

## ORAL HISTORIES - INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

## JOE ARLINGTON

My name was Joe Apple. By date of birth was the 7th January 1924 in Old Street within the sound of Bow Wells. I think it was called the London Maternity Hospital in those days. I lived the first few years of my life in the East End in Charles Street which was near Arbour Square in the East End and I moved when I was nine years old in 1933 to Evering Road. My father had opened up a fish shop in 1931 or 32. After that he took another fish shop at number 83. The fish shop was called Apple and later called Joe Apple in Stoke Newington. There were far more non-Jews than there were Jews and so he had to accommodate the people who lived in the area. We were both skilled craftsmen at filleting and preparing fish and we took people in and trained them.

Ridley Road was the local market. Most of the people were drawn to markets because there was far more shops than stalls and the prices were keener than shops. So the discerning client who was a bit short of cash or wanted to buy something cheaper and have more variety went to the market. We found we were losing customers so we decided that's where we should be. It was absolutely wonderful. It was open from very early in the morning till very late at night. It was always busy and it was a very happy atmosphere. I would say it was about 40% Jewish and 60% non-Jewish. I remember Jack Solomons very well. His brother Maxy - they had a shop facing ours. I remember the Barnet Brothers. They had a shop down there. In fact their grandson is still there to this day - he has a shop and a stall. Sam Stoller and his son.

I remember when Reeves, the paint people in Dalston, were bombed – the place went up like a very large bonfire. One of the stall holders went in there to rescue people and he got the George Medal for it. There were often air raids at the beginning of the war when we had to just pull the shutters down and go to the nearest air raid shelter.

I started on being a club leader when I met Mrs Du Vergier, who was the mayor. I started my first club in the boys school in Northfield Road and then I went on to another club in Rushmore Road. I became a club manager at the Hackney Associated Clubs – the Jewish community - you knew everybody either through the local club by working with different associations in clubs you got to know practically everybody. The younger people didn't speak Yiddish. I was fortunate because my grandparents had a shop in the East End at 100 Clark Street and before the age of nine I used to help in the shop and they only spoke Yiddish. The customers were only Jewish and so I picked up a lot of Yiddish. I used to deliver things by the bicycle – I used to push it – I wasn't allowed to ride it. And then they later had a shop at 165 Sandringham Road, Dalston. Although I don't speak Yiddish fluently, I understand it and so it was a great asset.

## ORAL HISTORIES - INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

## MARION FRANKEL

My name is Marion Frankel nee Rabin (Rabinowitz) and I was born on 17 December 1926 at number 5 Ferncliff Road, Hackney, and my father was a furrier. After the Second World War he started his own business in Dalston Lane. My two older brothers and myself, I was the youngest, were all born in that house. We just grew up in that area.

All our friends were around there; we went to schools round there. It was like living in a community, a Jewish community. I had friends who weren't Jewish too and my father wasn't keen on me mixing with people who weren't Jewish but if I met somebody who I was friendly with, I, I didn't ask them. I mean, we, we didn't, it wasn't a big thing, religion, in those days. I wasn't conscious of em, that it was such a big thing to be Jewish or not Jewish or the other way round.

My father was religious but there was no way he would have allowed me to go to school on the Jewish holidays. Obviously my non-Jewish friends had Christmas holidays and their own Easter holidays and I had Passover and Chanukah and it was just taken for granted – we just took all that as a matter of course. Father got a real religious bug and went to a shtetle in Sandringham Road and my mother was very much against it really altered our lives - he wasn't ultra-orthodox when my mother and father were both married in the 1930s but this rabbi from the shtetle he converted my father into somebody really fanatically religious and it turned our lives into a bit of a turmoil at home because we weren't allowed to answer the doorbell or the telephone – we didn't have a telephone in the early days - but in the later years.

And had the radio on or switched the light on – or anything like that – you know. We had someone come in to light the fires in the winter and my mother had to keep the cooker covered over so she had the kettle on all night and the cholent went in the oven and she wasn't allowed to cook on shabbos and it was something that my father developed into. He was always religious but never strictly.

My father was Russian and my mother was Polish. They would only speak Yiddish to each other if they didn't want us to understand but of course usually we understand those things; we learnt to understand those bits. I cannot speak Yiddish properly but I can understand it but I can speak the odd word and sayings and all sorts of things. My grandmother couldn't speak any English. My father's mother who brought him over from Russia couldn't speak any English at all and we just couldn't converse. She had a wonderful sense of humour apparently and she used to tell jokes in Yiddish and everybody sitting in the room laughing their heads off and completely over my head. We were number 5 Ferncliff Road and number 2 Ferncliff Road which was over the road was the milkman – Millers the Milkman. Everybody knew Millers and he had his horse and cart and he kept the horse at the back. It was a semi-detached house in Ferncliff Road and he had sideways that led to the stable where he used to bottle the milk and that.

My mother she used to go every - early about 7 o'clock, half past 7 in the morning or something to Ridley Road. And she used to buy her fish in Barnett and sometimes some nice vegetables and

## ORAL HISTORIES - INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

**MARION FRANKEL (contd)**

things and she used to come back with two heavy carrier bags. Every Thursday it was a ritual. It was really I would say at least 75% Jewish in those days in Ridley Road – the shops - the drapery shops and the greengrocers, Solomons the fish shop, the butcher shops and chicken stalls and things were all Jewish. I mean I can't really remember any, I think maybe a stall that sold tomatoes might have not been Jewish, but I would say the majority of shops were either Jewish or all the Jewish women used to go in the area, used to go to Ridley Road.

