

NATIONAL | Life  
stories

IN PARTNERSHIP  
WITH



NATIONAL LIFE STORIES

FAWCETT COLLECTION

Amy Bush

Interviewed by Janet Grenier

C466/08

This transcript is copyright of the British Library Board. Please refer to the Oral History curators at the British Library prior to any publication or broadcast from this document.

Oral History  
The British Library  
96 Euston Road  
NW1 2DB

## **IMPORTANT**

Access to this interview and transcript is for private research only. Please refer to the Oral History curators at the British Library prior to any publication or broadcast from this document.

Oral History  
The British Library  
96 Euston Road  
London  
NW1 2DB  
020 7412 7404  
[oralhistory@bl.uk](mailto:oralhistory@bl.uk)

Every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of this transcript, however no transcript is an exact translation of the spoken word, and this document is intended to be a guide to the original recording, not replace it. Should you find any errors please inform the Oral History curators ([oralhistory@bl.uk](mailto:oralhistory@bl.uk))

Track 1

This is an interview with Amy Bush for the Fawcett Collection of the National Life Story Collection. It was recorded on the 28th March 1991.

Oh, well I'm glad to welcome you to Putney and to... I was born in Battersea in 1905. My father, who had been in the Grenadier Guards, had left the army and was then working as a gardener.

That's interesting.

(Laughs). I had a brother and sister who were a good many years older than I was. So I suppose as a child, to a certain extent, I was on my own. [Yes, go on].

Do you remember your grandparents at all?

No. Oh, I remember my grandmother. She was a little tiny person with a very fierce voice. And I... years afterwards I only saw her when she was in bed, because I understand that she had ulcerated legs. And in these days, of course, she wouldn't have been kept in bed continually, she would have been given treatment. She lived in... My mother's family came from Windsor. And my grandmother lived in this little house, with one of her sons and his wife, and she ruled everything from her bed.

(Laughs). She dominated the whole family (laughs). But I used to enjoy going down there though, because I always found Windsor a very interesting place.

Do you remember very much about your childhood? What was it like?

Oh, we had a very happy childhood. My father was very interested in social questions. And I remember my sister telling me, some years afterwards, she said, "You know, we were not usual. We were allowed to talk at meals and father discussed questions with us and we all joined in and expressed our opinions of it".

And of course father was always doing things for other people, which I suppose rather gave me the background of voluntary work.

Did your mother also have very much influence on your life later?

Oh... My mother, or my...?

Your mother.

Well, no, not really, because we had very little money. My father earned 18 shillings a week. Which was not a very large wage. And the consequence was my mother did soft upholstery as well to make... to add to the income. But both she and my father were very keen on education. And although looking back it must have been very hard, all three children had grammar school... went to grammar school. We won scholarships, but which brought in a very small amount of money, but we were all kept at school until at least we were 16. And I stayed until I was 18 and went to training college. And it must have been a great effort for them to have continued like that.

Do you remember much about your schooldays? Was there anyone who was of any particular influence? Any childhood friend who...?

No, not particularly. I think... oh, I suppose... No, I mean I was just an ordinary schoolgirl.

What about subjects? What subjects did you enjoy at school?

Well, I've always been very keen on history, very interested. I think it was because I had the most excellent history mistress who was... I found her very inspiring. And when I went to training college my credit subject was biology. We took one, you know, one subject in which we specialised, and I took biology. Otherwise it was just the usual teaching subjects.

Where did you go to training college?

Yes, I went to Furzedown(?). I was a day student.

Were you there for three years, or...?

No, two years it was in those days, because you worked for the... It was the Board of Education in those days, for their certificate, teaching certificate. But a good many years afterwards - well, I suppose it was 25 years afterwards - I... I'm rather jumping things (laughs). I had - I had been interested in local government and I'd been a councillor, and lost an election, so I thought well, I'd better do something, so I went back to university and took an academic diploma in principles of teaching. And I met there my old English mistress, Miss Podzus, who, to my great surprise, had been a suffragette. And she... I used to go in and see her in the evening after I'd finished lectures, and she said to me one day at the end, when my course was nearly finished, she said, "Do you expect to get your diploma, Amy?" I said, "I hope so". "Oh, well", she said, "You were intelligent, but you were never studious". (Laughs). And I said, "Well, how can you tell that?" "Oh yes", she said, "I have seen you quite a lot recently and I remember your old compositions". (Laughs). Bit damping, but she was such an old dear. Mmm. And it was through her I joined the Women's Freedom League and got interested in the women's movement.

Right. But after you left training college, did you teach?

Yes, I left in '25, when... No. No, '27. When employment conditions were very bad. And I knew I had to get some work, because by that time my father had died. Although I had been able to finish the college course. And so I was... I got a position in a Hospital School. At Carshalton. And I was there for two years. And then I managed to get into St Mary Abbots Church of England School in London. And I was there, yes, for three years, and then I was married. And in those days you had to leave when you got married.

Yes.

Mmm.

Very difficult.

Mmm.

What sort of age group did you teach?

Well, I was trained for senior girls. But when I was teaching in the Hospital School you had to take anybody, child, who came, you see. And I began to get interested in the beginnings of learning. And so when I applied, I applied for a vacancy in a junior mixed and infants school in London. And at that time if you wanted extra qualifications or anything you didn't get leave of absence like you do now. Well, you did it either in the evenings or the weekends. And I went to various courses and got qualifications in... in teaching infants and juniors. And I stayed with them for the rest of my teaching career.

Yes. That's very interesting.

Yes.

And you said you met your husband when you were teaching in London.

Oh no, no, I met him at the church, because we always attended Battersea Parish Church, St Marys. And I met him there. But... Yes, I was teaching when we got married in, was it? '31. Mmm, 1931.

And when you got married you had to leave your...?

Yes, we had to leave, yes. But (laughs) money, we had various financial burdens. And you could get... State schools couldn't employ you because of the marriage bar. But church schools could, you see, because they had a different set of governors. And

I applied for a vacancy at Christ Church Chelsea. And got the job there and carried on teaching again.

So you didn't actually stop?

Well, yes, I was off for about four years, that was all.

And what did you do then?

And then I was there until, of course, the evacuation.

What did you do during the four years weren't teaching?

Well, I stayed at home as a housewife and... (laughs)

Did you find that frustrating?

Yes, but then you see I was always interested in youth work, and I did a fair amount of guiding, I was District Guider and did a lot of camp work. My husband was interested in scouts. And so I did that.

What did your husband do?

He was an analytical chemist. So...

And where did you live when you were first married?

In Battersea. Yes. We had a flat in Cambridge Mansions. And then we moved to Wandsworth Common. Yes, Trinity Road. And then round into Maudlen Road. And at one time - well, you needn't put this in - but at one time I had both my mother and my mother-in-law living with me. (Laughs). When we were in Trinity Road we had a large house, both were widows. And it was all right when I was at home, but when I decided - when we decided that I'd better go and earn some money, because money

was getting so tight, (laughs) and then the fun began. The two of them left at home.

(Laughs)

I can imagine.

So we got a flat for my mother-in-law and put her in there and carried on.

So you went back to teaching then?

Mmm.

To still teaching infants?

Oh yes, mmm.

And how long did you stay at...?

Well, I was at St Mary... At Christ Church Chelsea. We evacuated to Uxbridge. No, the other side of Uxbridge. Denham, New Denham. And then after I'd been a year there, the children were coming back and our numbers went down so much that some of us were sent back to London. So back to London I came, to Stepney. Oh yes, before that of course, I had worked for a little while in the Raleigh School(ph) at Stepney. And then when we got back to London the schools were all closed so the teachers were either put into rest centres or on to field kitchens, cooking. And I remember going to the divisional officer and he said to me, "Well, what experience have you got in cooking?" "Well", I said, "Any experience I've got in large scale cooking", I said, "Is cooking for guides at camp". "Ah", he said, "Just the person we want". So I got put on a field kitchen in a playground in Brick Lane, Stepney. And then from there I went into the City, because the Lord Mayor decided - I don't know what his name was now - that they should have a kitchen for employees in the City. So I was transferred to St Mary's .....? School. And once again another field kitchen (laughs). We'd only opened it 10 days when we were blitzed. So after that, for, oh, a couple of months, we served soup and tea on the pavement (laughs). And then got the

kitchen open again, and there were so many children in London, and there were no schools open, that it was decided the schools should be re-opened. So I was a bit perturbed to think I'd got to, you know, be in Stepney. I was living in Wandsworth and, you know, going... Used to cycle to and fro every day, because there was... There was little other possibility of getting across because of the bombing. So I was transferred to Battersea. And I taught at a school then called Surrey Lane. And went on there. What happened after that?

