday morning. You don't see that now do you?

MLL: You mentioned that your friend had a farm and you used to go scrumping – was there a lot of farmland in those days around Shirley?

No, no there wasn't really ... I suppose it was from years back that she had this farm – it was where the Girls Grammar School is built now ...

MLL: quite near Hill Lane then ...

At the top of Bellemoor Road right opposite the Common you see .. and the boys' grammar school used to be in Southampton and then it was built along the top of the road – Raymond Road – Norman went to the Grammar School, my cousin....

MLL: do you remember there being quite a few nurseries and allotments?

In Bellemoor Road there was Edwards – he had a freeholding and a shop and we used to go there and buy our vegetables – we would go

and buy threepennyworth of picked apples and threepennyworth of picked vegetables – it was enough to make a dinner ...

MLL: was that Edwards the Nurseries?

Yes, well no not a nursery as we know it now – they sold and they grew vegetables but I was young – I don't know if people went there to buy plants but that's where they built the new school now – further up Bellemoor Road and my brother Wilfred was a teacher there. He was apprenticed to Zillwood the Signwriter in Southampton but when he finished his apprenticeship he said to my Mum – do you mind if I give it up because the paint makes me sick and she said – well I can't afford anymore – so he worked as a bricklayer for two years and then he went to college every night and he went up to Guildford College to teach that sort of thing there. Freda, his wife, I don't know, they couldn't move up to Guildford so he came down to Southampton again and he taught at Shirley Warren School near where Freda lives. He taught at Millbrook School first – that's where his children went and they all got scholarships and then he taught at Shirley Warren School near where Freda lives now and he was there till he retired.

Personal comment by Raymond Hancock 2012: Father remained a bricklayer until he volunteered for the RAF in 1942. Returned to bricklaying after demob. Actually father passed his City & Guilds and was asked to help out teaching night school at the Tech College Building Dept in Albert Road. He liked teaching, and in 1952 he went to Manchester University (Bolton Annexe) and obtained his Teaching Diploma. His first job in 1953/4 was at Guildford Technical College. In 1957 He came back to Regent's Park Boys' (not Shirley Warren) and then to Bellemoor when the Boys were transferred to the new building. He later spent a few year at Western Middle School (Shirley Road) and then Bassett Green Middle School. This where he was when he had his first heart attack in 1974.

We used to spend a lot of time at the Recreation Ground – we called it the Recreation Ground then and at one end it had three sets of steps with walls on and I remember that when I was smaller I used to fit in the bottom set of the wall – you could lie on it and my feet would touch the bottom and then gradually as I grew I fitted the second one and then the top one. Opposite the road was the children's hospital and in Anglesea Road at the top of it was where Miss Hawksworth who used to sing at the Empire Days – that's where she lived. I don't know anything about the others but we used to spend all the summers down at the Shirley Recreation Ground – we weren't home much.

MLL: what were your favourite subjects at school – was there anything you really liked?

I used to like writing essays. I always used to have my essays put up on the wall you know – I don't know what you call it – yeah – because I remember this teacher – we wrote something about it and I said that a storm was brewing – she said that's a good expression .. of course I used to read a lot – I must have read thousands of books in my time – I think that's what spoilt my eyesight because if I couldn't sleep I used to read – when we were young we used to have candles you see and I remember one night we three – Kathleen, Florrie and I, we got into our big double bed and she said blow the candle out so I threw a petticoat at it so when my eldest sister came to the bed the petticoat was alight ... but I say – the devil looks after his own doesn't he?

I don't remember much else – I was very happy at school – it was a very happy school and I liked the teachers very much but I don't know what else I can tell you about it.



The house was 39 Wilton Road – and its there you see – that’s the back of the school – that’s a photo of my family up there and of course the back of them is the big high wall of the school – it was a six foot high brick wall at the back and that’s our garden and the school was at the back of it.

MLL if you could tell me who is at the back – starting from the left

That’s George – that’s the eldest one, and then there’s Florence – that’s the middle sister, and then Herbert the second son, Ernest the third son, and then my mum and dad, and my eldest sister Madeleine, and there’s me, Owen, Wilfred and Kathleen

MLL: and this is the photograph that was taken – did you say – Gazzard ...