## ORAL HISTORIES - INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

## MONA GOLDSTEIN

My name is Mona Rappaport, married name is Goldstein. Born in 1926 in City Road Hospital and then we moved to Clapton to Gunton Road. Most of the families in Gunton Road were Jewish, nearly all of them at the top half, and the bottom half - I don't know why, seemed to be non-Jewish. But everyone in Gunton Road knew one another. Children played in the street, we had gangs and it was, it was lovely. We played knock-down-ginger and get told off by all the grandmothers and grandfathers but we had a lot of fun. I went to Northwold Road. It was the school. And it was very strict, a very nice school. I used to walk to Northwold Road. I was only interested in art, needle-work, sports. Academically I didn't bother. I used to get told off every report time to my father. When I left school – I suppose those days with girls they didn't bother so much. I went in to, er, to learn to be a cutter in Hackney in the dress trade in Well Street and I stayed there 'till I got married. My grandmother spoke Yiddish. Understand it fluently. My grandmother and also my step-mother being from Vienna they was German so the two combined.

When I was married I went to Ridley Road but everyone but everyone went to Ridley to do the shopping. It was alive, very much alive. We could get fish and everything you wanted. It was a Jewish market, a nice market, every night of the week we were at club except on Friday, it was the only night it was closed. As soon as shabbos was out we were all there on Saturday, jitterbugging away. You didn't have any clothes in those days. We used to wear trousers, a top and you wore turbans. Why we wore turbans I do not know. You'd have your hair up in an Edwardian style with combs stuck in it, thinking you looked terrific. We must have looked dreadful. And flat shoes. You really didn't have any clothes. We were all poor and we didn't have anything and you couldn't get it as well during the war.

Used to go to the Paramount, yes, yes and dance – loved dancing. Remember once many years we were at the Paramount and we were asked to be extras in a film. Can't remember what the film was now but we went to, I think it was Ealing Studios and got £4 each for jitterbugging – in the, you know, as extras. We used to love it. You didn't go to Stamford Hill a lot. We were Clapton and Hackney. The only time we went to Stamford Hill when we went to pictures. Everyone went to pictures. There were two lovely cinemas in Stamford Hill and we had, we had the Ritz at Clapton which why they pulled it down, I don't know – it was a beautiful cinema and then we had two in Hackney – they were a bit rough. The Essoldo, I think, and the Pavilion – oh dear they were right, right... And then we had Kenning Hall which was a fleapit.

Friday night was Friday night. Nobody went out Friday night. You had supper - chicken and baked potatoes. We had Kiddush and I don't know if the older ones went to shuls and if it was lokshen pudding or something like that and soup. And on the yom-tovs it was always fried fish or gefilte fish and on New Year we always went to an aunt of mine and it was always fish, always fish. Always first night, second night we went to one of the other. We always broke the fast at one or the others. I'm of the old school. Erm, I'm not an adventurous cook I remember my grandmother doing, erm, stuffed fish – carps taken out and stuffed and it was gorgeous And there's, we'd

## ORAL HISTORIES - INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

**MONA GOLDSTEIN (contd)**

eat gefilte fish sweet because we're Polish; my husband like it peppery. But, erm, I still cook the same way. The chicken soup you have half a fowl, don't need a whole fowl, onion, carrots, turnip. You cannot get soup greens now – which is called pepkeshher (?) - so you use celery, you bring it to the boil, you skim it, you add a little salt and you cook it slowly until it's tender but you must take the onion out, and everything out. I just keep the carrots because the onion would turn the chicken soup sour and that's all it is and it's, it's gorgeous but you let it get cold then take all the fat off which they didn't do years ago - they used to bake the potatoes in it and everything. Kneidlech is nice but a lot of people do not do the Jewish cooking now, do they? There's chopped meat still, gedempte meat and there's a recipe I had that I couldn't tell you what the recipe is called - mother's moukhal (?). It was one of my aunt's and it's gorgeous. There's all bits and pieces – an hors d'oeuvre - but that is lovely.

## ORAL HISTORIES - INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

## KENNETH HAMMOND

My name is Kenneth Hammond. I was born July 29th 1928 at I think the Salvation Army Maternity Hospital in Mare Street. At that time we lived in Amhurst Road. The original name is Hamerwitz and then I changed it after I got demobbed to Hammond. Every time you went and said the name was Hamerwitz – you got ‘how do you spell that?’. We do have one photograph of my grandfather and grandmother looking like refugees from the third rate company of Fiddler on the Roof. My grandfather’s wearing a coat which is, the negative has been printed back to front or he’s wearing a coat that is done up female style. He’s got under his arm a huge book which I presume is either a copy of the Torah or a prayer book, and long pias and a big hat and very gentle eyes. My grandmother has hands which look like they’re made out of tree bark so she was obviously the grafter in the family. And they look petrified by the camera.

My father who was the last to arrive got here in 1910. He was apparently quite well-to-do and had his own fur furriers. His sister, my aunt Bassa, never spoke English. She spoke Yiddish the whole time but communication with my aunty Bassa was very, very difficult. Because my parents used to use Yiddish when they wanted to talk about things which neither my brother and I were supposed to know about. They never taught us Yiddish but my aunty Bassa never spoke English. And she lived over here, oh she was gone 90 when she died. My cousin, my aunt lived in Leswin Road – they were the only members of the family that owned their own house. And Leswin Road was nice – you know, they had a garden, an inside toilet and a bathroom. We lived on the top floor of 127a Old Stoke Newington Road and we shared a toilet with the people that lived at 127 which was the floor down. But for a bath we used to have to go to Clissold Road.