Were you teaching there until the end of the war?

Yes. Yes, that's right. Then...

Can you remember what it was like when the war ended? Were you at school when it ended?

Oh. Well, yes. Do you mean the day the war ended?

Yes, VE Day or...

Oh, well, I mean the schools closed and we... (laughs) we had a holiday for the rest of the day. And then... I'm just trying to think how it was. I was put on to another... To the Lambeth... Oh no, I remember what happened. Just before that, not only were the authorities worried about the children in the daytime, but of course it was in the evenings. And they made a big attack on opening up youth clubs. And... I can't remember whether I applied or what happened, but anyway the London County Council transferred six of their teaching staff to form the nucleus of the youth organisation. And I was one of those, because of my experience with guides. And so I became a youth organiser. And that carried on until '49, 1949.

Were you still involved with the guides then?

Well, yes, and, you know, I didn't do very much with the guides because as a youth organiser I was out every evening, you know, we were starting up new clubs and

getting people in to help. And then (laughs) once again they decided, no, the youth organisers ought to go back, they would appoint other people, not teachers. So back I went again. And then I was recommended on the promotion list, I suppose they called it. And I was accepted for it. And so then became the head teacher of the Wyvil Infant School in Lambeth.

[inaudible]

(Laughs).

Very wide experience.

Yes, I've never minded accepting a challenge for a new... a new job, you know. And I suppose this is why I've had such a varied experience. But I was at Lambeth at the Wyvil, oh, I suppose, yes, 19 years. Then by that time I was old enough to retire (laughs). But in the meantime, I'd also got, in '45, 1945, I had become a member of the Labour Party. And local elections came along. And I had no real intention to get on the local council. But I went to the party meeting. And they were moaning the fact, you see, I lived in a Tory area which had never had a Labour councillor in all the years of its existence. And so I found that, you know, there didn't seem to be anybody, and I said to one of the women, I said, "Well, isn't there anybody to stand?" So she said, "No". She said, "[inaudible]" So she said, "Nobody wants to stand for the Labour Party". So I said, "Yes, but you want to put a name on the list". So I said, "If you want a name, you can put mine on". So, I was nominated as a candidate. (Laughs). And lo and behold, got in. 'Cos there was a whole sweep, you see. The whole of Wandsworth turned Labour. So in '45 I got on the council and I did, oh, 30 years.

When did you join the Labour Party?

In '43. I'll tell you the book that made me do it too, was a book by Ellen Wilkinson called The Town That Was Murdered. And I read that. And I was so struck by, you know, what happened, what was happening in Jarrow and the Jarrow march and one thing and another, and the work that I had been doing. And of course my father had

always been quite a political animal. My mother would have nothing to do with politics. And when I began to get quite interested, when I was young, she said to me, "Politics are out until you've finished at college". She didn't mind me becoming a guider and doing youth work, but no politics. (Laughs). I think she must have had a pretty tough time with my father. But I was too young to realise it (laughs).

So when you joined the Labour Party did you find that there were very many women who were sort of.....?

Well, yes, there were... Of course there was a very strong womens' section in Wandsworth, in the Earlsfield area. Springfield area. And it was the womens' section and the guilds, the Co-operative Guild, that nominated me to stand for the council.

And how many women were on the council when you were elected? Do you remember?

No, I can't. I should think it was somewhere about 12. Not very many.

And did you enjoy it?

Oh, yes, I enjoyed council work very much. And I'd only been on a year when I was nominated as Chairman of what was then the Public Health Committee. But my biggest interest in local government was always libraries. I became Chairman of the Library. I was Chairman for 10 years. And, yes, it distresses me really to see the things that are... the things that I used to work for and we got going. I mean we developed the library in the prison, Wandsworth Prison. We did boxes of books for hospitals. We developed the... you know, the car... The business going round to...  
Oh, what do you call it?

Mobile?

Mobile library, yes. And I suppose they're still in existence, but they've been cut so much. I mean the libraries now are cut so much. But there we are, that's what happens.

When did you join the Women's Freedom League?

Oh, well I joined the Women's Freedom League - let me see, must have been 1940. No, no, just before the war. Yes. I had forgotten to say to you that I had transferred from Christ Church Chelsea over to Stepney. And I was teaching at the Raleigh(ph). And there was a... one of the young teachers there, her name was Suzie Peddler. And she brought along a copy of the womens'... the bulletin, and gave it to me to read. And lo and behold, this was the publication of the Women's Freedom League. And lo and behold, the list of officers, the treasurer was Lilia Podzus. So I said, "Who is Lilia Podzus?" So Suzie said, "Oh, I don't know, I'll ask Tommy". That was Miss Thomas. She was a very active woman. And I said, "There can only be one person to have a name like Lilia Podzus". And it was, it was my old English mistress. So this was the one who had been the suffragette. So I got in touch with her. And she, you know, joined me on to the Women's Freedom League. And that's how I got into the women's movement. And that was in 1940, yes.

I understand you were very much involved in two campaigns. One, giving women the right to keep their nationality on marriage to foreigners. How did that come about?

Well, this was... the women's... There's a woman called June Nita Francis(ph). I don't know whether she's still alive. But there was a society for this. And the Women's Freedom League and I suppose the Fawcett Society. But I wasn't active in the Fawcett Society. We kind of all joined together. And we, you know, supported June Nita Francis(ph), who was the leader really of this. And lobbying government. And then, of course, after the war, when Labour got the majority, the minister - I don't know if it was the Home Office or who it was. But the women's organisations went to see him. And he quite agreed with this and finally put through the amending legislation that brought it in. But it was... I took no personal - you know - part in this, I was just a member of the Women's Freedom League. The other thing though that I

was very active in was the question of equal - war injuries - equal compensation for war injuries. And I did do canvassing for that. And also too when we finally got Atlee to say he would see us, I went on that deputation.

That must have been very exciting.

Well, it was. And of course old Atlee, you know, he was a great man for doodling. And there... we were... I'm just trying to think where we had the meeting. And I remember us sitting up and we were the... And you would think that he wasn't taking any notice whatsoever. He just, you know, doodled away there, and occasionally look up and ask a question, then he'd go on and look as if he was doodling again. And he really didn't show any real interest until the delegate from the Fire Brigade Union spoke. And he said that the men were... He said, "The women came into the incidents when the bombs were dropping, and one thing and another, sitting there in their ambulances. Bombs all round them. To know very well that if anything happened to them, they were injured or anything, they would only get three fifths compensation to what the men got". And old Atlee did look up at that and... (laughs) And then some little time afterwards it was introduced, legislation was introduced for equal compensation.

[inaudible]

Oh yes, well, yes, I went up and down my road, Maudlen Road, and asked people (laughs). I was most surprised, because one man said, "I'll go and ask me wife". (Laughs). I never had that reply given to me before.

[inaudible]

Yes.

It's usually the other way around.

Yes.

End of Track 1

Track 2

How many petitions did you present?

Oh, I can't remember now. I mean I think I only got one pageful, because there were a number of us working at it.

And you were doing this and council work? Still on the council?

Oh no, no, I wasn't on the council then, because you see this was during the war. Yes, so I was back teaching you see.

But were you still teaching when you were on the council?

Oh yes, yes.

How did you manage to fit everything in?

Well, it was like a jigsaw, I mean one was up early in the morning (laughs). It amuses me when I hear people are so busy and, I don't know, I managed to keep a home going and full time teaching and then council work in the evening. And - it can be done.

Did you find your husband was very supportive?

Well, you see he had his interests. He was a very keen model railway enthusiast as well. And he'd be quite happy being left up... We had two attic rooms in the house. He had his railway there and he would go up there and play -(laughs) build engines and things and play with the trains for a whole evening. But I mean he was a keen scouter as well. And also too, he... Well, we both sang, but he was a member of the BBC Choral Society. So on Friday nights I knew he wouldn't be home, and also too

they did quite a number of concerts. And when... And recordings. And he would go straight on from the laboratory. And so otherwise I would have been at home in the evening on my own.

Yes, I suppose that's true.

We always tried to arrange it, if possible, if we had camping weekends that he would be away with the scouts and I would be with the guides you see. So we arranged it comfortably.

It must have been a great help to you to have someone who...?

