

Interview with Mrs Elsie Wright (21/09/04)

Elsie Wright (nee Lee) was born in the village of Hunwick, in County Durham on 4th July 1917. In 1938 she married Mark Wright, in Croydon. He was also born in Hunwick, but had been brought up in the village of Langley Moor, a few miles south of Durham City. Mark had worked in the coal mines but took the opportunity of better pay and working conditions offered at the newly developing London Airport.

In 1939 Mark was made redundant from the airport, and took a job working in Cooper's Brickyard in Wheatley. At first he lodged with Mr and Mrs Phipps in Ringland Cottage, in the High Street, next to Gostick's Stores, but later he and Elsie moved together into 1 Robin's Row, at the east end of Church Road.

Robin's Row was a privately-owned terrace of six cottages, which was officially 'condemned' because the cottages had no indoor water supply or toilet facilities - but at 6/- a week it was cheap! The cottages had a living room and small kitchen downstairs, and a bedroom and landing upstairs. Each cottage had a fair-sized garden, and most of the occupants grew their own vegetables. Elsie records also having a huge greengage tree, a plum tree and an apple tree.

There was a communal pump at the lower (Church Road) end of the properties, and a communal privy at the upper (London road) end. There was no electricity in the cottages at that time, but there was gas. There was a gas stove in the kitchen, and two gas lights: one downstairs in the living-room and the other upstairs in the bedroom.

Elsie remembers buying a dining-room suite (table, chairs and sideboard) for 18 guineas, and a bedroom suite (three mirrors, a dressing-table, a double wardrobe and a single wardrobe) also for 18 guineas. These were on Hire Purchase and had to be paid off at the rate of six shillings a week. Other regular expenses were 6/- a week for rent, 2/- for coal, and a similar sum for gas.

In 1940 Mark was called up for Military Service. He joined the Royal Artillery, receiving his initial training at Romsey, in Hampshire, and then saw active service in Italy and in North Africa. He died in 1990.

Elsie was an active member of the Women's Institute and the Women's section of the British Legion. Her husband, Mark, who died in 1990, enjoyed watching football matches, and having an occasional drink at the King's Arms.

Their son, Malcolm, went to the local Primary School and, later, to Thame Grammar School. He won a scholarship to University College, London, where he was awarded a First Class degree in Chemistry and Mathematics, and, later, a Doctorate from Cambridge University.

Susan Prest
(21/09/04)