

Clent History Society
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Transcript of Lily Griffiths interview for **Black Country Talking Magazine. 2010.**

Original Recording by Thomas Pocklington Trust– (Housing and Support for people with sight loss)

Interview introduced by Music –'Lily Marlene'

See our **News - Quaint Clent Home. Homes under the Hammer** – Link to Jan 2017 TV programme featuring the sale and renovation of Lily's home.

I was born over a100 years ago, actually here in Clent, not far from where I am now. We lived in Church Cottages, at the back of Clent Church when I was a girl and until I got married. I've always gone to church a lot – Sunday school and catechism classes.

It was 17th December I was born, in 1909. I was Christened Lillian but everyone calls me Lily. It was the nurse when I was born as give me my name. It's a bit of a mouthful '*Lillian*', that's what Jeff, my husband always used to say. Yes I think it was the nurse who named me. Both my sisters had two names.

Jeff's own name was a bit of a mouthful too. He was Jefuss He came from over Hereford way. That explains him having such an unusual name. He died 24 years ago now. You know people tell you, 'My husband has died' and you say "I am sorry to hear that," but you don't really know until you lose your own husband and then it's really terrible. We had a lot of years together and we were happy. He came over to Clent to do some work for.....and that's how we met. Oh yes I did like him, a lot and we started courting. We courted for yes it was a long time but it was alright because you got to do some fun things and enjoy yourself.

When it came to us getting married we were very lucky that we got this cottage where I'm living now. It had been my grandmother's cottage and when we were girls we would walk down on Sundays to visit, wearing our clean clothes. It makes me giggle now just to think about it. The cottages in the village at one time belonged to either the Thatchers or the Amphletts and they rented them out. Another young couple had been promised this cottage but I believe they fell out and didn't go ahead with the wedding so when my

mother heard about it she said she was going to ask Miss Thatcher if we could have it. Miss Thatcher said she'd give it some consideration which didn't sound too hopeful but it worked out well because she decided we could have it after all.

There's the picture of our wedding. I wore a blue dress. We didn't have a honeymoon. Ordinary people didn't have such things then. We got married on the Saturday and came back to our new cottage at Holy Cross and the next day, Sunday, we went up to me mother's house for tea. Jeff was working on the Monday. It's all different now but then they didn't have all these presents and that.

Jeff worked up at *The Austin*; - Longbridge Car Works isn't it now? They've opened it up again, haven't they? He was working on the "*Arro*", yes that's what they called it. It was quite a journey into work but there was a coach used to come to the village and pick the men up to get them over there. He had his own bike (motorbike) and he'd go on that too. He helped build the "*Arro*."

The First World War passed me by, I was such a little girl, three or four when it started. Unclegot killed, my mother's brother.

When the Second World War started, it was only three years after we'd been married and that was really hard to see him going off when he got called up. He was over at Norton Barracks, Worcester. He used to write to me every day. There was another chap there lived in Clent as well and sometimes he got a lift home with him. I remember it was difficult making my food ration stretch to feed Jeff as well as me. He hated the food he got at camp and looked forward to a meal at home. I used to share our little bit of shin beef. I don't know how we managed but we did. It was very hard seeing him go off again each time. But he came home in the end.

We never had much money but we was happy enough together. I wasn't brought up with much money. My father died when I was very small, leaving my mother with three of us girls to bring up. He was killed in an accident. She took in washing from the big houses every week and that was hard work. We were all expected to help out with jobs at home.

We went to school, first the Infants, opposite the Church and then on to the 'Big School', which was close by at that time too. Now of course both schools have been turned into private houses and there is a modern village school which was built at Holy Cross in the 1970's. It (the school) keeps growing all the time. We get invited in to concerts at Christmas and they have the village fete there now.

When I left school and my sisters the same, we had letters after our names. The letters were W. O. R. K. and of course that's what we did. It makes me laugh to say it now but that's the way it was.

