

Interviewee(s): St Mary's School: Anna Tyler [AT]; Mr and Mrs Stock (MrS, MrsS); Betsy McLaggan (BM); Ms Mary and Minnie Myrtle (MM); D.C. Young (DY); Mrs MacPherson (MrsM); Mrs Tulloch (MrsT); Mr McLaughlin (MrL); Unknown Female (UF); Unknown Male (UM).	Interviewer(s): St Mary's pupils (P)
Date of Interview: ?	Ref: EL2-33-1-1-T
REGION	East Lothian
TOWN	Haddington

0h 00m 00s

[playing recording of Neville Chamberlain declaring war on Germany on 03/09/1939]

'This morning the British Ambassador in Berlin handed the German Government a final note stating that, unless we heard from them by eleven o'clock that they were prepared at once to withdraw their troops from Poland, a state of war would exist between us. I have to tell you now that no such undertaking has been received, and that consequently this country is at war with Germany.'

P: We have all heard about the great events of World War Two: of the battles on land, on sea and in the air. We know quite a lot about Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, Benito Mussolini, Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill. We have all seen films of tanks and aeroplanes, soldiers and sailors, and the terrible pictures of concentration camps – but what about the people who lived in Britain during the war? What was it like to live in our own town of Haddington, between 1939 and 1945? Our class decided to find out.

P: We have looked in lots of books and read articles from old East Lothian newspapers. Some of us have managed to find gasmasks, ration books, old letters and photographs, and to have them brought into the school. The school logbook has helped us to find out what it was like to be a pupil when the war was on. We are soon going to visit the Museum of Flight at East Fortune aerodrome, which was in use during the war and we hope to go inside some air raid shelters which still exist in the grounds of East Fortune Hospital.

P: The most interesting thing we did was to interview people who lived in Haddington and can remember what it was like to be afraid of bombs and to have to carry gasmasks and use ration books. Most of the people came to our school to talk to us and to be interviewed. One or two were not able to come, so we visited them in their homes.

0h 02m 04s

P: We are now going to let you hear some of the things we have learned about life in Haddington during the Second World War. Mrs Anna [Tyler?], who's now our school secretary, was a little girl then and became a pupil at our school when she was five in 1942. Paul and Michelle asked her about her childhood memories.

P: How did sweet rations affect you?

AT: I used to go to a small shop in Hardgate, run by an old lady called Rachel Taylor, for a pennyworth of sweets, but I remember quite distinctly when sweet rationing began, my mother told me that no longer would I be able to get my sweets whenever I wanted.

P: Did you ever have to go to an air raid shelter?

AT: Yes, we had practices in school and I remember going into the shelter in the playground. It frightened me because it was so dark.

P: Did you ever have a gasmask?

AT: Yes, I had to carry a gasmask on my shoulder every day to school.

P: Was it a Mickey Mouse gasmask?

AT: No, I had a black one.

P: Mm. What was school like during the war years? How big was it?

AT: Our school was quite small; perhaps there would be sixty children or so.

P: What- was there anything in particular that you really missed during the war?

AT: Yes, I missed fruit. I had a picture in my mind that a banana was something wonderful and remember asking the teacher if we would get bananas in heaven. I was very disappointed when I first received one; it was a small, green thing and looked awful.

P: Where did you live in Haddington during the war?

AT: I lived in Hardgate, near the centre of the town.

P: Were you still able to get birthday and Christmas presents?

AT: Yes, I always got something but nothing like you get nowadays.

[pause in recording]

P: Mr and Mrs [Stock?] also remembered what school was like during the war because they were both teachers. Helen asked them for their memories.

0h 04m 04s

P: How did the war affect the children in the school?

MrsS: Well, [?] in Haddington really by that time, after I was married, and the children were perfectly normal [?]. Nothing to affect them at all in Haddington, really, being as though we didn't have many bombs and planes occasionally going over but the children weren't affected.

MrS: We were both teachers in Dunbar when the war started and, em... a whole school was evacuated from Edinburgh and, as a result, we, in Dunbar, worked in the morning and the Edinburgh school used the school in the afternoon.

MrsS: But we didn't get to go home, either.

MrS: Aye.

MrsS: So, then the Edinburgh teachers got the morning off *[laughter]*.

P: Miss Betsy McLaggan was also a schoolteacher. She was interviewed by Lorna and George.

P: Miss McLaggan, although you're retired as a schoolteacher, did you teach in Haddington during the Second World War?

BM: Yes, I taught all the years during the Second World War in Haddington.

P: Where was the school?

BM: It was called the primary school and it was close to Meadow Park.

P: What effect did the outbreak of war have on the running of school?