Oh yes, I mean I... But not that he was interested in politics. 'Cos his theme song was, "Oh, well all politics are dirty". So he wasn't at all interested. But he had these other interests, so I was able to get on with mine.

And how long were you in council work?

I was 30 years. Well, no, 27 years. From '45 to '73, I think it was. '72 or '3. And I was the Mayor of Wandsworth in '64 to '65.

Did you enjoy that year?

Yes, yes. The LCC were very co-operative in things like that. When I was nominated I said, "Well, I must find out whether I can have some, you know, any spare time". And I rang up the council, rang up the education officer, and he laughed, he said to me, "Well, knowing how", he said, "your school is organised", he said, "I see no reason why, (laughs) why it should collapse if you're out of it at any time". But I was always particular though, I... When the list of engagements, suggested engagements, was given to me, they knew that except in the holidays I would not except engagements before 3 o'clock in the afternoon. And also too, I cut out everything I possibly could on a Sunday. Because I... I mean the men wanted a day off as well. Because you see in... I don't know what they do now, but of course I had a chauffeur,

a mace-bearer and a secretary. And I mean if I was wor... you know, at an engagement till 12 o'clock at night, I mean they had to be on duty as well. So we arranged it so that it was very seldom I took Sunday engagements.

Did you have any time for any social life during all of this?

Oh yes, yes, I mean it fitted in.

And did you have family around you?

No, I didn't. No, I didn't have any family. I was 'universal aunt' to my... My brother and sister both had children. And one lived in Birmingham and one somewhere else. And anyway, the kids used to come up. We had plenty of room and they knew they had to look after themselves if I wasn't available, and they were all quite happy about it.

Were you surprised that women should have got such posts as Mayor or Mayoress?  
Was that very common by the sixties?

Yes, but... Well... I think they'd got there in Wandsworth at any rate. There weren't many women on the council. I was the third woman. But there have been several women since. But of course in the, as you might say, percentage-like, with the number of men on the council, I think the women had their fair share. And the Labour Party at any rate were... did everything by... you know, whether you were capable of doing a job, whether it was a man or a woman, you'd got to get the chairmanship of a committee. I mean there was no query when I was nominated as the Chairman of the Libraries. None of the men said, "Oh, well why should she have it?"

So you never found there was any prejudice against women in the Labour Party or...?

No, no, no, no. I've always got on very well with men. And I've spoken... although I didn't often speak in the council chamber, the men did all the yapping. And I didn't

see there was any real need for it. You'd done your work before on the committee (laughs).

Well, yes, so you feel that women should be accepted as they are?

Yes.

There wasn't any...?

There wasn't any need.

[inaudible]

No, quite.

Do you think there was some disappointment among the older people, like you mentioned the suffragettes? Do you think there was some disappointment as time went on that they really hadn't achieved, that women hadn't achieved as much in...?

Well, I think... I've had the impression that the old suffragettes, their aim was the vote. And once they got the vote they felt their job was done. They didn't... I don't think they realised the consequences of what would be happening afterwards. That the vote wasn't the be-all and end-all of it. I mean there was... It didn't bring equality. That's what I think. And they didn't realise that. And of course you see they'd worked for many years, they were tired, and... then really... Let me see, it was '28, wasn't it? The final... That's right. And then there was the big slump. And then the war came on. And I think it kind of put a bit of a stopper on the old members of the movement. And it was after the war that the younger members had to start again. Now you see, I was never a member of the Fawcett Society, not for many years. But I became very active in the National Association of Women Citizens. And their chief aim was to get women onto local government, and also things like magistrates, etcetera. They weren't concerned with equal pay, they didn't... Well, they might have been, some of

them, but at the same time it wasn't one of their aims. It was equal citizenship they were after.

And so I suppose during the thirties when it was quite uncommon for a lot of women to be able to work anyway? Because if you were married you had to stop working.

Oh yes. It wasn't... Yes, it wasn't until the war, I think, they repealed the... Yes, it got repealed in, I expect, in the '44 education act. About married women. That's right, because of course you couldn't stop... It was government service you couldn't... You had to leave in the Civil Service if you got married you see. But - I don't know exactly when legislation came in that did away with the marriage bar. But of course then you see, also the Women Citizens Association carried on from the Women's Freedom League, because the Women's Freedom League had been very keen on international... the Women's International Movement. And I think it was because of Dame Margery Corbett-Ashby. She was the President of the Freedom League. She was also the President of the International Alliance of Women. And I think the two, you know, got together. And the Women Citizens Association, they were very keen on international work for women. The Fawcett Society did do something, but they weren't so... I didn't know very much about them, and they weren't quite so keen. But I did know they were very interested in the Economic Commission.

So you must have met many of the leaders of these women's movements, as you were very much involved?

Well, yes. But I was... I was quite small fry in those days. You see Miss Reeves, Dame Margery... Now, who was it? The... In the Fawcett Society. But there were a number of very prominent women, you know, still about. And I was just, you know, a member of the... (laughs) the rank and file who was interested. So that when Dame Margery said, you know, decided it was time she stepped down, and that, you know, some of the younger women should come forward. And she... Mrs Bompus(ph), who had been the part time secretary of the Women's Freedom League during the war, although really she was the full time secretary of the International Alliance of Women. And she said to me, "Look, why don't you take... try and take some kind of office?"

And she and Dame Margery encouraged me a great deal. And persuaded me to go to congress in Naples. And... (laughs)

Could you tell us about that?

Oh well (laughs). I was a bit overawed about this. Because my languages weren't very good. And there were two or three very vocal, strong minded, French women there. (Laughs). And I'll always remember after the congress, the first board meeting. Well, this was rather an incident. In those days the UK delegation from the Women's Freedom League and the Fawcett Society, Women Citizens, etcetera. You see, they shared the 12 delegates between them. And in those days - I suppose big congresses do it now - they all stayed at the same hotel you see, you were the UK contingents. So we travelled together. And the discussion went on as to who UK should nominate for the board. They felt that UK ought to have somebody on it. So there was a Mrs Spiller, she was a French woman, but she'd lived in England for many years. And she was also a member of the Labour Party. And she said, "Well, I would like to nominate Mrs Bush". Well now, Miss Reeves and I didn't... who was the Chairman of the Women's Freedom League - didn't get on very well together. She was a Liberal, and she thought I was an upstart. And she nominated Margaret Ingledew. Who was then Margaret Matheson. So these two went hammer and tongs. We were travelling (laughs) by night over to Italy, and they went hammer and tongs. Finally decided they'd put both the names up. So I had only met Margaret then, but we got very friendly. So at the end of the congress, when the votes were counted (laughs), lo and behold, Margaret Matheson and Amy Bush (laughs) were equal at the bottom. Number 23 and 24, or rather both we were 23. So we looked at each other, and we couldn't both go on. So I said to Margaret, "Well, shall we toss for it then?" So she said, "Yes, okay". (Laughs). So we tossed for it. And of course some of the delegates thought this was awful, I mean UK, we roared with laughter about it (laughs). And Margaret won. So of course Miss Reeves was terribly pleased. Not that she was on the board, she didn't want to go on the board. Anyrate, last night of conference, after the dinner, Dame Margery said to me, "Oh, Bush..." - 'Cos we were all... It's funny how it's changed, we were all surnames then.

Oh really.

Yes. Yes, you always used people's surnames. Much more useful than using Christian names I find. But anyway, she said, "Bush, will you be available for the board meeting tomorrow morning?" And I said, "Well, yes, but I'm not on the board". "No, that's all right", she said. "You come to the hotel at 9 o'clock for the board meeting". So I went. And I sat at the side. And then when they got to the agenda, the appointment of Chairman for the Commissions - apparently there had always been... well, for some time, for the Education Commission, Doctor Lehman(ph) of France; she was Chairman of two. And they had decided that she could choose which she wanted. So she decided to have equal rights, I think it was, and not the education. So then the thing was, you know, who would be the Chairman. So Margery said, "I would like to nominate Mrs Bush". (Laughs). And I always remember Dr Lehman(ph) said, "Mrs Boosh? Who is Mrs Boosh?" And she looked round. (Laughs). And so Dame Margery, in a quiet voice, said, "Mrs Bush is the directrice of a large school in London". (Laughs). I shall never forget Lehman(ph) over that. And so that's how I got on to the board of the Alliance, and I've been on the board of the Alliance until... oh, the last congress I retired.

What were their aims of that...?

What...?

The aims of the Alliance.

Well, the International Alliance really is for equality. Equal education rights. Economic rights. Social rights. And... well, I mean, we're still trying to fight for them internationally.