My parents were members at Shacklewel Lane. We went to the Simchas Torah Shacklewel Lane thing and when at the end of the service they gave you the sweets, you ran like mad to sneak into Walford Road – we had a longer service – it was Federation – and then you got your second lots of sweets. You then grabbed the bus and went up to see your grandmother at Egerton Road where if you were lucky you’d get a third lot of sweets and whereas both Shacklewel Lane and Walford Road only gave you a bag at Egerton Road you got a box of chocolate and when we were living in Stoke Newington my mother, Friday night used to take us to the Alexandra Theatre which was – what do they call it? - Carnival Night. We saw the show and then they had spot prizes. If you were lucky you won the prize – a tea set and stuff like that and we went there but my mother always used to tell me ‘Don’t tell anybody we go’. You know we should have gone to shul instead. Friday night was always chicken – chicken, chicken soup. But I remember at Cable Street being down there; we would go down there by tram on the Saturday, sometimes in the morning, and one of the things we would do – we would help give out the cholents. Because what happened was they used to stop baking on the Friday, didn’t do the thing but because it’s a brick oven it stayed hot and people would come in with the casseroles, with the cholent in it, they would be all put in the oven. The oven was then sealed. They all had different tickets with numbers on which was their thing. And they would come in on a Friday, er on a Saturday lunchtime and pick up their cholents.

## ORAL HISTORIES - INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

**KENNETH HAMMOND (contd)**

When the Battle of Cable Street took place in 1936 my mum took us down to the bakery and I can remember her having a row with my grandfather and she was saying to him 'Look I've brought them down because I want him to see and I want him to remember' which I still do - I was eight. It was the first aid post. My cousin Aubrey of course was very involved in it being in the Young Communists.

I can remember people coming in with bandaged heads – with heads to be bandaged - and the thing I remember more than anything else is my grandmother bandaging somebody's head. And then she looked and he had stuck in his belt a homemade knife and I can remember because she pulled it out. 'What is this' in Yiddish to him. And he says if I get caught then I'm taking one of them with me and then she started yelling at him in Yiddish 'a nice guy like you not worth dying for one of them mamserim – you know, one of those bastards – and he couldn't understand a word she was saying but he understood. He said "all right, granny, do something". And she gave it to me to get rid of and this is why I remember it. The handle was made of insulating tape and it was an old wood file which he had ground down to a really vicious point and my grandmother said 'You take the potato peel, you put them in the newspaper...' because she wrapped all her rubbish up '... and wrap it in the newspaper with all the potato peel and then put it into the middle of the dustbin - not at the top not at the bottom: in the middle'. If the police tipped it out it wouldn't come up from the top. And they wouldn't go through too much of the rubbish. And I remember doing that.

## ORAL HISTORIES - INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

## SOLLY KAYE

My name is Solly Kaye. I'm born in St Pancras, Stanhope Street, NW1 in 1913. My father was a cobbler and he opened up a little shop when he got married. My mother came by boat and I remember she and her sister were the first of the family to come here. She came on a boat and she said there were terrible storms and they had to go through the Baltic and the Kiel Canal and so on. And they had their pots and pans – it amazes me - and their feather beds with them and she said the storm was so terrible that the captain took pity on her and her sister and he brought them down to a cabin where they could finish safe and warm and, er, but she didn't tell me much else and then they went to the Jewish Shelter in Leman Street and while they were there they waited as they all did for some landsman or person from their locality, to wander round and to see who was there and they went to live with one of those until they found themselves a place and a job and the first place they took was in Court Street opposite the London Hospital.

My mum was a lovely woman. She was popular and she worked hard. We had an aunt who lived in Bethnal Green which was just across the border. And she had a tiny, little chicken shop which she started in the front room. Mother used to go and help her and once a week, particularly on Thursday, the busy day – I was telling Mildred - she would sit plucking the chickens, you see. I was lucky, I suppose. My grandfather, he was quite religious but as I say when I knew him he was an old man but he used to tap his way to the synagogue and lead the services even though he was blind. And they were religious up to a point. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, the Jewish holidays. Mother wasn't terribly, she lit the candles on a Friday night and she used to kosher the chicken by putting it in salt water for the requisite number of hours but she wasn't mad. She used to say: "A good person is a good person. Solly" she said, "don't matter what they are, if they're good they're good and if they're bad they're bad". So that was my mum, you see. She was unorthodox.

One of my uncles, the chicken shop man, he said you'll go to my synagogue and we'll see that you have a barmitzvah, you see, and it was in a yard in Cambridge Heath Road, used to be called Cambridge Road, and at the back of this house there was the yard which was covered over with like corrugated tin and I suppose it held about 30 people and they got me involved there and I went to Hebrew classes in Hanbury Street and I did my necessary practising and I sang me song and I got me nuts and raisins chucked at me and a few presents and that was me – I was a man at 13, you see. But I stopped going to synagogue, to cheder, immediately after that - I'd had enough, you see. I could speak, I can read Hebrew; I knew a little about translation and that, that was it.

There was a lot of unemployment, a very great amount of unemployment, and at the corner of Valance Road before the traffic lights were put up they used to have regular meetings of the unemployed. I used to listen to these meetings. I got a little bit of what was going on. So there was a certain political atmosphere in the area.