BM: At first it was very disorganising because we had to accept about three hundred children into our school, from Edinburgh. These were evacuees and we had to do a double session in school: one lot of children came in before noon and the other lot came in the afternoon.

P: We have already heard about sweet rationing and food shortages. Were there any shortages in the classroom?

0h 06m 02s

BM: No, not really. We were told not to waste any stationery, like jotters and pencils; they were in short supply. But in those days, we had no school dinners but the children still had school milk.

P: Did you go home for dinner?

BM: Yes. I went home for my dinner everyday and most children- most of the children did; those that didn't manage to go home from the country, had to bring sandwiches with them.

P: When the sirens went, how did you take shelter?

BM: We were very fortunate that during the day we had no sirens. The sirens only went off at night for the German bombers came in the blackout.

P: Is there anything else you need to tell us about school life during the war?

BM: Well, I wouldn't know just which angle to tell you about, excepting some children were very unhappy because their parents – their fathers, especially – were killed in the war. Many of our former pupils were killed during the war and it made things rather sad and very trying.

P: Were there any... interruptions due to air raids?

BM: No, we had no interruptions during the day but we did have air raid practice when the children had to run out and get accustomed to being in the shelters, which were blacked out, of course.

P: Did... did you ever have to go to air raid shelters at night?

BM: No, the air raid shelters were shut and I think it was a pity because if there had been a massive air raid in Haddington, people would have been glad to have gone to the air raid shelters.

0h 08m 02s

P: Our school is more than a hundred years old, although we now have a new school building. The school logbook had some very interesting details about school life during the war. These entries were made by Mr Reekie, who was headmaster of St Mary's for many years. They are read by Wendy and Ruth.

P: September, the 12th, 1939: School opened after summer holidays. Opening delayed due to outbreak of war. Children from St Mary's RC School, Edinburgh, were evacuated to St Mary's, Haddington.

P: October, the 20th, 1939: Air raid siren sounded at 11:20am, all clear was given at 11:50. Children gathered in corners against walls; behaviour was very good. During lunch hour, the siren again sounded and the all clear was at 1:30. A very good return of children to school.

P: July, the 9th, 1940: School taken over by the military.

P: August, the 22nd, 1940: School evacuated by the military.

P: December, the 6th, 1940: School opened at 09:15am, owing to blackout.

P: December, the 9th, 1940: Beginning this week, the hour of opening has been fixed for 09:30am.

P: December, the 10th, 1940: Classes four and five began writing addresses in ration books for the ministry of food.

P: December, the 13th, 1940: Ration books completed and returned to county buildings.

P: December, the 22nd, 1940: The afternoon devoted to examining the gasmasks in the whole school.

[pause in recording]

P: We have already mentioned the wartime rationing. Two people who know a lot about this from a shopkeeper's point of view are Miss Mary and Miss Minnie Myrtle, who used to have a sweetshop on Haddington High Street. Ruth interviewed them.

0h 10m 04s

P: Miss Mary and Miss Minnie Myrtle, we know that you both kept a sweetshop in Haddington High Street during the war years. Can you tell us about sweet rationing and how the war affected your business.

MM: Eh... we were quite lucky tae have a good business when the war started and travellers that could advise us not tae refuse tae take in supplies. And ye got what ye had the money for and when it came to say how many coupons ye were tae receive, tae carry on the business, it was judged by what the stuff and the sales that ye'd had previously. So, it was quite fair and we still lived and had quite a good living, in spite of things being scarce.

P: How long was the shop open each day?

MM: From eight in the morning tae eight at night.

MM: Eight in the morning tae eight at night. [?] sometimes.

P: Had you ever to shut shop cause you didn't have enough sweets?

MM: Yes, I shut the shop one afternoon and went away for a walk around the haugh, no sweets. That's the only time.

MM: When sweets got scarce, a van would draw up at the door and in a few minutes, a queue formed and I had tae tell the folk the order had tae be kept before I opened the door. Then, I stuffed some of the order under the counter, for the folk I knew would come in later but couldn't stand in a queue.

0h 12m 02s

And I used tae say tae the children 'you're not coming round this side of the counter when ye can read'. When the Food Office opened in Hardgate in 1941, rationing started... started, life was easier

for everybody, for everybody got the same. I had tae cut off a coupon for every sale and count them at the end of the month and take them to the Food Office in Haddington. Then, in 1948 or '49, I had tae take them to Edinburgh. Then you got a form with the number of points you had tae buy stock for the following month. Ye couldn't buy what you wanted: you had tae take the good with the bad. And instead of coming in saying 'what will I have?', it was 'what have ye got today?' and folk would buy anything made with sugar. The prices of boiled sweets were from fivepence a quarter; then, two-ounce bars of chocolate was sixpence. Sweets came off the ration for a very short time in 1949 and it was pandemonium. There wasn't enough sweets tae go round and they were glad tae put them back on the ration for another year or so.

