



Rosemary Carden, Amersham

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Chiltern Open Air Museum

Interview with Mrs Rosemary Carden

Interviewed by Solange Gulizzi (SG) and Jane Wilson (JW)

Solange Gulizzi: Today is the 23rd of August of 2016, my name is Solange Gulizzi and I am interviewing Rosemary Carden. Hello. So, you used to visit your cousins in a prefab, is that right?

Mrs Carden: Yes, I did, yeah, very often, yeah, and my grandmother, yes so, who was the, you know, their grandmother as well, so Bob's grandmother.

SG: And when was that? Which year are we talking about?

Mrs Carden: It was, uhm, shortly after the war and for a number of years after that. She... I can't remember the actual year that she died but she died. And then I come back to live in Chalfont St Giles myself in 1956--I think it was...1954... or... 1956. Time flies... Anyway, of course I was in contact with them all the time because a lot of my family were here working before the war and after the war. They had to come this way for service and I was brought up in a village in Charney Bassett near Wantage so there is no work around there unless you work on the farms which is why most of my family came this way. So that's why I was able to visit them a lot.

SG: Can you remember where exactly the prefab was?

Mrs Carden: Yes, is on the Amersham Road, not far from where the dump is now and the lane that goes up on the side, I don't remember what that's called, but they are based across the Misbourne Valley. There are quite a few in there and then of course they were demolished so they could put modern bungalows in there. And it's nice to have this one preserved. It's obviously one in the best



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Rosemary Carden, Amersham

conditions, so Rob and Ethel must have been proud of that. They were very pleased to be at the opening ceremony. I've got photographs of that too in my records that I keep [of] just families.

SG: And do you remember how your family ended up with a prefab?

Mrs Carden: Well, I don't remember what happened to Bob because Ethel came from London and I imagine that either their family lost all their homes in the bombing and when he finished his service in the war time they had to find somewhere to live you had all the council houses around Chalfont St Giles and Chalfont St Peter then, so. And that's why they had this so called temporary home, but of course they lived in it for years.

SG: And they still live there?

Mrs Carden: No, they are both departed now. Bob died in 2000, which is on the bench outside. He was born in 1921 and Ethel about the same time. She died a couple of years ago. She lived until quite an old age.

SG: And what are your memories of the prefab like? What do you remember?

Mrs Carden: Well at the time we thought: gosh this is really modern, it's got a bathroom, you've got somewhere to wash your hands, you've got a toilet inside. We had one down at the bottom of the garden [laughs]. So it was luxury to us, you know, and I still remember that. And walking in it today, you know, is really sort of like stepping back in time. But if you compare the living accommodation in most people's houses at the time that was really quite modern [laughs]. And very homely, you know. Because it was warm. That's one of the things I remember because I lived in a stone farm cottage and it needed a lot of heating which we didn't, couldn't afford anyway, and we got used to being quite cold, and it always seemed warm when you stepped on the door. Not just the welcome, the warmth of it.

SG: And you said you used to visit very, very regularly. You used to visit all your cousins and did you used to play with them and run around? What did you used to do there?



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Rosemary Carden, Amersham

Mrs Carden: Yes, yes. We were a very warm family as well, so you know, and they still are, the ones that are left [laughs].

SG: And what about the neighbours, did you have any interaction with the other neighbours in the other prefabs?

Mrs Carden: No, I don't remember the neighbours. No, I must admit I don't. But then I wasn't very old and you tend to sort of concentrate on your own relatives having the afternoon tea, you know teapots of course and cups and saucers must be out of fashion now, aren't they [laughs]

SG: And how old were you at this time?

Mrs Carden: Uhhh, well I was, I should imagine I was about 8 or 7 or 8 when I first came, and then 'til I was a teenager.

SG: So many many years...

Mrs Carden: Still sort of visit them occasionally until I moved to Chalfont St Peter and then of course they moved to Pennington Road in Flackwell Heath which is where one of the daughters still lives.

SG: And which year were you born?

Mrs Carden: 1937

SG: [to Jane Wilson] Do you have any questions?