## ORAL HISTORIES - INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

## SOLLY KAYE (contd)

When we moved to Hackney I joined the Communist Party and I waited few weeks and then there was a meeting and they talked about all kinds of things and then I said what could I do? I want to do something. And they said well you could be the Daily Worker organiser for the borough [laughs]. They had meetings regularly at the Hackney Town Hall and er, we were supposed to go along and support it and I went along and the speaker on one occasion never turned up and I said to the chap who was with me, who had been in the Party for years - I had only been in for a month - and I said "Well you can't let, there's people waiting for the meeting, you can't leave it; you can't not have a meeting." He said, "What can we do?" "You get up and speak." He said, "I can't, I can't speak." He said "You get up and speak" and I said "All right then" [laughs]. So I jumped up on the platform and I spoke to the meeting, much to my surprise, I carried on speaking there every Friday for years. But when I spoke, it was mainly I think on the subject of fascism. It became the main issue of the day.

It was in Wells Street there was a little café called the Blue Café and after our meetings we'd go there and have a little chat in the back room and one day I was in the back with one of our comrades and in came the fascists. They got me in the corner and they said "Right, this is it" you see [laughs], and everything went flying and there was a big fight in this back room. And I, I, I survived but I survived a huge black eye. One of our friend's father had a shop and he sold salt beef and I'd heard that if you put, if you put, er if you put steak on your eye it does away with it. I thought I can't get steak, I can do a bit of salt beef so I went to bed with this bit of salt beef [laughing] on my eye, woke up with a stink like anything and it didn't do any good. The black eye was still there. Local people eaten up with this idea of antisemitism, of fascists, of the fuhrer. You've got to face it, they were, they are ordinary working people. There was one bloke who got expelled from the Party because all he wanted to do was go out and beat them up. But it's not the answer. The answer is to organise them in their, on their own behalf and then they'll, and then they'll see who the enemy is, you see. No, no, there was antisemitism; there was latent and overt antisemitism. Hackney Gazette, it wouldn't hesitate to say: Flat to Let – No Jews, No Dogs. My brother worked for Potters the Printers – I think it was the Hackney Gazette Press but he asked for the Jewish holidays and they sacked him. There was a lot of antisemitism but it wasn't expressed in physical violence until the fascists came along but Jew Boy. We lived in Stanhope Street and my dad had died and we were living in there – my mother, two brothers and a sister, and our little friends would stand outside and sing "Abe, Abe, Abe my boy" – it was a song – 'Abe, Abe, Abe my boy, what are you waiting for now? You promised to marry me one day in June it's never too late it's never too soon' and it was a snide and deeply ingrained, in the same way racism is deeply ingrained among the British people and antisemitism ingrained also among Christians and others. If they were real Christians it wouldn't happen because Jesus was a Jew but they don't think about that.

## ORAL HISTORIES - INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

## SIDNEY KIRSCH

Sidney Kirsch, London Hospital, 6.4.18. We lived in Cleveland Street. My mother lived in the flats. There were about four flats – I think it was called the Cleveland Buildings in those days and my grandmother lived opposite. They had a house there. My grandma was a typical yiddisher woman – I was her crown prince [laughs].

My father came from Poland. He came here about 1917 – he was in the war in Poland and they weren't treating Jewish people too well in the war and I don't know how he did it but he absconded across Europe somehow and found his way into England. I think he did, er, was an illegal immigrant for a while and met my mother and they got married. My father – I understand that in Poland he was a baker but here he became a tailor. If you could afford it you just bought a couple of machines and in a room somewhere and you were in business and the whole family were in that type of business.

It was later on, about 1933, that he decided that we would move to Hackney – to Victoria Park Road – 85. I was about 15, 16 then and had already started work – barber. My father could speak and write English but my mother spoke English very well but couldn't read or write. There was always fear though, always. I mean there were pubs all the way along, even in Cleveland Street and people used to drink out in the open in those days and when you walk along there was always a fear that you were going to get a jibe of some kind.

I used to go down the East End but every now and again the fascists would come down here and they would come down in a car and quickly daub on the pavements – you know 'Get rid of the Jews'. I had many a stand up. You know they would come in with a jibe and I would accept the challenge and came off worse as a rule but that was the East End though. Fascism – is rearing its head again, there is no doubt about it and it's got to be combated but I think everybody was involved in politics and or having an opinion. Before the war, mainly the East End was left because with the rise of fascism and also with the rearing of its head in Hitler and the 30s as well, it seemed as though the Conservatives or the right-wingers weren't really very worried about it and we could only find help and togetherness with trade unions, the left wing – extreme left wingers as well – communists etc were rife. A lot of boys from the East End went to Spain and a lot of them got killed out there and they also elected a communist member of parliament, Phil Piratin.

I wouldn't say we were exceptionally frum. We went to shul. My father would take us to shul on Friday nights, sometimes Sunday, Saturday mornings. We would always have Friday nights, shabbos, at home and my father was a very strict in a lot of ways and I remember my father was very fussy and on one occasion I was walking along and I put my hands in my pockets. He nearly knocked me across the street. Don't put your hands in your pockets, he says, you'll spoil the shape of your suit. The East End was absolutely alive, I mean, Yom Kippur, every seat was taken everywhere. I mean if they could dig up the park seats and put them together they'd have a, and get a minyan – that would be a shul on Yom Kippur.

## ORAL HISTORIES - INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

## HELEN STRAUSS

I'm Helen Strauss, maiden name was Silverman. My grandparents, with whom I spent a lot of my early years, their name was Mitchell and they lived in The Limes, Massie Road, off Graham Road, Hackney.