[pause in recording]

PS: Stuart and Steven spoke to Mr D.C. Young, who had a shoemaker's business during the war.

P: You had a shoemaker's business in Haddington during the war. Was it difficult to obtain supplies of leather?

DY: Aw... yes, it was difficult to obtain... good supplies of leather but a had... the experience o the previous war and knew that leather would become scarce and I had laid in good supplies of good quality leather.

0h 14m 12s

Then, I had the contract tae look after the Home Guard boots... and I could obtain special consignments of leather tae carry out that work. So, I- actually I had plenty of leather all of the time, although it was scarce.

UF: And then it was rationed.

DY: In most places.

UF: Rationed. It was rationed. Ye mentioned the rationing of the leather.

DY: Oh yes. Leather was rationed, according to the quantity that ye had bought before the war. And I was very fortunate that way because a had... a was never short o ready money, as it were, and I had always had, and obtained, good supplies of good leather... so that I was entitled to it and actually, I didn't need the entitlement. So, I had no difficulty with supplies.

[pause in recording]

P: In March 1941, a heavy bombing raid was made on Clydebank. When the German planes were on their way home, they dropped two bombs on Haddington. Many people in the town can still remember that night, even Mrs Tyler, though she was only three or four years old.

AT: Well, I was two and a half years old when war started but I remember the night in March 1941, quite vividly. I was carried up the High Street to see the spot where the bomb was dropped. We watched it from Boot's the chemist's, it was a mass of flames, but all I could think about was the toy piano which I'd seen the day before in a toyshop in the vicinity of the bomb.

[pause in recording]

P: On the night of the bombing, Mrs MacPherson had sent her son for a message.

0h 16m 00s

MrsM: I sent ma son across tae... where the Garleton Chip Shop is now – do ye know it?

P: Mmhm.

MrsM: He went across there for tae get chips and a never was as sorry for anything in all my life when the raid started and a was fair terrified because he was only about ten year old at the time, and I thought he was never coming home, and some o the borders were out patrolling over the bridge, and they got a hold of him and told him tae lie flat, on his stomach, on the ground until it was all over. And I vowed [?] then I'd never send him for another chippy at night.

[pause in recording]

P: Neil asked Mrs Tulloch what she remembered about that night.

P: What was it like to live in Haddington during the war?

MrsT: Well, nominally, it was perfectly normal and in fact, the famous night of the bomb, I'd been teaching at St Mary's during the day and in the evening, oh, in the evening, a bell rang and this was a gentleman who was called a...

UM: Warden.

MrsT: A warden. And he had a bit of the town, you see, under him and he came and saw about things to do with the war and he asked us if we would be willing to pay for a share in-

UM: A stirrup pump.

MrsT: Stirrup pump, which was a thing that was supposed to put out incendiary bombs, because they were throwing bombs that went on fire and made fire, and if you had a stirrup pump in the house, you were supposed to watch out and put that thing out. And we said certainly, we would share in a stirrup pump with somebody and then, later our neighbour, who was normally not out at all, a lady who lived upstairs, an elderly lady, came in and sat beside us, most unusual. And the police were brought, the...

0h 18m 04s

UM: Siren.

MrsT: The siren had gone off. We were so... unworried about the siren that we'd forgotten all about it. Then, suddenly there was a crash... and a whole lot of coal and everything came out of, fell out of the fire. And we hadn't even been thinking about bombs. And then, afterwards, on the whole, nothing happened. I was frightened after that, a bit, when the siren went off but everybody just settled down again and- but that was a nasty night. There was quite a wee bit- opposite our house, there was a big building that had been a big shop and there was soldiers stationed in there and they had a dump of small ammunition and a bomb struck the edge of our pavement and it struck that building and all the small ammunitions started exploding and coming right across the street and one of the soldiers was blown right out. It was really quite nasty. But then we all settled down again.

UM: I should set it right that, at that time, Market Street was cobbled. It wasn't tarmacked in as it is today. And, eh...

MrsT: Oh yes.

UM: A lot o the cobbles had blown intae the... intae the room, intae both rooms we had at the front.

MrsT: Front.

UM: The windows were blown in, of course but the... we had long, heavy curtains that prevented the cobbles from actually coming in and...

MrsT: Hitting.

UM: Hitting us, ye see. The curtains went round about them.