Yes Gazzard ... the Echo photographer yes I can’t remember his Christian name ..

MLL: what a lovely gathering – really, really nice ...

Not bad looking ...

MLL: and is this your shed in your garden?

Yes and then at the back of us would have been the school – in the larger photo it shows the school, you know ...

MLL: wonderful ... lovelyyou look very well groomed on there – the boys look very smart at the back don't they?

Well we were you know, my mum made all our clothes – I often think how did she do it because she used to be two days washing – the whites Monday and all the coloured Tuesday and she did the shopping – she used to do her shopping at the Co-Op that was in Shirley Road, she used to walk down Church Street, and go to the Co-Op because of course you had the dividend at the Co-OP ... she used to do all the cooking and cleaning and everything – I mean it was drudgery really wasn't it ? But when you are young you don't really notice it – and she used to make all our clothes – marvellous really ... and dad used to go down East Street and buy a piece of leather and mend all our shoes – you know you didn't pay out any money if you help it ... but I often sit and think how hard she must have worked ... the milkman came to the door and the baker came to the door – that's all – she had to carry everything in and of course you didn't go the local shops because they are always dearer than the bigger shops – so she used to go to the Co Op about three times a week ... I remember once we had a dog – a black dog called Gyp I think and mum didn't know – he went out shopping with her and in the International Stores that was in Shirley High Street they used to have their windows open and all the bacon on the shelf inside on the window – and the dog came home with a great big piece of bacon so we always used to say 'go on Gyp go on out with Mum .. he must have carried it from the High Street up to Wilton Road in his mouth ... she always bought bananas when they were mushy when they were much cheaper and you can spread them on bread with jam on top – it was lovely ... we never had a cooked tea – we had a good cooked dinner and we only had a pudding Sundays – that was apple pie and we girls used to make the pastry for the pie and

of course when it was my turn, my brothers you know how brothers are – they would say ‘who made the pie today mum’ and she would say ‘Gwen did’ so my brother Bert – he went out the shed he did – he came in with a hammer and chisel – I was about twelve and I broke my heart and my dad said don’t you worry girl the proof of the pudding is in the eating – you see if they leave any – and of course they never did ... but of course you get teased with brothers you know ... but we were happy – didn’t have much but we were happy ... well you didn’t expect much you know...

MLL: do you ever remember seeing the Police Box in the recreation ground? The telephone box in the recreation ground ...

No that was after me I expect ... I know some people came to my mum and my eldest sister when they lived in Wilton Road – they said you’d better get down to the recreation ground – your Maddy’s got into some trouble – evidently she was a real tomboy – she was trying to climb over the fence and she got a spoke in her chin – off the fence – you know – not serious just one of those things that happened – but the only thing that I can remember any of us being hurt was Wilfred my middle brother – the one just younger than me – he was riding home from work and the bus stopped and he bumped into it and dislocated his thumb – that’s the only thing I can remember any of us doing .. but we used to be real daredevils – you know we never used to bother about anything ...

Personal comment by Raymond Hancock 2012. As told to me by my father, he was about 14, riding his bike up the Avenue, past the shops just above Bannister Road. He was about to pass a flat bed coal (?) lorry, which involved moving out into the tram tracks when he realised that there was a tram coming up behind him and he wouldn’t make it. He therefore braked hard but his handlebar and one hand jammed under the back of the lorry. A passer-by had to kick the front wheel away to free him!

MLL: so where did you take him with his dislocated thumb?

Well I suppose the South Hants ... my mum had six of us all down with diphtheria – I can remember I was about three and my brother Ernest and I were the least ill so they took the other four to the Children's Hospital and my eldest brother George was there for six months because he was a germ carrier and they couldn't make him sick or anything so he used to do odd jobs like cleaning the windows and things – he would never eat rice pudding after that ... its funny the things you remember .. but I can remember the doctor coming up the stairs to see Ernest and I – we were in bed together or I was dancing about on the landing .. of course I had a bad stammer when I was young .. terrible stammer .. and umm ... its only after I grew up and went out to work that I got rid of it – I don't know why I had it – I remember we had a student teacher round us when I was in my last year at school and she was ever so nice you know ... Miss Knight was in the class .. and I was trying to say 'monopolistic' and I couldn't get it out and Miss Knight was poking me in the back saying you don't have to do this and of course that didn't help me at all and the student teacher didn't know that I stammered but after that I went into my shell you know .. but I don't have it now thank goodness ...