Jane Wilson: Do you remember any particular family events? Like Christmases or birthday parties?

Mrs Carden: No, I don't think we came much at Christmas because where I lived, you know, that was quite a big family concern there so we tended to have big Christmases down there. And



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Rosemary Carden, Amersham

travelling was difficult 'cause we didn't have you know...bus to Abingdon once a week, you know, and to get to Oxford, to get the train to [High Wycombe] or whatever [unintelligibly] in those days to get here because we haven't got a car or anything like that, so it was quite an adventure to get there, to get here.

JW: And how often would you come do you think?

Mrs Carden: Well, I think two or three times a year my grandmother managed, because she had to save every penny she could to afford to make the trip, so that is why we were greeted so warmly when we did make it [laughs].

JW: Did you stay overnight?

Mrs Carden: I remember staying in that main bedroom, so I must have stayed there with gran in one occasion but I only remember doing that once 'cause it was quite busy, they've got quite a big family in quite small building, really. I never heard any complaints.

SG: Did you also have a garden to grow your food in the prefab?

Mrs Carden: Well I don't remember that much, I just remember very similar as it is now, you know. The path up to the door and a grass bit. I think there were some flowers at the side of the path, that's all I can remember. I don't remember going much at the back but when you looked at the [rows] of them, in later years, I don't think they had much in the [way of] garden. They might have had a small patch behind but I don't really remember it.

SG: Any bad memories attached to the prefab?

Mrs Carden: Not really, no.

SG: All happy?

Mrs Carden: All happy ones, yeah yeah.



Rosemary Carden, Amersham

JW: You said it was a big family. How many children? How many cousins?

Mrs Carden: They had, there's Robert, which he died recently with cancer, unfortunately, Jackie who still lives in Chalfont St Peter, Carol lives in Chalfont St Giles. Quite a handful, really. Small space. And they... working as much as they could make a few... ends meat, you know.

SG: What was the occupation of your grandma at the time?

Mrs Carden: My grandmother? She actually she started, she... My grandfather was an assistant gardener in Windsor Castle and she worked in the kitchen. She actually met Queen Victoria once a friend presented. And I still got the jacket that she had made to be presented to Queen Victoria which I am going to pass on to Jackie because the name, the name was Brant, her name, she was married to a Brant so and so she worked and she did the housing in Buckland housing, near Charney Bassett, she worked there as much as she could because she had me to bring up, that is quite hard for her so when I went to grammar school she had to get a grant to afford to send me there. And then when she died I came back here to live with my father and my step mother, and that was not a very happy relationship. And I finished up to my A levels at Wycombe High School but they were against education for young girls, they needed to get out to work so... and I liked drawing and painting and my father said that is the only thing you will ever be good at, and burnt all my certificates in front of me in the garden, so that was not a happy memory there. But they were very supportive, Rob and Ethel, and I look back and the reason why I am telling you that is because they were so supportive and her, Bob's father, actually wanted to take me in when I left home, but I said no [it's all right] I can manage, and I did [laughs] But that's how loving they were, they cared. So got very happy memories [of them in the] prefab.

SG: And what were your impressions when you came back after many years here actually and saw this [pointing to the prefab] very same one.

Mrs Carden: I said to James: -There it is! [laughs] and then walking in there and the same colour inside, that green, you know, that really struck me because they managed to keep that colour as well. Well that surprised me because I thought that perhaps it would have been a bit decorated but



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Rosemary Carden, Amersham

it's... it's good to see it as it was, really. I don't know if it has just been coated with paint and they used the same colour but whatever, it's...took me right back [laughs].

Thank you very much for what you are doing to save these sort of buildings 'cause most people would say: - well it's just a shed, isn't it? You know, why are you preserving that? But it is part of history. And it's nice to know, there is one in London have been protected as well. I know you got block of flats in it and they cater for a lot of people but should be somewhere [laughs].

SG: They stay in a special place in people's hearts these prefabs.

Mrs Carden: Yeah

SG: Thank you very much.

Mrs Carden: Thank you.