Could you tell us something about Dame Margery? What was she like?

Oh, well, she was... never been anybody like Dame Margery. I would have thought that... (laughs). There have been various... She was interviewed herself... several

times before she died. Well... she was just a wonderful woman, that was it. And she... I think it was through her mother that she became interested in equality. Of course her father was... She was a Liberal, and her father was a Corbett. I believe he was a Liberal MP. Anyway, she was brought up in a political household. And he was a very progressive man. And she was one of the first women who went to... Oh, what's the name of the college? Newnham College, Cambridge. And did extremely well there. And well, just fought for equality all the time. It's difficult to talk about a person like that in two or three minutes. She was just an inspiration to us all.

Do you think these organisations are still as prominent as they once were?

Well, the Women's Freedom League has gone. Women Citizens has gone. The Fawcett Society I think has got a new lease of life now and is starting again. I'm sorry that they're not more interested in international work. And of course they could contribute so much on the international line. But there doesn't seem to be anybody, you know, really interested in the international angle. I mean I think they're doing something on Europe at the moment. I think they're connected with somebody. We don't seem to have any... 'Cos Dame Margery was the leader of... All the women's organisations knew her. She was a great woman in the Countrywomen. Although she never did very much in the Countrywomen of the World. She always kept on the political angle of the... But of course she was one of the founder members of the Townswomen's Guild. And all the societies accepted her as the leader of the women's movement. In the... Well, it's gone on for some time, but the fifties and sixties, Dame Margery was everywhere. Until slowly she, you know, she got too old and...

Do you think the women's movement has changed very much in its composition and getting enough active members?

Well, I think the thing is, of course, with the vote it was... everybody. It didn't matter what organisation it was, if they wanted anything, equality of women, they had the vote, they'd wanted the vote. You see there were the artists for the vote. Anybody and everybody, they had groups... And now I feel that what has made it so much weaker on the... I mean this was the great thing of Fawcett. With the fact that it was

legislation that must be amended and altered. And of course nowadays it strikes me that the women are attracted to something that's emotional. One parent families. The Gingerbread Group, and these. It has an emotional appeal to the younger woman. But they don't seem to realise that however much they shout and yell, they will not get anything unless they get legislation through. That's my opinion at anyrate. I mean this is why I had hoped that the 300 Group would have been stronger and... And I feel that the Fawcett Society is the only one now that really fights for the basics of equality.

Well it seems extraordinary that you were able to work full time and be a councillor and be involved in all of these. And whereas nowadays it seems that everyone is too busy.

Well, yes. I think that is so. I mean you can do these things if you try, if you want to do them. But the other point I think that has made things alter a little, is the fact that through our work women are now becoming professionals. They're, you know, full time, paid, etcetera. And they expect to be paid for everything. You don't get the voluntary work given. Now that's where I think that we're lacking. I mean there are some people, I mean you do things, we do things for the Fawcett Library. But we don't get the crowds of women coming in and saying, "Oh well, I'll do this and I'll..." No.

Do you think it's because more women have to work now? That there aren't so many who...?

Well, yes, there is that much about it. But on the other hand, if they go to work they say, "Oh well, I go to work now". But I mean it can be done. But you've got to organise your life. And (laughs) my friends - I have one particular friend who is a Chairman of the local Townswomen's Guild, because I'm always at her because I ring her up sometimes about half past nine in the morning, she's just about creeping out of bed. You see to get all this done, I used to be up about quarter past six every morning. And, as I say, it was like... it was like a jigsaw. I would not go out if the beds hadn't been made. And it was my husband's job to wash up. He did do that much (laughs). I was lucky in the fact that I did have help for, I think, three mornings a week,

something like that. Because I have always believed that if you do earn, work and earn, that you should be prepared to pay other people to do jobs as well. But... I don't know, it fitted in. But I think if you organised it it was done. And people who really want to do it, do do it.

So a typical day then when you were teaching? You'd start at, what, six?

I'd be up about quarter past six you see. And then there'd be breakfast. And we used to have an English breakfast in those days (laughs), it wasn't toast or anything. And then I'd go and make the beds, or my husband would do the washing up. I mean little jobs that had to be done. And I would collect my bits and pieces together. And I think... yes, I went out about quarter past eight I think. Yes, 'cos school used to start at nine. Yes, I used to leave him at home, because he didn't have to get to the laboratory till half past nine.

And did you walk to work, or by bus?

No, no, I had a bike. I cycled (laughs). I cycled until... Yes, I was 58 when I learnt to drive a car (laughs).

Really. Tell me about that, because I think that's extraordinary.

Why?

Well, it isn't actually, because I gather this is something that is becoming more common. But why did you decide at 58 to learn to drive?

Well, I just found that I needed a car to get about in you see. That was the only reason. And I just happened to remember that I was 58 when I did it. But we used to do a lot of cycling you see. And when we were young, before we were married, we belonged to a cycling club. And of course everybody cycled then. And for holidays we used to go on our bikes, we went one year up to the Lake District, another year up to Scotland. And, I mean, you see there weren't the cars about and it was very nice.

Yes, not like today where .....? before you got very far. I don't think I'd like to go on a bicycle down Putney Hill.

Well, I've got the bus outside you see. Oh no, I wouldn't cycle now.

If we could just go back a bit to your work with the council, when you were a councillor. Besides your great interest in libraries, were you just involved in the sort of day to day running of...?

Well, you see you... It was policy. I mean we had 12 libraries. 12 branch libraries in Wandsworth. We had a librarian. He still comes up occasionally to see me. He's retired too. But when he comes to London he calls in and we have a little gossip and we bemoan the fact (laughs) of what's happening to the libraries. There was quite a large library staff. No, the committee... And of course in those days, now they put everything baths, libraries, cemeteries, everything, all under the Leisure Committee, apparently, in the council. But then in those days we had a Libraries Committee. There was a Baths Committee. There was a Parks and Open Spaces Committee. And of course you were nearer the thing then. And you went into things in far more detail. And of course nowadays, as far as I can see, so much more is left to the officers to decide. And it's all very well for them to say, "Oh well, the main policy is decided by the committee". It may be, but at the same time there are a lot of small details, smaller details, that make the job much more interesting, and... if you're on a certain committee.

So what do you think of local governments now?

Well, I don't know very much about it really. But... And being... Let me see, I retired in '65, wasn't it? Yes. That's right. The last year I was a member of ILEA. I served on the ILEA for three years. And then another member took it over. But I always kept my interest in schools. And as Chair of Governors etcetera. And I was Chair of Governors of South Thames College.

End of Track 2

Track 3

If you could just go back to your experience with ILEA?

ILEA, yes. I was a member of ILEA. And then a younger member took on. But I kept up my interests in the various education establishments. I was Chair of Oak Hall, maladjusted boys. And then there was a Wandsworth one, the maladjusted boys, and I was Chairman of both of those. And then I was Chairman of South Thames College of Further Education. I was Chairman there for eight years. And then I was also Chairman of the Adult Education... Wandsworth and Putney Adult Education Institute. But of course you see, of these last two, soon as the last education act came in and the borough became the Local Education Authority, I was the wrong political colour, and I was out. So that really came at rather a right time, because I was thinking it's time for me to pack up. And so I'm really rather at a loose end now.

You must have found though quite a change in the schools in London over the period that you were involved. The sorts of children.

Well, yes. Although once I retired I wasn't... I didn't take an active interest in the schools. I mean I knew what was going on. But I don't think... they gradually evolved, but I don't think they altered all that much until, oh, perhaps the last five years of ILEA. But I know little about that. Of course by that time I was far more interested, and linking up the work I did... international work on literacy for women, with work for adults here in London.

Would you like to tell me something about the work that you did, international work on literacy for women?

When I got onto the board of the International Alliance, the president was a Danish woman, Esther Graf. And she was a businesswoman. Although she carried on, she worked for Lever Brothers I think, she was a head of Lever Brothers in Denmark. But

she retired, and she was very keen to get the commissions - we would call them committees - in the five points of the Alliance, really active. And it was through her that I started the seminar work for the International Alliance. UNESCO was then becoming quite active. And they were allocating sums of money, and she was able to get hold of some money, and we had our first seminar, education seminar, in Greece, before the congress in '58. And it was - I'm not quite sure what the title was - but it was women of the East and the West getting together to discuss literacy. That wasn't the title, but that was what we were doing. And from that the woman who came from Nigeria, she went back and ran a little seminar etcetera. And then, after that, we had a president from Sri Lanka. And she started me working on adult literacy. Before, we had just talked about literacy for girls and women. But she said the great need in the developing world was literacy for adults. So I never did very much, we never did very much with men, but we developed literacy for women, rather than... UNESCO, we supported UNESCO in their work for equal education for girls, girls and boys. But we worked hard on this other thing. And we started some regional work. And our first one was in the Caribbean. And I went out there. And we had a seminar on literacy for women and the Caribbean women. And then the whole idea of these seminars was that the person who came then went back to their own country and started, tried to get a small seminar of their own going in their country, which would develop into further literacy. Then the next one was in India, for the sub-continent...