0h 20m 00s

But, eh... and when we looked out the window, the hole that had been made just beside the pavement, very, very strong, eh... there was a huge flame, it had burst the gas main and the flames were coming up.

MrsT: Mm.

UM: From the gas leaking.

MrsT: And I says 'well, it's not much is buying a stirrup pump' [*laughter*]. I thought this was an incendiary bomb.

UM: [*laughter*]

MrsT: Not only that, the stones didn't come in most of the way but on [?], there was a little bedroom that was looking at the front, between the dining room and the sitting room and on his pillow, was a great, monstrous pavement edge, and he surely would've been killed, just where his head would've been, nothing else practically, not a lot of damage done. We had great, big wooden, old-fashioned shutters. It was an old house, it had been a big, old house – in fact, it had an iron fireplace – it was very nice inside. And they had those big shutters which we always [?] because of the blackout, helped us with blackout. Ye weren't allowed to show any lights, out into the streets.

UM: There was also a long piece o the bomb, about a foot long, in our bedroom.

MrsT: Which we carried about for a few years.

UM: [*laughter*]

MrsT: It was like a great, big oakleaf.

UM: Jagged.

MrsT: Jagged at each end.

[*pause in recording*]

P: The newspapers printed reports of the bombing but they were not allowed to mention the name of the town.

P: 'Telephone Girls' Devotion to Duty. When a Nazi raider dropped a stick of high-explosive bombs in the centre of a town in southeast Scotland last night, killing two men and injuring a number of other persons, girl operators in the local telephone exchange stuck to their posts and continued to pass calls, although a bomb had demolished a building a few yards away and started a fire which threatened to envelope the telephone exchange.

0h 22m 10s

The curtains of the windows in the exchange actually did catch fire but the flames were quickly extinguished with a stirrup pump. Through the devotion to duty of these girls, important telephone messages were able to be sent during the period of the raid'.

[pause in recording]

P: Mr Young can remember seeing a German plane being shot down in the Lammermuir hills.

DY: In my- sitting in ma shop, I looked out the window, up intae the sky and a could see... an air fight going on, with a German aeroplane and one of ours. And, eh... the... they wheeled about in the sky and ye could hear the rattle o the machine guns and... but the [?] got oot his plane, got out ontae the tail o the German one and the German one obviously was struck and begun tae fall. And it landed, of course, on the Lammermuir hills and there was quite a crowd went away up tae see it, of course, including maself. And, eh... the plane was smashed up, of course, and the police brought down the... body in the uniform and what not. Naturally, I was on duty that night, in the county buildings on, eh... ye know, fireguard duties and I saw the police had the uniform of this German who had been killed and, eh... in the stomach and breast o the dead man's uniform, there was quite a big- oh, a big tear, the size o the palm of your hand, where the stream o machine gun bullets had just landed, as it were, on the centre o the [?] and tore a big hole in the uniform and what not.

0h 24m 28s

And, eh... that's where I saw that uniform, that night, up at the county buildings but also, I can't remember where the German was buried or anything about the funeral.

P: We also spoke to a man who thought he was going to be killed when a bomb fell near Tranent.

UM: I was out working that night and I'd just come out the car and a don't know if ye've heard a bomb coming down, it comes down like a whistle. Ye asked me if I was scared; it was the one time I was scared [?] bang. It was about two miles away from where I was. So, naturally in the morning, I went tae see what had happened and it had landed in a field near Winton. There was a huge crater in the ground but there was nobody killed but all the cows in the field were spattered wi mud. That's- that's the time I was scared.

P: Haddington Golf Course was turned into a prisoner of war camp; Mr [McLaughlin?] had to deliver food to the camp and he told us about this.

MrL: Take a thousand loaves over tae Amisfield Park. [?] There were about three hundred in it. I had tae go three times and the truth is, [?] they were always looking for [?]. But luckily, I was a non-smoker.

P: The Myrtle sisters also remember seeing the German prisoners and felt sorry for them.

MM: On the first day they had any, I saw them come up at a track at the new bridge and it was difficult tae see them, wi their grey clothes right down tae their feet and they looked thin and old.

0h 26m 10s

P: Last week, during our interviews, we asked whether it ever seemed likely that Britain might lose the war. Here are two of the replies.

UF: Well, I think of Hitler had bombed this country first and if he hadn't waited till 1941, he would certainly have won this war but, to put it mildly, he missed the bus.

UM: I think the great escape of the British empire... unshakeable faith that I think that most Britishers had. Ye see, our... our country [?] from time immemorial we always come out on top, so that it had grown into a sort o constant expectations that we would win at any fight we got into, which I think helped to bring it about.

[*'We're Going to Hang out the Washing on the Siegfried Line'* playing]