Ridley Road was the place to go. My grandmother used to do all her shopping there and nobody had fridges in those days so if you wanted to buy anything like fish you had to go every day and get some. Fish was very important in Jewish people's lives. My father was a tailor but then he was out of work for a while and my grandparents helped him get this shop in Stoke Newington in Northwold Road and we all lived, three sisters, there were three of us, above the shop and went to Northwold Road School. The shop was called Martin Silverman: Tobacconist, Newsagent, Confectioner. He came from a very poor family – he lived in the East End and my mother lived in this big house in Hackney. Great difference in the families.

My father's family were more Jewish-orientated and my grandfather's family, my grandfather wanted to emulate the English aristocracy who he used to supply with leathers to clean their horses. He had lived in Oxford and he'd seen the way they lived and he wanted us all to know English well and English ways and hardly anybody spoke Yiddish in his house but my father still spoke Yiddish in his shop.

In the old days the families used to keep the girls at home to do sewing and things like that, to be ladies. He wanted them to be different but my mother was a bit of a rebel and she climbed out the window one morning and went to Houndsditch and got a job in an office and when she came home he was waiting on the doorstep and said you never do that again. And er, then she went and had her hair cut because none of the women had their hair cut – it was always long – and she came home with a bob and there was another argument. What did she do that for? But she was her own person. She was very modern. Her name was Sarah – Sarah Mitchell.

I often think of it that whereas today people will talk about the Blacks – I think in the way they used to talk about the Jews then. I worked in Stoke Newington Town Hall in the war, in Church Street, and I worked in the Medical Office of Health Department and we had a lot of people coming in who were bombed out and wanted somewhere to live and I remember being in the office and somebody coming in and saying "There were those yids at the counter again" and I said 'Excuse me, but do you mind not saying that because I am Jewish and I don't like you saying that word.' There was antisemitism.

Most Jewish people, I think all Jewish people, were inclined towards the left movements at that time and I was hesitating as to whether to join the CP, the Communist Party, but I stayed with the Labour Party. It was all going to demos and going to Ridley Road when there were speakers there and it was quite an outing to go the Lyons Corner House in the West End – that was wonderful. My parents took us occasionally. Stoke Newington High Street there was Bibas where if you wanted to buy a wedding present for 4/11d you got a lovely bone china teaset. There was Levys, the outfitters, and then there was the butchers, Frank Godfrey. Mr Blackstein owned the Egg Store. People used to go there for miles around and not only did they have eggs outside the shop on the pavement but inside they kept all the schmaltz herrings, all the olive and, cucumbers - all the deli things. It was quite a meeting place and when I first moved from Stoke Newington to Cockfosters I used to feel miserable if I couldn't shopping at the Egg Stores. I used to go down there just to get some shopping.

## ORAL HISTORIES - INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

**AUBREY MORRIS**

My name is Aubrey Morris. I was born on 20 May 1919 in Princes Square off Cable Street in Stepney. My grandfather came over from Poland which was annexed by Russia, Minsk, I believe it was and he came over here with my paternal grandfather came over here with six children in the late 19th century. He was a baker and he came over here. My father was then about nine years of age. My maternal grandfather he came over here around about the same time and he came from Lithuania and my father ran the bakery. Unfortunately my father was a very big gambler which was one of the problems very predominant in those days. If it moved he gambled on it.

Meantime I started working when I suppose I was about 10, making doughs in the evening while my father was at the dogs or somewhere. So it would be ready for him when he came back to work and delivering bread and rolls – ten or eleven years of age – to various cafes and shops early in the morning. So I used to get up about 5.30 in the morning and do deliveries and in the evening I was involved in serving in the shop, Maurices. It was the corner of Dinmont Street and Hackney Road – just a bakery.

I married on February 18th 1940 – married Lily Weinberg, she was then. She was – her mother came over from Rumania. We met on, erm, at the battle of Cable Street – we actually met and we were on a march together – after the end of the whole thing with Mosley. She was living then not in the bandstand but on a corner of old Nichol Street and opposite the flats there was a laundry and she lived above there in a couple of rooms with her parents.

My brother-in-law, that was Lily's sister's husband, had been a fishmonger in Solebay Street in Mile End but the thing went kaput – change of attitudes – people didn't buy from a single store in a street – or whatever, whatever the reasons and he became a cab driver and he seemed to make a good living at it and so I decided that's what I'd do so, so after about two years I borrowed £100 from my brother-in-law and I put in an insurance policy that I had and I got £100 for it and I put down a deposit for a cab and I become a mush – when you're driving your own cab you were a mush.

Bethnal Green was a hive of fascism. We used to meet at the Salmon and Ball almost every evening. Salmon and Ball was a pub at the corner of Bethnal Green Road and Cambridge Heath Road and there would be meetings, there would be fights, there would be selling papers and this went on and we were there almost every night and it was a political involvement. We were very, very active and we went on marches and demonstrations so it grew from when I was about, I suppose, about eleven.

My father was very anti-me. In fact on the morning that war was declared and I was standing in the room, we lived above the shop in Cable Street, standing in the back room, and when the radio came on and declared it was war my father turned round, I was then 20, and he whacked me round the face and said "It's all your fault. All your bloody fault – the war." Because I was a

## ORAL HISTORIES - INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

**AUBREY MORRIS (contd)**

communist and of course there was the Soviet-Nazi pact and so on and that was the way his reasoning was. So my life with my father was not a very, very easy one, mainly because of political things. My grandmother was running the bakery business in Cable Street. I spent some time around the Gardner's Corner area but I couldn't get anywhere or do anything so I decided I'd go down to Cable Street and I went down there and things hadn't happened there yet but then I got involved in taking a flat-bed lorry out of Wellclose Square joining them there and putting it up and the barricades and so on and all the time we were getting messages, some conflicting and otherwise, and the police trying to come up to you at the side turnings to break it all. And that was when I first experienced the use of marbles – you know, to stop horses going and that sort of thing. My aunts and uncles were not very enthusiastic in the beginning, neither were my parents about it all but eventually they got joined into it. When it was over, that evening, erm, as I say there was a spontaneous sort of march which was organised by the Communist Party and I went on that and that is where I - I'd seen my wife around before but we got chatting and that's when we got together and then our lives, when other people were going dancing, and going to the Astoria and places like that we weren't. We were out canvassing or out talking at meetings and whatever and that was really our way of life until I went into the army.