What year would that be?

'72. And that was the one I really enjoyed most of all. By this time Olive Bloomer - I don't suppose you know her, although I believe she's a member of the Fawcett Society. But anyway, she was the Treasurer of the Alliance. And we went out together. And we used to get money from UNESCO you see. And (laughs) I was the organiser. And I think I got paid \$2000. And then that money, you see, would go back into the Alliance. I never took any money and 'nor did Olive as the Treasurer. But we put this into the budget, so that UNESCO paid. And that gave us a little sum of money to start something else afterwards. Anyway, and I remember we started... She and I, we would meet at Heathrow. And of course now I creep about with a little bag (laughs), but then I used to carry a typewriter, a bag of papers, clothes to last me for six weeks,

and thought nothing of carrying the lot (laughs). And I always took my travel scrabble with me. And 'cos you know these long air flights are very boring. And we used to start playing scrabble. And it would last, these games. And of course at the hotels there's nothing to do in the evening except prop up the bar, and neither of us wanted to do that particularly. So we would play scrabble. And when we got back to London the person who'd won the most games had to treat the other one to a dinner (laughs). Added a little bit of excitement to it. But the India one was very good, because I... Oh, that was the second one, yes, because I had been out to India before, to Pakistan, in '68. And we did that one, together with the Associated Countrywomen's World. No, no, with The Women's Institute. And that was 'Creating a Climate of Opinion for Literacy Among Women'. Sounds awfully... (laughs). Anyrate, the second one was very nice, because on the pre... I used to go out to do a pre-... what do I call it?... organisation, before the actual seminar itself. So I went up to Nepal and I went over to Indonesia. And I've never been further East than Indonesia. But visiting these other... you know, before. And then the main seminar was in '72, in Delhi. Then that was that one. Now what was the next one? Oh, in West Africa I think. I don't know, I've never noted down these things, I mean they've just been done, I've done them and... (laughs).

[inaudible]

Yes, yes.

But I mean did you feel that you were getting anywhere [inaudible]?

Oh yes, well, I think to a certain extent. But our trouble was that we hadn't got any money for real follow-up work. This was the great thing. I mean these women would come and they would say, "Oh yes", and, you know, they'd have all their notes and they'd known what they'd seen and done and etcetera, and they'd go back. And for a while you would get a bit of enthusiasm. But it gradually died out a bit. Although I do know there are certain things that are going on from what we started. But we never had any money to send out an organiser, unless we were able to get something from UNESCO, or from the United Nations Fund for Development. They paid for the main

seminar. And, as I say, Olive and I, any money we made out of it we put into the seminar fund of the Alliance, to give us a little bit of money. And that was all we had.

You didn't get anything out of the governments of the various countries that you were in?

No. When we were in... Oh yes, that's right, I did one in West Africa. That was an interesting one too. Because there we worked in English and in French. And the German government will always give money to their delegates, from the Deutsche froumring(ph), if they're going to a country where they have... you know, they want to start something, or they have an interest. So that Fersino... Fersino... oh dear... Baccu, I think is the proper name now. And Ote Volter... The French speaking... Germany has been trying for a long time to get their roots into the French speaking countries. And... what was the woman's name? Oh, Hede Flitz(ph). Yes, not Hede(ph), another one. When she was the President. She got onto the German government and she said, "Now we're going out there, we're going to work with the women's... you know, their literacy etcetera". And they managed to get their fares paid. But we never got a penny out of England. Although most of the third world countries that belong to the Alliance are countries that used to be members of the Commonwealth. And this is what is a silly thing about the... Of course the Germans are always very envious of the UK. And the Swiss rather follow them. And when they decided that... For a long time they thought England had far too much influence. The headquarters... there was a London office. And they were... Four or five years ago money was very tight and so somebody moved at a board meeting that the London office should be closed. And although Olive and I and Margaret Ingledew, we spoke very strongly against it, they closed it. And they've lost a great deal out of this, because you see all the English speaking countries that are members of the Commonwealth, all have high commissioners here. And I mean it's the easiest thing in the world if you want something in a country, is to go and see the high commissioner and sell it to them. And then it helps. So there we are. Yes, and I did the West African one. But the... Laurel Casinada(ph) was then in charge, I had given up the London office. And she was in charge and she did - organised the one for East Africa.

How big an office was there in London?

Oh, about 20 by 20 feet. (Laughs).

Typical.

Oh yes. I mean there was me, unpaid, and, you know, more or less in charge. And then we used to have a part time secretary. And one or two people who came in and did voluntary work. It was all voluntary.

So did this take up a great deal of your time at that particular point?

Oh, well, I was doing a lion's work. I mean all the spare time I had was given to Alliance work when I was really active. I kept up my council... My husband had gone by then, and so I was on my own, I was able to things, you know, I didn't have... worrying about keeping a home going or anything like that. And so I used to... I kept the council work up and various other voluntary things I did. But the spare time, as I say, was given to the Alliance and it was through that that I was able to do this other organising.

So this was after you had retired?

Oh yes, yes. Yes, this was in the sixties and seventies.

And what other voluntary work were you doing? Because I know you were quite involved. Did you find that retirement was...? You didn't have time on your hands?

No, I've got more time on my hands now. And I'm not so active, I can't get around like I used to, unfortunately. Oh, well, I mean I've always been keen in... arts and crafts. I mean there are always things to work for. And I mean I've always been very active in church activities. I just can't think... (laughs).

You can't think of what it must be like not to have anything...?

Well, I know, I mean to have an afternoon empty like this. (Laughs).

What would you be doing if I wasn't here?

Probably reading. Yes. Well, in a way, things kind of cut out on their own accord, because I finished the... Perhaps you didn't know, but, yes, it was six years ago, I had a venose thrombosis, which put me in hospital. And then when I came back I, for, oh, some weeks, I had to sit there with me feet up higher than me bottom, and nothing to do, you know. And ever since then, physically, I haven't been so active as I was before. And I thought to myself, well, I really must start thinking about, you know, what to do, and pack up some of these things. So... And then, of course, I mean I've had... Then I started cataracts too. And so for the last eighteen months I mean I haven't been able to... I've been able to read, not as much though. And my long distance was very poor as well. So that kind of... (laughs).

[inaudible]

Yes.

The sorts of things you like to read, are they things that you became interested in when you were younger, or do you like...?

Well, no, I've always been very keen on historical novels, well researched historical novels. And I like... In fact I'm going back reading Margery Allingham and those detectives... They're quite well written. I mean some of the modern detective work is pretty awful. But... So I'm, I suppose, fairly Catholic in my taste. (Laughs). I've altered. I mean for a while I was very keen on books, novels about, you know, people going over to America and starting a new life there. But (laughs) I've given that up now (laughs).

I don't suppose there's any place you'd rather live than...?

Oh, I wouldn't leave London.

No.

No. I have a friend, Josephine Carter. Well, she was President of the Women Citizens for one period. And she and her husband moved to Banbury. And about, ooh, several years ago now - they live in what was an old farmhouse, which has been... they've got the centre. And then the still room at the side, has been made into a cottage. And the laundry on the other side has been made into a cottage. And she was very anxious for me to go down when Eric died, to go down and have one of the little cottages. But I said, "No, Jo,". I go down and see her, I know a lot of her friends, they're always very nice and they say, "Well, why don't you come and live down here?" But I say, "No, Jo, they're your friends. They're not my friends. And it's far better for me to stop in London where I have contacts".

When did your husband die?

'62, '3.

So you were still...?

Yes, I was still busy. Yes.

And still interested in children?

Oh, yes, not so much now. I think, noisy little brats! (Laughs). They're still the same. Little boys still shout at the tops of their voices. They can't talk quietly. (Laughs). I said to a mother in the bus this morning, and she had a little boy with her, and he was a very sensible little boy. But always talking at the top of his voice. And I said to the mother, I said, "Why is it little boys always shout like this?" And she looked at me (laughs). "Oh", she said, "Do they?" I said, "Yes". I said, "They don't talk quietly". "No", she said, "I suppose they don't". (Laughs).

