



Bob Dench, Hackney

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East End Canal Festival, Mile End Park

Interview with Bob Dench

Interviewed by Elisabeth Blanchet

Transcribed by Sonia Zhuravlyova March 2018

Elisabeth: Tell me your name first?

Bob, Bob Dench.

And so you moved into a prefab?

Yeah we moved in in 1946 and they were still building the other prefabs around us. And we used to play on the site you know terrible things used to happen, I got covered in red paint, we were playing like, you know.

It was a great time. We move in there and as I say we had a separate bathroom, and the fire heated the water, the fire in the front – I mean the water. But oh the downside in the winter it was cold. The ice used to be inside the windows, like you know, when you got into bed, wow it was freezing, even the hot-water bottle didn't make any difference.

But, it was great, we had a garden all round. And my dad used to, you know plant all these flowers, he was into flowers and that you know. It was lovely, a really great childhood, great childhood.

Till what year did you stay, till when did you stay?

Oh, I don't know. We live there for quite a long while. Then we moved to over the road in Gray's Inn road. We had a house in Gray's Inn road, yeah a council house in Gray's Inn road. Must have been well over ten years we lived there, you know, grew up and went to school from there. But yeah, it was great.

Tell me about your famous neighbour?



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Yeah, she lived over the back, with her, her name was Barbara Deeks, Babsey, they used to call her, Babsey Deeks and she used to go to Madame Behener's dancing school, up the road, her mum was quite, her old dad was a proper cockney you know, and her mum was a bit more, you know, upmarket than that. And well yeah, they were alright.

She was a friend of yours?

Oh, we used to play, all the kids around there used to play out in the street, you know, because it was like, very little, few cars around so we all played in the street from morning till night time. Till it got dark.

There was a good sense of community?

Yeah, in fact one of the people, he didn't live in the prefab, he lived over the road, I'm still in touch with him. He lives in Australia now.

Do you remember how many prefabs there were?

Probably a dozen, cos it wasn't a big site, it was a bomb site, they cleared it and built the prefabs, there were about 12, you might be able to look it up. It was opposite Gray's Inn Road.

We used to climb over the wall into the cemetery, play in there.

Have you got a funny story to tell, about life in the prefabs?

No, other than it was freezing cold, in the winter. Probably got some photographs at home of being in the prefabs. It was luxury at the time, absolute luxury. The only thing I worry about now is the asbestos.

Another [female] voice: Do you know what I would say, the people most at risk were the people manufacturing them, and the ones demolishing them. As long as you didn't touch them you were alright.