## ORAL HISTORIES - INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

## WILLIAM MASSIL

William Massil, 26th June 1912 somewhere in Bethnal Green, maybe Hare Street, I don't know but my first recollection of where I lived was in Bethnal Green Road above the Sussex Laundry which was opposite the Smarts Cinema where I'd often go in round the back and get in for nothing. My father was a wood turner and a highly skilled wood turner. He died in 1946, a long time ago, but I never asked him and he never discussed with me what he did in Russia but he must have been a skilled wood turner when he arrived here because he obtained a job almost immediately with an old-established firm in Hackney Road called Franklin & Goldberg. By 1912 he set up his own little business in Coronet Street, Hoxton. When, when I joined him in 1928 he had four, five non-Jewish wood turners and machinists working for him – always non-Jews working – and by the way wood turning was considered a non-Jewish trade – not like cabinet making, which was large..., not entirely but to a large extent Jewish. There were quite a lot of Jewish people in this end – down from Dalston Lane to Graham Road - and from Graham Road further – it was mainly non-Jewish. And strangely enough the Jews were mainly on one side of the road and not the other and it was a mixed community and we all got on well – there was no problem.

I was fortunate enough to win the Junior County Scholarship at the age of eleven and I shared that with one other boy and we both went to Grocers on that scholarship. So it was considered quite unusual that we were the only two boys in the school that got the Junior County. And The Grocers in those days had a very high reputation – there were very high academic standards, I can tell you. Yes it was big, enormous. We had, I don't know, 700 students there and scholarship boys were looked down on – a little – but the interesting thing – there were, most of them were fee-paying and these were people - I remember Jews and non-Jews – I suppose it was 50-50 Jews and non-Jews from Hackney, Clapton, Stoke Newington – came all around but I can tell you in the main the scholarship boys outshone the others.

We'd only go to synagogue Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, as far as I can remember, and in those days we lived in Hoxton. Shoreditch Town Hall was taken over for the High Holydays.

I was going to become a chemist. I was told I was very good academically – well five distinctions – London Matric. My mother prevailed upon me to join my father because he wasn't very well and he was working very hard and as a schoolboy I just caved in and went into this little workshop. I learned a bit of wood turning and after about a year my father said to me – I must say he was very, very far-reaching in his views – he knew his limitations – he was a very fine craftsman but he said to me "My boy, you run the business." So at the age of 17, roughly, I was handling all that – buying, went to the bank, did all the cash and everything in this little business.

# ORAL HISTORIES - INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

## SAM STOLLER

I am Sam Stoller, I was born on 1st November 1910. As far as I know I was born in Old Montague Street in the East End of London. My father came from Russia where he was running away from Russia because he should have been called up in the Russian Army.

My father first got for himself a job on one of the ships that landed on the River Thames by carrying up parcels on his shoulder from the ship onto the quayside and managed to get a few shillings, or whatever it was they were getting. He wasn't there very long when one of the, er, men who worked there tripped him up and he fell into the Thames.

My mother had more aptitude as far as business was concerned. She started buying all sorts of things – greengrocery and things like that and the fish that they dealt with was in smoked fish – kippers and that sort of thing and in those days every other corner shop was another Jewish grocery shop. My father started dealing in kippers – buying boxes of kippers in Billingsgate with a pony and a small van, he used to travel around with these boxes of kippers supplying grocery shops. Eventually that business became extremely important to him. I came into the business when I was 17 or a little before that of course but when I was 17 my father bought me the first 10 hundredweight or 8 hundredweight Morris van and with this I was able to go around shops - before that I used to deliver box of kippers for him on a bicycle and I had a lot of escapades, riding a bicycle, getting caught in tramlines and all that sort of thing.

In those days there was hundreds of grocery shops, Jewish grocery shops and we supplied them all. In Stoke Newington the Egg Stores, we supplied when he first started. In the West End Brookler in Peter Street, when I was supposed to be barmitzvahed I was delivering, going round with my father in the West End with a horse and a van to deliver boxes of kippers for the Sunday trade. They were all very frum in those days. They were closed but we had to deliver their kippers for their Sunday morning, early morning. So we worked on Saturday but we used to get, buy our kippers from Billingsgate Market. My father he got on very well but I myself, I was a fighter and I got into one or two scraps going to Billingsgate Market when my father. One of the things that used to do in those days, which was, they'd see Jewish people, they'd call you, you Jewish Bastard and I was a very good fighter and one of these, I use the word yobbos, one of these yobbos, and I had a fight and we had a crowd all around us. One thing I will say, I never lost a fight.

We were at the beginning of Ridley Road, where Crowmers (?) was, and we had a very, very good business. Jewish people predominantly there. My business prospered. A lot of the stallholders were, were non-Jewish but most of the shops were Jewish owned, brilliant they were – materials and all that sort of thing and Joseph was down there – is he still there? - Breckman was there, that's a butchers.