But of your work then, you've obviously been involved in all these activities. Which ones do you feel have given you the most satisfaction? Or have they all?

Well, I mean when I was doing each I was thoroughly... I think the International Workers I found the most inspiration. But, of course, you see, I've always been very fortunate. I've never minded trying new things. And I've always been, in a way, fortunate. I mean I couldn't have carried on the international work I did if I hadn't have been on my own. I mean my own mistress and, you know, do things when you want to. It's a different matter when you have somebody you have to, naturally, have to consider and fit things in with. This is what's been so fortunate for me. And I've got one niece, she calls me her second mum, she lives in Southfields. She acted as my Mayor when I... Mayoress, when I was Mayor. And I mean - well, she's often over here, and sometimes stays the night or so, although she's got her own little house. And, you know, the children have always welcomed me. I mean I... They're wanting me to go over to Ireland now. But I just don't want to travel these days. I'm quite happy staying at home. (Laughs).

Well, you've got such a lovely house, I'm not surprised [inaudible].

Yes, and I'm very lucky, I mean the bus is outside. I can't walk an awful lot. I'm wondering whether I shall have to give up the library, because I can't come to the... I find it very difficult to come up to the lectures.

The Fawcett?

Yes. And I really think they ought to try and find somebody a bit younger.

How did you become involved with the Friends of the Fawcett Library?

Well, I've always... When I joined... I mean I've known the Fawcett for some time. And then when I joined them - I mean the Women Citz closed down, Women's Freedom League, and I wanted to belong to some women's organisation. And although I didn't do very much, I suppose I got friendly with Mary Stott. And, yes,

when I first retired I was a member of the University Women's Club, Women's University Club. And it was very useful for entertaining overseas people. But, ooh, about four years ago, I realised I wasn't using it... Well, anyway, I often used to meet Mary there. And we've kind of... we don't see each other very often, but we do. But it was through her I began to get interested in the Fawcett, and active in the Fawcett Society.

Have you known Mary Stott for a long time?

Well, ooh, I suppose some years. But I've never... Not like some of the other people that I've met in the women's movement. But we meet at... Well, when I was a member of the club I often used to see her, because she's a member of the club as well.

Of all the women that you've met, these various women's organisations, would you say any one was more of an inspiration to you, or should be more of an inspiration to younger women?

No, I mean Dame Margery was the inspiration of... Yes. And, you know, I've got some very good friends; Margaret Ingledeu, who is a cousin, a young cousin of Dame Margery's. ....? and I go down there occasionally and see her, or when they come up, she and her sister. And, of course, Olive. Olive Bloomer and I were very close. Then, of course, her husband retired. And they've gone out to Malta to live, so I don't often see her now. But, you know, she comes over, oh, I suppose fairly frequently, and we meet up again. But we were very friendly together. Oh no, there are... Well, there are a lot of people that... A lot of women I still know. But you see, this is the thing of getting old, you're generation goes. This is before Easter, three of my old friends died. And this is what happens you see. And you slowly... unless you've got some interest. My great interest now is patchwork and quilting. I go to a... We've got a very nice class at the Institute. And with an excellent teacher. And so I do a bit of patchwork and quilting. (Laughs).

So if you look back through your sort of life once you grew up and started working etcetera, which decade do you think you found most interesting? The thirties, the forties, fifties, sixties?

No, the sixties really, that was the time when I finished at school and I was a Mayor and started, you know, the education work for the Alliance. It's the sixties. And that went on till about '75, I suppose, and then slowly it began to tail off. I came off the council, you see, and... Of course this is the thing with council work. You meet so many people. But of course when you're off the council they go.

Yes, this is strictly [inaudible]

Yes, yes.

Are you very optimistic about the women's...?

Women's movement?

Today.

Sometimes I am and sometimes I am not. I mean little bits come up and I think ah, yes, they're doing something. And then... it fades again. But I don't really know enough about it now. I mean let's face it. And I don't know enough of the younger generation either. Leslie Abdella(ph). Do you know Leslie Abdella?(ph)

Yes.

Yes, she writes to me sometimes. And she's now living in France. I don't know why. But anyway, I have a letter from her occasionally. And there's... what's her name?... Mrs Davies. Alison Davies. Well, quite a lot of them write. And in '63, '64, the Alliance held its congress in England and we had a very powerful hospitality committee formed. Now the Fawcett... there was a member of the Fawcett Society who had some pull with the Royal household. And through her Princess Alexander

became the Patroness. And the Chairman of the Townswomen's Guild was very keen, and there were several... And we had a very, very powerful hospitality committee. Well now, one or two of us still meet and (laughs) talk about the old days.

End of Track 3

Track 4

If we could go back a bit to your early life? Could you tell us a bit more about your grandparents and your father and mother? Particularly on your father's side?

Well, I... I can't help you very much. Or do you mean about my father?

Yes, about your father, if you can.

Oh, well... As I said, he was a family man. And we did... the family did things together. And if ever he had any spare time he would take us out. He was very keen to take me out.... take me round London. And we would get on the tram and go either up to, usually up to London Bridge, and then from there we used to walk. And that's how I know the City so well. We would walk to St Paul's or walk round to the Tower. And then another time perhaps we would get on the bus and go to Piccadilly. And from Piccadilly we would go walking to various interesting places. And that's how I came to know London.

Did he treat you more or less as an adult from a fairly early age?

Oh yes. I mean.... Yes, it was as an adult.

And he was very keen that you should have a good education?

Oh yes, yes. And also too, I suppose I probably did things that girls didn't usually do. I mean he taught me to row. We went into Battersea Park and we used to have a boat on the lake. Well, it was just, I mean... it's a bit difficult to explain it you see (laughs).

Did he talk very much about his life in the army?

Oh, he used to tell us things sometimes about life in Egypt. Because he was in the Third Battalion of the Grenadier Guards and he went out to the relief of Gordon. And he used to tell us a little bit about life. And the fact that the worst thing you could do was to steal water. Water was very, very severely rationed. And if any soldier was caught stealing water, he was, well, practically court-martialled. And then after Gordon was relieved and the.... It wasn't a battle, I don't quite know what it was. And the fact that they came home via Cyprus and stayed there. And then from Cyprus they came back by troop ship to England. He didn't really say very much about it.

Did he meet your mother after he came back? Or before he went?

No, I think he must have met her before. Because she lived at Windsor. And of course he was in barracks. That's right. He was a friend of her brother, my uncle Tom. And that's how she met him.

Right. You mentioned that later in life that you met Miss Podsuz again, or came across her. And that you remembered her from your....

Schooldays.

Schooldays and so on. Did she have much of an influence on you at that time? Or was it just that you noticed the name later on?

No, not in school, I'm afraid (laughs) we weren't very respectful to her. She was a little tiny person and she lisped rather badly. And I'm afraid (laughs) often times we were, as schoolchildren are, a bit cruel about it, and mimicked her.

Did she ever speak about women's suffrage, or...?

Well, yes, you see when I met her in later life, and visited her, I used to go to lectures at the University and go in and see her, because she lived quite near. And used to go in and see her. And then she would talk about it. And she would talk about her early life as a teacher. She started in a village school. I always think of her if ever I read any of the books by Miss Reed. Who was a teacher in a village school as well. And Miss Podszuz would talk to me about what teaching was like there. And I was always very amused at, if the.... The numbers of children in the class, it used to fluctuate. And if she had too many children in one day she would say to perhaps one of the biggest girls, "Now, I'm sure your mother.... you would be very useful if you were helping your mother today. You go home." And that's how she brought her numbers down (laughs) to a manageable size. Because she said.... There was one other teacher, and it was a two class school, and, well, numbers used to vary. And I don't know very much about her background at all. But she just used to talk about teaching. I suppose because I was a teacher. And I don't know very much about her work as a suffragette either. She didn't speak about that very much. But after she retired, evidently she was very interested in education and women, and she went out to Tangiers. And she taught there in a... some kind of settlement. And taught reading and writing to those children. Then until for some reason she had to come back to England. And there she joined with the Women's Freedom League and became very active in the London branch.

So she obviously never lost her great enthusiasm?

No, she was.... Yes, that's right.

Did you ever think about things like women's suffrage at that time? Was there any talk in your family about whether women should have the vote or not?

