



Tess Carthy

Interviewed by Liz Bloom

September 2015



49 Cambridge Road

Tess Carthy. 49 Cambridge Road
Born December 1920 in Northern Ireland
Interviewed by Liz Bloom in September 2015

My name is Theresa Carthy but I'm known as Tess. I am 94 ¾; my birthday is just before Christmas.

Arrival in St Albans

I was born in Northern Ireland. My cousin and I came to St Albans during the war; well, we were sent! We had no choice, coming from Northern Ireland looking for work. I was very sad to leave because I missed home. But 'home' was only a hovel really. We were out in the country where we had land and of course we spent more time on the land than on the house. We were a family of 7 girls and one boy. My brother tried to take over the farm but he wasn't cut out for it so an uncle of mine took him out to America where he died about 10 years ago. I never went back to Ireland after I was married; the family never met my husband. My father died in 1953 followed by my mother in 1956.

When we first arrived here, I went to work as a parlour maid for a bedridden old lady in Harpenden and my older sister was the cook. This was the first time I had done domestic service and the old lady was training me; she'd say "give to the left and take from the right" but I had trouble telling my left from my right! That didn't last long because she didn't like me although she was very fond of my sister.

Early Work

When I came to St Albans we had to register for war work at the labour exchange in Latimore Road; there was a choice of the ATS or 'munitions' so I thought, "What's 'munitions'? I'll have a go at it!" and that's how I ended up at DeHavilland's. We were moved around a bit; first of all I was on sheet metal and then finally on plywood because the Mosquito aircraft was built using metal and wood for its 'shell'. I worked at Salisbury Hall for a while, just stock-taking; I was taken there every day in one of their vans. I worked later at Fiddlebridge. I was the only girl kept on at DeHavilland for 6 years; all of the others at the end of the war got paid off because they didn't want women. I was in a little store, dishing out nuts and bolts and washers.

Lodgings in the Cambridge Road Area

Funnily enough I had lodgings in Cambridge Road, I think at number 12; no bathroom and an outside toilet. I lodged with a husband and wife and a little girl; but the wife ran off with a Yank! They were called Beatrice and Len and the little girl was Felicity, I think. I'm going back a long way to the war years now! I also lodged at 19 Campfield Road with Mrs Jones – she was a good woman and she looked after me very well. Unfortunately, her husband was ill and I had to leave so then I found lodgings in 81 Castle Road.

There was only one bus running between Hatfield and St Albans so I would cycle to work. I was a posh lady because I had the only bicycle with a dynamo on it and when I was coming back on dark evenings, my light was lovely and bright!

Early Family Life

I met my husband at a dance in Harpenden when I was in service. He worked for the gas company in Luton. Several young men came into the dance and there was a crowd of us girls from St Albans and Harpenden who used to go to this Catholic social thing. We were married on May 19th 1945 at St Stephen's Catholic Church; my husband was only home for 8 days when we got married and then he had to

return to the army. When he came home again I got pregnant, of course. After we married, I moved to 36 Stanhope Road; Tom was only there a short while because he had to go back in the army. My first child, Terry, was born in St Mary's Ward at the hospital in 1947; Patsy was born there too.

On his return, he had to back to Luton to the company he worked for there. After he finished there, he found work at the Sphere Works in Campfield Road. I did evening waitressing at the Brown Owl in George Street to get a bit of money; 10 shillings a night from 6pm to 10pm.

Moving to the Camp Area

In about 1949 we bought a little cottage at 21 Camp Road for £725; 2 up, 2 down, outside toilet and no bathroom. In about 1960, we moved here to 49 Cambridge Road because our house in Camp Road was no longer suitable as we had a boy and a girl and only 2 bedrooms and no bathroom. We looked at so many houses all round St Albans and prices were going up and up; there was gazumping even then! We looked at this house and I said to Tom, "I'm not looking at any more; we're having it!" It was bitterly cold when we moved in during November. There was an open fireplace and I had ordered a ton of coal to be delivered here a day or so before we moved in. I thought that we'd best get going quickly or the other people would use our coal! I had a gas fire in the back room with a back boiler in it as well. The previous owners of this house were Mr and Mrs Upton and their two children and they moved to Redbourn. Mr Upton was a good table tennis player, I remember.

Family Life

We had an allotment for years near Camp School. My husband was the gardener. We would go to Kent for our holidays; I loved Margate and Ramsgate. We also went to Southsea and Bournemouth, but I hated Yarmouth because it was so cold!

My children went to Catholic Primary School at St Alban and St Stephen. The senior school for boys was out at Garston so Terry went there to St Michael's. I was foolish enough to fall for it and send my poor son there; it was far too far. My daughter Patsy won the 11 Plus and she went to STAGS. Patsy's best friend, Hazel Merchant/Merton?, lived on College Road. Terry's friend was Paul Martin who lived in Royston Road.

I used to drive and my first little car was a Triumph Herald. When I got rid of that, I bought an Allegro from next door but I never liked it. So I bought a lovely little Mini; oh, that was my pet! And then I started having blackouts and the Mini had to go. I had to have a pacemaker.

Work

While the children were growing up I did house cleaning for a teacher for a while. Then I went to work at a company called Revertex that was housed in the old Ribbon Factory building. We made sound proofing mainly for Jaguar Cars; I was on the switchboard. It closed down after I had been there about 3 years. Then I got a job at British Indicators on Sutton Road. I was on a little machine, drilling things but I didn't like that because I couldn't stand the smell of machine oil. I left there and I went to the Labour Exchange to find out what work was going. The lady there said, "I think you would do all right at the Inland Revenue" in St Peter's Street; it later moved to Bricket Road. I was there for about 5 years; I even get a small pension from them!

Then I had twelve months off because my husband was ill. He was ill for 15 years and during that time he couldn't work. He'd had pernicious anaemia all his life and he never knew it! But then he started having epileptic fits and that was difficult.

I just glanced in the Herts Advertiser one day and they wanted someone to work at Polaroid on Ashley Road. I joined the Despatch Office; they were very good and would let me come home early to look after my husband. They threw a great party for me when I retired on my 60th birthday and gave me a cheque for £500. It was the best company I ever worked for; even though it was an American company!

About Cambridge Road

I only got to know the people on either side of us; Peter and Gill Inskip at No 51 and Molly and Jack Rudling at No 47. Juliette Haddon lived at No 45 and she had a photographic studio in Victoria Street. Mr Gage (or Gaze), a widower, moved in with Mrs Inskip who was also widowed. I knew him when he was quite an elderly man. It was Mr Gage who told me that, as a young man, he remembered all this area around Hedley Road as 'lakes'. He also told me that these houses on our side were built for railwaymen; and they weren't just the ordinary riffraff, they were management. He said the company that was building them went bankrupt or something and so the Council finished them off. I remember when the large house at No 55 was pulled down and the two new houses built in its place. We went in and 'inspected' one of them because we had thought about moving there but we decided not to. I remember my children running up the stairs because the stairs ran up the middle of the house.

Where are we now?

My son worked at Handley Page when he left school but when he was 22 he went to Australia. He's been home a couple of times. He married there but they have no family. They live in Townsville, North Queensland, and I have been out there twice. Unfortunately, he's in poor health now. My daughter married a Londoner and they bought a little house in Frogmore and after that they moved to Kimpton. They have four daughters. Patsy visits me every Saturday. She'll be retiring soon. I have a sister who still lives in St Albans on Beech Road who is 93, one in London who is 90, and one in Birmingham who is 13 years younger than me.