Amhurst Road was at one time was a very wealthy area. I lived opposite the North London Jewish Club on the left hand side going down Amhurst Road towards, more towards Hackney were all

## ORAL HISTORIES - INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

**SAM STOLLER (contd)**

big, double-fronted houses and very wealthy people lived in them and we went to Wellington Road Synagogue. My father used to say in Hebrew his prayers when he had horses and vans going to Billingsgate Market he'd be reciting them by heart every morning. Never laid teffillim or anything like that and I was never, never orthodox as far as religion was concerned. I could speak Yiddish. I could understand Yiddish I could never really able to speak it as a language but I could make myself understood if I was to meet someone who couldn't speak English I knew how to make myself understood.

## ORAL HISTORIES - INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

## GERALD ROLAND

My name is Gerald Roland I was born on the 25 May 1922 just behind Mile End Road Station in a little flat. We then moved to Burdett Road and in 1933 we moved to Meynell Gardens, South Hackney, E9.

My mother was born in England in the late 1800s. She was born in the East End in Stepney. My father came from Vilna just before the first world war. He went into the army in 1914 and he was in the Royal Field Artillery and when he came out of the army after the war went in with his brother into the garment industry. He had his own factory for a while. My father was a master tailor and I used to get sixpence a week pocket money of which four pence a week went on the cinema and if I couldn't get in to the fourpennies, I used to go back for another tuppence and my friends and I used to go to there. We used to go one of the lads' houses and play Monopoly in the afternoon and in the evening go to the cinema.

And some time in 1935 friends of mine wanted to form a little club. The first few fellows hired a room behind a boxing establishment in Wells Street and we had a table tennis table and that's what we used to do basically - meet for a couple of hours in the evening, play table tennis and yap.

My father belonged to Brenthouse Road shul. I used to go there for all the High Holydays and all the shabbotim, and I made friends from the cheder. We couldn't afford to have a barmitzvah in those days in a hall and everything so we had it at home and we cleared our dining room of furniture – I don't know where it went but we cleared it and all the family were invited to the do afterwards. And there were about 500 people in shul – a shul-full. I mean I think the shul holds 750 people and on Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah they used to put extra seats in. I used to go to synagogue every shabbos until I started work and after that I was working on a Saturday and I had to, just gave it up.

After the war I joined the 43 Group. We had headquarters in Panton Street. They used to find out where the meetings were and organised parties to go. A lot of the boys had cars by then so we had our own transport. We never carried any weapons as such but my friend, who was, used to cut cloth in one of the shops in the Lane, went down to Brighton to a meeting once and had a pair of scissors in his pocket. And was arrested for having an offensive weapon but when he told them what his job was and he'd gone there straight from work they let him go. But he would have used it – no two ways. And we used to go to some hairy meetings at Dalston. I went in a car once with a speaker on top for the 43 Group down to Bethnal Green, which was the home of the fascists, asking the public to come to a meeting – an anti-fascist meeting – and the police had insisted that before we make any announcements we had to stop the car. We couldn't do it going along. We stopped the car and started this announcement. And a bunch of Fascists came flying towards the car and I said to the driver 'Go'. They would drive what they called the Elephant – the big, huge van they had with loudspeakers on, they used. What's his name – Mosley – would get up there

## ORAL HISTORIES - INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

**GERALD ROLAND (contd)**

and speak and we used to try and cut the wires or do something – damage the vehicle. Used to try to infiltrate – we even had some of the 43 Group were actually put into the fascists as spies, I suppose – very dramatic but it was; had to get information – needs must.

I voted Labour; most of my friends voted Labour – we were all working lads so how could we do anything else? Once they grew up and some of them had their own businesses then probably they went over to Conservatism. My father was a great Liberal so was Mr Waldman a great Liberal. I was definitely Labour.

My father and mother hardly ever ate out. I did – well it was a question of affording it as well. I couldn't afford to eat out but occasionally there was Goodies. There was a salt beef shop opposite the Regal – I don't know where it is now - but he had a shop there and we always used to go in there for a salt beef sandwich after Club sometimes if we had the money. But eating out? No. There weren't so many Jewish restaurants at the time. I don't even remember having fish and chips out. It would always be done inside. My mother would fry fish as all Jewish housewives did. And we would have our meals inside. The only time we ate out was if we went to other people. There was a lot of visiting done in the families.

My mother's family – my grandmother and grandfather spoke Yiddish all the time. My mother was educated here – she was born here - so she didn't speak Yiddish – knew it but didn't speak. My father was a complete linguist. My father-in-law as well – completely Yiddish. Spoke better Yiddish than English in the end and my mother in law as well. And my wife can still speak Yiddish and I would love to. I know little bits and I can understand it but I would love to speak Yiddish.

## ORAL HISTORIES - INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

## HAROLD NEWBLATT

My full name is Harold Newblatt. I was born in Hackney on 3rd June 1922, Church Crescent, which was just at the bottom of Lauriston Road adjacent to the church.

We went to my grandfather every Saturday. He always used to get a few coppers spending money. He was very liberal as far as we were concerned and very often he used to give us sixpence to go to the children's matinee in a cinema in Commercial Road for a sixpence - and that was usually our outing on a Saturday.

My dad was an optician – he worked for a firm at the Nags Head, Holloway. My mother was a shorthand typist. We were ordinary Jewish people, not frum or religious but we kept up the Jewish religion. We belonged to the Brenthouse Road Synagogue and there was another synagogue in St Thomas's Road and we were, with another friend were both barmitzvah there. What do I remember? The sweets being thrown down by the women in the gallery. We had a celebration at home – very much different to the barmitzvah celebrations of the boys today. The family came, some friends came – we had a meal – we had a very, very large table in the dining room - everything was set out there and that's how we celebrated my barmitzvah.