No. I mean that didn't worry. I automatically.... I mean when women got the vote in, was it, '28? I mean I just used it and that was that. And I wasn't particularly interested. Because I always found plenty to do. I had lots of interests in youth work. It wasn't until... I believe I... I'm not sure whether I told you this, but in '38... '37, 1937, I decided to take the MATHA(ph) diploma in nursery work. And I applied to the

London County Council for leave of absence. And hoped that they would pay, and I would get leave of absence with pay. And to my surprise the reply came down, "Oh yes, okay" - I could have a year's leave of absence without pay. And the education... the fee I think was £37. So I rang the department, and I said, "I can't understand this". And I said, "Why aren't I getting leave of absence with pay?" And they said, "Oh, you're married. You've got a husband who's working". So I said, "Well, what happens to a man who applies for leave of absence to take a further qualification? Does he get paid or....?" "Oh no, he's a married man, he's got a family". And that riled me so much. And then the war came you see. And in any case I couldn't have taken it up. But it was... at the beginning.... yes, just before we were evacuated, I read the copy of The Bulletin and found out about Miss Podsuz. And that's how I started in it you see.

Just to pick up this resentment about not getting paid leave of absence. Did you find when you went into teaching that there was a certain career structure for women and another one for men?

Oh no, there wasn't. But the only this is, of course, if you were married you had to leave. And I marked that in here. When I married in '31, the marriage bar was still in existence and I had to leave. Otherwise, I mean, the thing was that women only got 4/5ths of what the men.... They didn't get equal pay or anything.

What made you decide to go into teaching?

Well, there wasn't very much... very many things open. And it was either that or needlework of some kind. Or you could go into the Civil Service, into telephones. There were very few openings for girls in the beginning of the twenties.

Did any of your classmates go on to university? Was that ever a choice?

Yes. Now let me think. There were three or four of us went to training college. And some of the girls did. But I wasn't brilliant... (laughs) as all that. And besides that too, I knew very well that I mean if you went to university it was four years for

whatever you did. But for teacher training it was two years. And I had to earn some money as soon as possible. I got a teaching bursary, which gave me a grant of £45 a year. But that was all I had during college.

And it was necessary for you to be financially independent?

Oh yes.

As soon as possible?

Yes. Quite.

When you started teaching then, you said in 1927 I think?

No, in '25 it was. Yes.

Did you have any difficulty in finding a job?

Oh yes. I mean at that time I was very lucky. When college finished I managed to get two or three weeks supply work. There was an open air school in Battersea Park, for children. You know, tubercular children, that kind of thing. And applied for it, and I saw these.... I couldn't get onto the list of first appointments in London. And I couldn't go.... I couldn't leave home because I was with my mother you see. My father was dead. And so I saw this Hospital School vacancy in one of the books. And I applied for that. And of course, you know, (laughs) said, oh yes, I knew all about open air teaching (laughs). Having done three weeks in Battersea Park. And so that's how I got a job. But my particular friend, she was out for a very long time. Because there were so few vacancies. And then the Hospital School extended again and I recommended her to the headmistress. And Trish got on the staff as well. And I mean, well, it was.... I remember two of the teachers saying that they walked the streets looking for jobs before they managed to get a... when they came out of college.

Did it stay quite bad until the war, or did it improve?

Yes, I think... I can't really say. I mean... I was at the Hospital School for a couple of years and then applied for a Church School in London. And so... But I think it was difficult until the wartime came.

Do you think the war made a big difference to career opportunities for women?

Well, the point... Yes, I think the thing was that women could get all sorts of jobs when the war came. Because the men went... joined the army, the services. I remember a girl, a woman, I suppose she was about my age, and she was in the bank. And of course she'd been very lucky to get in a very junior position. But when the war came she was very thrilled because she went on the counter. And once upon a time they only had men on the counters in the banks. But as soon as the men came back, off she was taken you see.

So it was rather like the end of World War One?

Quite. Quite. Well, this was, yes... World War Two, yes, that's right. (Laughs).

When you became the head teacher at Wybold School, was it quite usual to have women head teachers?

Oh yes, in infant schools they were all women. And there were quite a number of women as heads of primary schools. The London County Council didn't make any difference. I mean they weren't like some of the country education authorities, where they would appoint women because they were cheaper than the men, they didn't have so much salary to pay. But in London I don't think that there was equality all the time.

Yes, it was in the forefront, wasn't it? As far as opportunity....

You see they had some very strong women on the education committee. Margaret Cole and Peggy Jay. I think London education, I mean through them, developed an enormous amount.

Yes, I think you're right. To come on now to your joining the Labour Party in 1943. You did talk about this on the previous tape. But when you joined were any women's issues discussed in the Labour Party at that time? Things like equal opportunities?

No. No, not at all. No, I don't remember any at all. I mean all they were thinking of was trying to get into power. No, any work on equal opportunities or equal access to anything, was done by the voluntary organisations as far as I was concerned. And it was through the Women's Freedom League that I went to the... on the two deputations. And the women's organisations were voluntary organisations for working on this. But I don't know of anything being done. You see there was practically nobody in parliament. There were one or two women in parliament. But I mean they didn't, as far as I know, they didn't bring up these questions of equality.

And they didn't try to get more women.....? [inaudible]

Yes, yes, there was that. But I mean many of us said, "Well...." But there were so few women you see who were put forward as candidates. I mean I was nominated to go onto the panel for interviews. Because after the war I thought, oh well, I would like to try and see if I could be a parliamentary candidate. And I had a couple of interviews. But after a while I decided it wasn't my cup of tea and that I should keep to local government.

Did you find these interviews were discouraging? Were they trying to discourage you from running?

No, no, the interviews were quite good. I had one for Clapham I think it was. And one for Harrow. But no, the interviews were good. But it was the work. Now in central Wandsworth we had a candidate. What was her name? Llewellyn Davies. And when I realised.... She used to come after she'd been working, you know, in the morning. And she would come to my house and she used to use my spare bedroom and have a lie down if she wanted to or something. And when I realised how she worked and how she was attacked by people - because there was a great.... there was

opposition to women you see, as candidates. And unfortunately they didn't get any encouragement from the other women. Women didn't support women very well. Well, they didn't in Wandsworth at any rate. And when I realised what it was like, fighting an election, I decided it wasn't my cup of tea.

Do you think being married had something to do with your decision?

Well, no, no, no. I mean I remember with Pat Llewellyn Davies that was. At the women's meetings one of the women said, "Huh, well, she's got a baby". She had three children. "She's just got a baby and she shouldn't be running round canvassing. She should be at home with her children". But Pat made perfect provision for them. And when she applied and was interviewed, she said, "Well, one thing is, I would ask that from 4 to 6 every day I would be at home. Because, she said, "So that I can see the children being put to bed and one thing and another. And after that the rest of the day except for 4 to six". And she did. I mean she was very good.

But it would take an extraordinary, dedicated, ambitious woman to overcome the barriers, do you think, to get into...?

Well, yes. And of course she got the encouragement of her husband. And she came from a family - she was Welsh. And she had a very famous aunt. I didn't know her. Margaret Llewellyn Davies. Or Margaret Llewellyn I think it was. Who had done a great deal in Wales you see. So she came from that background.

So you thought then that working on a local level would be more suitable to your talents?

Oh yes. Yes. Yes.

When you became the Mayor - or did they call you the Mayor or the Mayoress?

Oh no, the Mayor. The Mayoress is the.... (Laughs). I always used to tease them then. I said, "Well, why aren't you the Mayoress?" They called them the Consort you see.

How did your husband feel about being the Consort?

Oh, he'd died by then. Yes. Oh no, I'd.... This was '64 to '65 I was Mayor. I wouldn't have got any encouragement from him either I'm sure (laughs).

Really?

Yes. He wasn't at all interested.

But you were interested despite his...?

Oh yes. Yes. I mean he had his interests. And he was a railway enthusiast making (laughs) railway engines and one thing and another.

Did you find then that working on the council.... I know we discussed this before. But there wasn't any prejudice against women?

No, no, no.

Or what jobs had to be done? You just did the job?

That's right. Oh yes, in local government there's been no antagonism to women, not like in parliamentary government.

Do you see that there's been very much progress? I mean there are obviously more women MPs. But it still seems to me to be quite difficult for women to become MPs.

Well, it's only difficult because the women don't put themselves forward or get to be put forward. I mean from my work, from what I see in the Putney Labour Party now, you see they've nominated a woman, Judith Chedwiggen(ph), as the parliamentary candidate. No, the fact is that the women still kind of do the humdrum jobs. Whether

it is because of home circumstances, or what it is, but you don't get the number of women being put forward as candidates. But I've never noticed any... I mean... Putney has had one or two women up as candidates. And I've never noticed there's been any opposition to them.