We were the first people in our road to have electric light – very posh – because when I was young all those houses in Wilton Road past the school were being built - they were all new houses to me – it was only our houses and up to Queens Road that was opposite – that was all and all the rest was being built when I was young ..

MLL: what did you have before electricity?

Gas – penny in the meter – if mum was short she was glad when the gasman came round to read the meter because then she would get some money back ...

MLL: did you have gas lights in the streets in those days?

The gas lighter used to come round on his bike and turn the lights on – yes

MLL: and do you remember them coming round with milk in handcarts ...

Oh yes they used to come round and he would have a big urn and he would dip his dipper in it – a half pint or a pint – you would take a jug out and he would pour it in you see – but I don't remember when that changed – you just don't take any notice of it ...

We would catch the tram and go right down to the floating bridge – we just went for an outing you know – because you didn't go down that end very often because it was quite a way ...

MLL: you know you just mentioned something about not going to Southampton but I didn't get it on the tape – would you just repeat it for me?

Okay .. well we didn't go to Southampton very often living in Shirley because we had no occasion to go and when you were young you don't have the money to go on tram rides and when you were older – I mean the only time when we went into Southampton was when you wanted to buy something – I mean you always had a new outfit at Easter – you would save up for it and save £3 .. of course shoes then – good shoes were about 12/6d a pair and stockings were 1/11d but if you wanted silk ones for Sunday you paid 2/11d – that was old money of course .. and umm .. well you just saved up and Easter you definitely had a new outfit because that was the thing then ... but if you paid £3 for a winter coat – that was a lot of money – and it would last you three or four years – you didn't have the money ... we got by – you just didn't think anything of it – that was the way life was ...

MLL: so going to Southampton was a bit of a treat was it then?

Oh yes .. well my sister used to belong to the Southampton Operatic Society – my eldest sister Madeleine and I remember going to the Central Hall because she was in Hiawatha – she was, oh what was her name ? Minnie Ha Ha .. she sang the part of Minnie Ha Ha in Hiawatha and we went to the Central Hall – I was in the church choir and we went to the Central Hall to give a concert – of course I can't sing now you know – I used to sing to the radio and my husband who was very musical used to say 'you are nowhere near it' but I was happy ... now I never had any talent as such you know .. it didn't matter did it ?

MLL: I want to repeat that ...

I remember one day – I don't know how old I was .. maybe about seven or eight .. my Dad took Owen and Wilfred, me and Kathleen on the tram then as it was ... penny down to the Floating Bridge ... and it was like having a day at the seaside ... to be on the water – it was such a change for us ... as I say you really appreciated things that you had then because it was such a treat

The tram driver lived at the bottom of Shayer Road and his name was Mr Burleyfinger – he was a driver of the trams – don't hear that name nowadays do you – Burleyfinger ...

MLL: which tram route was he on then? Mr Burleyfinger ...

Well I suppose it was the Corporation trams ...

MLL: was he on the one for Shirley?

Yes he would start from Shirley and go right to town you see

MLL: what was the number of the Shirley tram?

Oh I don't remember that now (laughter) ...

MLL: did they have set stops like buses?

Oh yes, yes ... you couldn't stop them in the middle of a ride – you had to go to the tram stop.

MLL: and did they have a driver and a conductor?

Yes they did – there was a bell – you know it dinged when he gave you the ticket

Herbert ... they were so much older – they were more like uncles – they didn't take much notice of us wee young ones but we were happy –as I say – my eldest sister was married the day after I left school – I was fourteen – she got married and she went to live in London – her husband worked at the BBC – the British Bath Company not the broadcasting and I went up there once – I don't know what they were made of but they put the baths in a great big oven and they used to have to pull them out all red hot – oh I didn't like that.