I mixed with local boys. Our leisure time we spent – I was always very keen on cricket - we used to play in Wells Street Common. The club started in Brenthouse Road – I call it Brenthouse Road – it was Devonshire Road - in the hall underneath the synagogue. We had indoor games – where we had to take out whatever games we wanted and put them all back at the end of the evening and that's where we first met. As we were beginning we were the youngest club in the AJY but we were becoming noted at sporting events, cricket, we had a football team and we were becoming noticed. We were becoming quite a good established club in Hackney rivaling the East End clubs such as Cambridge and Bethnal Green, Victoria, Oxford & St Georges. The boys, without that club, would have been on the streets. And without that club and the influence of that club there was nothing. We got a grant from the council and we had to admit non-Jewish boys, Christian boys. They were great – not a lot – there weren't many but the boys that came in were excellent members – no friction, no antisemitism. I think they were as pleased to join the club as we had originally been.

Parents – in a number of circumstances were cabinet makers, other boys' parents were tailors. I was a little bit luckier than a lot of other Jewish boys, that's all I can say. My father used to earn before the war £5 a week. The average earnings by a man with a family, shugging his kishkers out, cabinet making, tailoring, they were virtually sweatshops. If they made £3 or £3.10 a week they were barely existing.

The only politics were with the blackshirts. Mosley used to have meetings – some of the club boys were tough boys; they tried to get engaged against these meetings. Sometimes they could cause a bit of a disruption but the blackshirts were very strong, both physically and wherever their

## ORAL HISTORIES - INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

**HAROLD NEWBLATT (contd)**

meetings were held they were quite strong but the biggest march was, as you know, in the East End when the whole East End stopped Mosley marching through but otherwise it was always sort of fringe meetings. Of course the fascists had thugs at these meetings at the bottom of Ridley Road, sometimes a small meeting at Victoria Park. They were always what I call fringe meetings, small meetings.

## ORAL HISTORIES - INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

## JOE LOBENSTEIN

My name is Joe Lobenstein. I was born on the 27th April 1927 in the German town of Hanover. My late father was a textile merchant there. My mother, whose name was Rosa nee Obermeyer, she was a very fine housewife and looking after the family and doing a lot of social work as well. She was a very, very helpful and active person for the benefit of people who needed help.

My parent's family was always frum – when I say frum we didn't make a show of our so-called frumness but we were very, very traditional, so much so that my father actually employed what was then known as a Haus Rabba – that is a Rabbi who had the key to our flat and could come in any time he liked and any free moment that my father had from his business or from his other activities he devoted to the study of the Torah and study of Jewish law and generally occupying himself with Jewish religious matters.

My father was a soldier in the German army in the first world war, you see, so we always thought this could never happen and I must tell you I often asked my father: "Tell me, why did you wait until May 1939 to emigrate?" So he said to me: "Joe, we never thought it would happen." After all, we were soldiers, we served the country, and made a contribution to the life of the country, to the social life and arts and everything and suddenly we were fourth rate citizens, taken to concentration camps as indeed my father was during Kristallnacht. I don't regret having remained in England and not having gone to America. In fact I think that it's wonderful that we did come here and we did stay here and that we enjoyed the hospitality of the British people and that, of course, is one of the things, one of the factors which persuaded me at the time, a considerable number of years later, to do what I am doing now to be part of public organisations and establishments such as the borough council. In a sense partly to repay the hospitality which my family and I, and indeed other Jewish families from Germany, enjoyed when they arrived in this country.

The London of Stoke Newington was more of a rural area at the time than what it is today. I do remember the first day when we arrived I remember that we had, as I said, we had just a few shillings then but we had to eat something so, and I was the only one in the family who knew a little bit of English, but literally a little bit. I'd learnt it for about six months in school in Germany and I remember my mother asked me to go round the corner. There was a shopping parade in Dunsmore Road. I should buy a loaf of bread – now I didn't know what a loaf, I didn't know the word 'loaf' at all - I knew the word 'bread' - and I remember going to the shop and I said: "Erm, er, I want old bread". Now why did I say 'old' bread? Because, I should probably have – the correct word would have been 'stale' bread you see, but I didn't know the word 'stale' either, you see. The reason for that was that a loaf of bread which wasn't baked on that day was a penny cheaper than fresh bread and with us, we, only having a few shillings, a penny was a big difference so I bought what I then called 'old' bread at a penny cheaper than would normally have been the case.

I went to school to the Jewish Secondary School. Dr Schonfeld at the time – Rabbi Doctor

## ORAL HISTORIES - INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

**JOE LOBENSTEIN (contd)**

Schonfeld – who was the honorary principal of the school and the founder of the school – he said to my father at the time he ‘can’t break the walls.’ You know every day new refugees are coming and he’s got no room for them. A considerable number of people who lived here in Hackney or Stoke Newington as their first stop when they came from the continent have moved out to what they considered to be greener pastures of North West London – Hampstead, Golders Green, Hendon, Edgware etc – and fine – they’ve settled there quite comfortably, quite nice, but the community which has remained here is also very happy – has established a large number of schools and Jewish institutions. It’s mainly, so far as the orthodox Jewish community is concerned, it is largely the Chassidic section of the community which originates from Eastern Europe rather than from Western Europe. I myself originate from Western Europe, from Germany – Hanover, as I’ve told you before but I am in a sort of minority because the large section of the orthodox Jewish community in Hackney actually is first, second or third generation originating from Eastern Europe, such as Poland, Lithuania, Hungary etc and they are more chassidically inclined.