No, well perhaps when they change.... They're talking about changing the time [inaudible]

Well, yes, I think that would be a great help. The women have complained about this and found great difficulty. Unless they've had no children or no commitments.

To get back then to your years as the Mayor. Did you see this as sort of one of the great achievements of your life?

Well, no, I don't think so. I mean... I think I thought to myself after some years, "Oh well..." I just don't know. I mean there weren't very many women... I forget how many women we had on the council. But we had a woman in Wandsworth, Eleanor Goodrich, now she was an old suffragette too. And she got onto the local government in '34. And when... Wandsworth was completely Tory, and she was one of the first Labour candidates. And she, you know, said to me once or twice, "Well, you know, when are you going to allow your name to be put up as Mayor?" Well, it just... it just happens.

Did you meet very many women then who had been suffragettes? Did a lot of them tend to go into local politics?

Yes. But of course the.... Don't forget the enthusiasm... I mean a lot of the enthusiasm had gone. Women had got the vote and they thought that was the be all and end of it, and that was that. But really since the war I think that there's been the... except for the few who've kept up and realised that the vote doesn't give you everything. And even so, one thing about the Fawcett Society is they still realise that you must have legislation. You must get legislation through for equality. But a number of the other

societies, I mean you talk to a Townswoman and they'll say, "Oh yes", they believe in equality etc. But they don't work for it. And you have to work to get this.

So you would see legislation as being all important for women?

Yes, very. I mean until you get it on the statute book, you've got nothing behind you. This is why this latest thing about rape in the family. I mean now the Law Lords have spoken on it something will happen. But before I mean cases could have gone to court, you talked about them and that, but no action would have been taken.

Could you tell me a little bit more about the sort of work that the Women's Freedom League did during your time, and before?

Well... Well, I mean they just picked up things that were happening, or... they lobbied and they pressurised on.... Let me see, I'm just trying to think what.... Oh, nationality I remember. Now, the question of nationality. Women being able to keep their own nationality. Well now, that was a case. The members of the Women's Freedom League got up petitions and lobbied MPs. And locally they had a number of branches. They would have, you know, meetings in their areas in which they lived. And then finally... I can't think of the name of the minister who it was, but.....

End of Track 4

Track 5

You got up a petition you were saying?

Well, yes. And then we called a meeting. I can't think.... I know the argument was that for some time that they couldn't grant nationality, equal nationality, because of the Dominions. And they'd have to get them to agree. And I think there... It's a long time ago, but I think there must have been a meeting in London of Dominion prime ministers. It was after the war. And they got the consent of them. Or they agreed. And then legislation went through. But I'm afraid it's a long time ago (laughs).

But was the Women's Freedom League quite a strong organisation after the war?

Yes, it was small. It was like the Fawcett Society. Not very many but quite powerful. I mean people of influence were members. They had a few men as well. But the women who ran it were quite influential.

Was it mainly London based?

Well, the headquarters were in London, but there was... I remember going up to Scotland to speak. And there was quite a good branch at Bradford. There were several, you know, a number of them round, not a lot.

When you went up to speak what sort of subject would you be speaking on?

Well, I spoke really on what the work of the head office, the London office was doing.

And you were in the office?

Well, no only... I happened to be on the committee you see. And they wrote down and asked could the headquarters send them up a speaker. I think it was in '47. Yes, that's right. Because I remember it was the year when there was no coal. Freezing. Ah,

dear. And the trains, the passenger trains always had to stop to let the coal trains through. And oh, it was a long journey (laughs).

Did you enjoy speaking?

I liked... Yes, speaking like that, I mean to a group or a committee or something. But I wasn't very keen on public speaking for large meetings.

So these would be relatively small groups of women?

Well yes, I mean the usually branch meetings.

Did you do very much of that?

Well, I went round to Women Citizens. And we used to go to them if they were asking for somebody.

So this is the National Society of Women....?

Yes, National Association of Women Citizens. Yes.

And how would you define what they were doing?

Well, they were working for equality. But they worked primarily for equality in local government and also women magistrates and women in parliament. It was political to a cer.... Non-party political.

Did you find that there were... I mean it was sort of across the board as far as parties were concerned, these organisations? Or did they tend to be more...?

Well, I think they tended to be more Liberal than anything. But there were some Conservatives and there were a few Labour people.

But mainly Liberals?

I think most of them were, yes.

You'd think that the Labour Party might have been more interested in...?

Well, the Labour Party was still struggling you see. I mean it was really only after the war that I think that the Labour Party began to get kind of really big and active. And they had the majority, they had certain legislation to put through. And I mean they started the Health Service, they brought in legislation on education and one thing and another. And then they really began to get active. But before that, I mean for many years, they'd fought in the wilderness and...

But they didn't see women as being of...? One way of...?

Well, they didn't. I mean that was the general feeling you see. I mean the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party, they were all the same as far as women were concerned. You'd got nobody, you'd got one or two people, perhaps one or two men who felt that women should have more access to everything. But it was the general tone. That's my opinion. It was the general tone of society.

And it was acceptable and of course women accepted their role?

And I mean suffragettes, well, I think they shocked a lot of people. But they got the vote and they thought they'd... the vote was the be all and end all.

So there wasn't any burning issue then except for peace perhaps or international...?

Yes, I mean I don't remember any burning issue coming up. It was just general social conditions.

But do you think that people who had been interested in suffrage then became more interested in social conditions?

Because they felt that the....?

Yes, I think they did.

But women had a better understanding of the social issues than men? Did you find that...?

I think on the whole women do have a better understanding of conditions of life of the mass of people. And of course you see there was still... very prevalent was the feeling... you would go round and talk to women. "Oh well, I'll ask my husband". I mean I had that said to me several times on the doorstep when I used to go... Especially when canvassing on the question of equal compensation for war injuries. The numbers of times the woman said, "Oh well, I'll go and ask my husband".

Yes, infuriating. Did you enjoy doorstep campaigning?

Oh, it was all right. I can't say I was terribly keen, but I did it, did my share of it at anyrate.

Both locally and nationally? Or did you have to go out when there was a...?

Well, nationally was through the Women's Freedom League you see. I don't remember.... You see the war was still on and I don't remember any big meetings or anything.

Just going from door to door?

Yes.

[Break in recording]

..... more interesting than anything else, I mean is equal access to everything for women. And I mean I feel that if things are open for women it's up to women

themselves to get in and use the possibilities there are. And that's the side of... I mean when I was doing the international work on literacy, it was equal access to literacy and to education that I've always emphasised.

And once that's achieved then it's up to the individual?

It's up to the individual, that's it, yes.

I think that's quite fair. So are you disappointed then in the way women have reacted to events in the past few years?

No, no, no, I don't think so. I feel a little hurt sometimes when you see women are getting into the professions and now they're beginning... I mean they expect to be paid professionally for... They don't give their services like the voluntary people used to. That's the... I mean it's a generalisation, there are still some who do this voluntarily. But I mean I've come across points when people are asked to come and speak. And well, they want to know what the remuneration is. Where once upon a time you'd have only been too pleased to have been asked. And well, you might have said, "Well, would you pay my expenses?" If you've got them, but not to ask for a fee as well. And that is what happens sometimes.

Are you a strong believer in voluntary....?

Yes, yes.

There's a lot that can be done to volunteer work, rather than paid professionals in every walk of life?

Yes. (Laughs). I mean I realise... I don't make it a hard and fast rule. I mean some people of course I suppose earn a living by speaking and doing things like this. It's like singers. I mean going to sing. But on the other hand when I think of all the jobs that have been done and how difficult... Now Wandsworth Borough Council is very keen. They keep saying... When I did a lot of work for Age Concern and we asked

for an improved grant to open up a certain bit of work. And the reply was, "Well, surely there are people who will do this voluntarily?" But there aren't. There aren't the volunteers nowadays. I understand that there are a number of women who have to... or who are only too pleased to work part time in order to augment the family income and also to make them a bit independent. I quite understand that. But on the other hand there are still a great number of people who could do things for other people in a voluntary capacity. But you don't seem to find them nowadays (laughs).

I suppose it is a lot more women are working?

Well, yes, yes.

But as you say, there are still... There should be enough people around to fill this?

Yes.

Is there anything else you think we should....?

Well, I don't think so, no.

End of Track 5

End of interview