As soon as my eldest sister left school she went into service with the Salter family. They were known everywhere because they had a factory making scales and cooking equipment. They lived in one of Clent's big houses – Clent Cottage. Although it was only a few minutes walk from my mother's house my sister had to live in. She wasn't happy about it. I went to help out doing work for the infant school teacher.

At holiday times Clent was alive with so many people coming to visit. Most had come from the Black Country and they needed feeding during their trip. We were in a good spot, not far from The Vine Inn and so when it was busy my mother would wait near the cottage and ask people if they would like a drink or something to eat. Some people didn't even bother to answer at all but others said, "Yes I think I would." And she would lead them round to the front room of our cottage where we had to have the furniture changed round a bit to get the table in.

She charged one shilling for tea, bread and jam. If visitors asked for fruit mother would send us off, to the shop by the church, for a tin of pineapple or something, which would cost five pennies so she would charge one shilling and sixpence, adding on a little bit of profit.

It was so busy with people flocking to The Vine or up on to the hills where Black Bess was with the horse and donkeys. She was so dirty, and I reckon that's how she was known as Black Bess. She had a man who helped her a lot and he was known as Japan. He lived in the stables with the donkeys so he was none too clean either. All the visitors knew them. When she died Black Bess was buried in the church yard. She died ever so wealthy. There's a big angel marks her tombstone. She had a lot of money did Black Bess.... from the donkey rides.

When I was growing up we had no spare pennies if you ask me about what food we ate then I can easily answer, 'Not nearly enough.' Butter was never seen in our house but we had lard, knobs of lard to eat with bread.

How have I lived so long? People do ask me and they seem to think it's because I'm a contented sort of person. I was content with my married life and I've been content with living my life in this one village. I used to be very quiet and even shy when I was young. I'm still quiet. I've never been one for a lot of going out. I love my home and being in it. I'm still like that.

I've got my old kitchen range still. It's wonderful to look at and it keeps me so warm. It keeps the whole house warm because it's built in the middle and the heat warms the place through. I don't polish it now, I have someone come in to help me out once a week. I do dust around though every day. I like to have a routine; that's another reason I've lived so long, I think, having a set routine of doing things on a certain day.

The range has a chimney that gets swept once a year, that costs me £30 and I use coal on it which is very expensive now £15 a bag. I can't do my plants and bits of garden, I get help with that now.

The village has changed a lot since I was young. My life here is much quieter these days. You can go all day with seeing nobody. People aren't walking about these days and popping by. There's a lot of them out at work all day. There were so many shops in Clent you could get everything nearby. You didn't have to remember what you wanted like when you go out to a supermarket. If you ran out of something you just went to the shop. There was butchers; a shop selling shoes and hats and cotton and things. (Is it a drapers?) There was Robert's Shop and the Post Office. There were Shops in 'The Rocks!' People just made space in their front room and sold things, you didn't need a license like you do now. Roberts was a shop selling all sorts; you had to have a good look. At Christmas we didn't ever have a tree and the presents were just something small from Robert's shop.

They closed in the end, all of them, because people didn't buy things from them, unless it snowed and then they would all be queuing, and then the shelves would be empty .

I've always gone local. It helps keep them going. When the butcher closed in Clent I went to Belbroughton butchers. I still go down to * Charlie Jordan's every week for my meat. (*now closed*) My nephew comes over and takes me down to fetch my pension from the Post Office in Belbroughton and to do a bit of shopping. It was nice shopping local and meeting people and having a chat with them. I miss that.

There have been lots of changes in my lifetime. Medical change has been huge. My only experience of it was a few years back when I began to have difficulty swallowing. I went to see Dr Philips and she sent me to Kidderminster hospital where they put a camera down my throat – a barium scan. It wasn't very nice at all, but it showed up that I hadn't got cancer. The trouble was too much acid in my oesophagus. The doctor gave me some tablets and that cleared up that problem.