

Interview in the 1980s with Curator Ann Lineen

[Is that how you remember the house, with the trellis in the front?]

Yes, that's right...oh yes I remember that very well because the night that my father died...he'd got a nephew who was pruning the roses for him you see and he was showing him what to do ...and he was marvellous...and they went to bed and the war had just broken out and he didn't like the idea of children being sent away from their parents but mother said she told him it was for the safety of the children –and he went on talking and he could remember the first world war as he was about 13 years older than my mother...anyway he was chatting away and suddenly he said he went cold so my mother gave him some whisky or rum - whatever she'd got. He was alright for a time and then he said the same again...and so mother said she would get up and get some fire and she was half dressed in the corner and he said I'm going to leave you.

[He was quite old when he died?]

85 but he'd got all his faculties

[What was his job?]

He was called a mine's clerk...he used to go to different pits...and take reports...

[So was he employed by the Earl of Dudley?]

I suppose he would be yes...

[Was that quite a good job? Did it bring in a good wage?]

I don't know, I think it was a good job in those times... he seemed to be quite happy. He was always very fond of walking you see...he did a lot of walking...

[Can you remember what the house was like inside? In the main room as you go in the front door...]

Yes well... I can remember before I was married...mother had got a little shop then because people would go in daily "could you lend me a bit of tea...could you lend me a bit of butter" and mother said she felt that the best thing to do was to have it and let them buy and pay for it, you see, and that is what she did and she got quite a bit of custom like that...till the end of course when she gave up...and there was that, and there was another lounge/dining room, and there was a scullery...that was...quite a bigish place...

[So if I show you a drawing of the house, the ground plans...you see here - this is the front door and this is the main room. Where did she have the shop?]

It was a biggish space that was...there was a pantry...she sort of halved it...She had curtains across there to separate the pantry from the shop because all that was really the pantry...They used to come to the door and she used to go to the door and answer it see... if they walked in they would be in our own private room...I think she'd got it [the shop] when I was married.

[When were you married?]

I can't remember...I was about 26 when I was married. I was married from here, from this house...

[Was there a marble slab or a cold slab of any sort or were things just kept on shelves and on a table?]

Oh on shelves...and this other part here was a fairly big space...a wash house and cooking in there - because there was a big grate you see...There was a big oven there you see...and there was a boiler...you know where all her Christmas puddings were boiled... she used to make them you see and boil them. Oh yes she did everything.

[This room] *was a dining room come lounge you know...it was fairly big - plenty of room in it. That was an ordinary fire place, it had got an oven but a small one. It wasn't as big as the one in there where she used to do most of the cooking...*

[Can you remember how it was decorated...was there wall paper on the wall?]

Oh yes there was wall paper...except in the kitchen and that was sort of whitewash, you know... it had got boards which were varnished and that round, and then paper on top...[the woodwork] was a lightish colour brown.

[Can you remember what furniture was in that room?]

There was a piano...I had piano lessons you see and my brother was very fond of the violin... and then there was a sideboard in there... and there was a table in the middle and then there were all the usual chairs...yes I think there was (a settee under the window...)

Yes we had a pig sty, we always had, every year I think, we had two pigs and so we never had to buy any bacon. We always had our own bacon...there was nothing we had to buy...we had a man who specially did that job (killed the pigs) He came to the premises and then they were hung up in the back kitchen for so many days and then they were cut up into joints...

[All that meat would be stored in the pantry?]

Oh yes

[Did your mother make her own jams?]

Oh yes she made jams...of course she had got a machine, she had a trellis machine, I could never use it I was terrified of the thing...I thought one day I'll use it and the needle will go through my hand...

She could make shirts. She could make anything - she was very good...

[Did she bake her own bread or did she buy it?]

No she used to buy it. I don't remember her baking any bread. No, she used to buy the bread... Men used to call, you didn't have to go out and fetch it.

[Did you grow a lot of vegetables in the garden?]

Oh yes we had a big garden... oh yes there was one big pear tree and about 5 apple trees and we grew all our own vegetables because we had got the space to do it, you see...I don't remember ever buying any vegetables - even our own potatoes we grew...and then eventually there was a piece of land not far away that could be rented and so Dad rented that and that was filled with vegetables and had got a lot of pear trees

[Did your father have a pony and trap?]

When he was at home but not after he was married. He'd got one before because he used to take his mother and father out, you see. It was what was called a Governor's car in those days. He gave it up in the end. I wasn't very keen - I was more frightened of the horse... what if the horse goes mad or something as they do...

[Where did he keep the pony and the trap?]

I can't think...I think it was before my time. It wasn't in the same house that I lived in...that he had the pony trap. It was in the other one further up the road you see... used to take his father and mother out. They weren't all that long when they were married...

[How old was your brother?]

Younger than me. Only about a year...something like that. He's been dead quite a long time now.

[Did your mother have a job?]

Not after she married no... I don't know what she did before...she didn't have a job afterwards because when we came onto the scene she hadn't got much time...she was working at home.

[Did you use to help her with all the housework?]

No I didn't do very much housework...I was at school then training college, my first job was working in a solicitors' office and I didn't really have time to do anything really.

[Was your father involved in the local church at all?]

Oh yes he was one of the sidesmen and also my grandfather...Church of Lower Gornal...that was there they went...they were there till the end.

[If I draw a plan of the garden you can tell me if you think it is right or not...Was there an earth closet in the back garden?]

Yes, there was no water toilets in those days...I can remember a time when we used to have to go outside onto the footpath to get a cup of water...there was no tap in the back kitchen at all so if you wanted a bucket of water you had to go outside onto the foot-path at the side of the house to get it...I remember them putting it in the back kitchen...I'm sure I was a school girl when I used to have to go outside to get a bucket of water...no we didn't have a pump...there was a well in the garden but that water was used to water the garden...The well was nearly at the top of the garden.

Christmas time my mother used to have a big joint and poultry and things like that...

[The meat was stored somewhere in the pantry?]

On like a big stone table...cold stone...at the end of the pantry there...We used to store the vegetables in one or two (wooden) sheds.

[You come through into the living room and there was wainscoting around the room?]

There wasn't a picture rail but we had pictures, but in those days you could get fancy hooks, you see, to hang pictures on, quite fancy in those days...and each side of the fireplace there was an alcove...

[So did you have to go to piano lessons? Did you enjoy that?]

Of course I did. My brother was very fond of his violin...he had violin lessons and it was absolutely amazing what happened...He was playing his violin till midnight on Sunday night. He got up as usual on the Monday morning...to go to the office and got onto a bus which took him so far, then he had to walk. And when he got to the office he said there was a pain in his left arm and he passed away... awful shock for all of us...they let his wife know and we didn't live very far away from them...and of course they called and picked me up and took me to the hospital and he was all laid out...He was 55.