Herbert Godwin – that was an old family name in the Hancocks, the next brother was Ernest William, then Wilfred Victor, then Owen Douglas. It was Owen Douglas and Ernest William who were killed. My youngest brother – he wasn't a pilot – I can't remember what he was - I think he was an observer and I think the other brother was an observer – they were all three in the Air Force at one time. Wilfred, the middle brother – he was two years younger than me – he went out to train in Canada you know he got invited out and one of the daughters was knitting – he said why are you knitting – would you like me to do some of it – and she said you don't knit do you and he said – I knitted all my babies clothes – of course they thought it was a cissy thing to do for a boy to knit – they were lovely – all my family were lovely

MLL: I missed the name of your eldest brother – what was it?

George Robert ...

MLL: What about the girls?

Madeleine Florence, Winifred Evelyn, Florence Margaret, Kathleen Esther and Gwendoline Muriel – nice names weren't they?

MLL: Yes they were – also family names?

I don't know – my Dad had a big Bible and he got all of our names from it – but that went to one of my brothers – I don't know what happened to that – of course girls didn't get anything in those days. I remember we rented our house – I don't know who we rented it from and my Dad had a chance to buy it for about £300 or something but he said I don't think its fair because the eldest son will get it and the others will get nothing – but that's how it was in those days ..



.....And that's when my middle sister got married – that's the five boys and the five girls – weren't a bad lot were we? But of course I am the only one left now.



MLL: these pictures of all the girls and all the boys .. where is it taken because I can see ...

Oh its where my sister Kathleen got married – it was the Cadena Ballroom – I think it was called Regent Street – it's off Shirley High Street where Boots used to be and there used to be the Regent Cinema but now it's a supermarket – you just come from Anglesea Road into Shirley High Street – Church Street is over there and this one I think it was called Regent Street because there used to be Ganges Shoe Shop on the corner of Church Street and Bakers, the men's outfitters, on the other

Because of course that place caught fire – I don't know when that was built I've never seen it – because the Vicar used to live at the vicarage opposite the recreation ground – the Reverend Bates and it was the curate who married us because Lena Thorne worked for them too – she changed her job a lot I reckon.

MLL: whereabouts was the vicarage in your days then?

Almost opposite the recreation ground ...

MLL: On Church St do you say ...

Yes ... well there were houses, there was Vaudrey Street and [Lyon] Street all off Church Street – I don't know if they are still there, no .. I said if my Mum and Dad came back to Southampton they wouldn't know it – I doubt if I would .. what has happened to Tyrrell & Green – what is there now? ...

MLL: it's being rebuilt – it was knocked down ...

Has it ??? Good Lord .. because I know Plummers is in the University isn't it ...

MLL: Yes they knocked down Tyrrells and at the moment there is an exhibition to do with Tyrrell & Green and the Southampton Art Gallery ... it's become a piece of history and they have got dresses that people wore there and were telling people stories about Tyrrell & Green ..

There were three houses – ours was 39 – Mrs Crane's was 41 and Mrs Bear was 43 and then there was Mr Puttick the Grocer, and Mr Martin, the Butcher ... that all went down Shayer Road – the other side of the road were the Miss Brickles – they had a sweet shop but I haven't been there I don't know if those houses in Shayer Road are still there or not – I haven't a clue – I know at one time there was a fuss about them being pulled down and all the occupants weren't very happy about it but of course I haven't been back there so I don't know – I expect it's all changed since I was there – across the road in Wilton Road was Yeoman's the Post Office and at the corner of Morland Road and Shayer Road – you went down there and there was a public house – I can't remember what he was called but he had a pet monkey and it was always running over the roofs and things – I don't even know if that's there now see.

MLL: did you know your old house got pulled down?

I didn't know but my grandson told me .. he said – your old house is gone Nan – I said is it? Yes they pulled it down to extend the playground – of course when we were there we had outside toilets and they'd have to build a place to have indoor toilets wouldn't they?

Extracts from an interview, in 2010, for the FoSJP Shirley Heritage Project with Michaela Lawler-Levene.

