

DONALD ROSWELL
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Interviewer: Katy Wade

Interviewer: I
Respondent: R

00:00 I This is Katy Wade recording an interview on 19th April 2015. Could you please tell me a little bit about your background?

00:10 R Yes, I was born in Birmingham. My father at the time had come down from Ilfracombe in North Devon, my mother from Somerset, and he had taken a job as a chauffeur to a big business man on Wake Green Road, having said that erm, my upbringing there was sort of, quite interesting because we had the Gatehouse there which was a lovely bungalow type building with ivy over it and the lady of the house used to let me in to play in the nursery there. I remember a large rocking horse which I was allowed to use, and the cooks used to feed me up very well from the cookery downstairs. And it was a very large garden I remember with a maze in it and I was allowed to wander around there. So both me myself and my sister in actual fact, who was three years younger than me, had quite a nice upbringing at that time. Moseley Grammar School was across from the house and we were friends with the caretaker there, so I used to be able to wander around the school buildings as well. So I got rather a taste for the high life if you know what I mean *(laughing)*.

01:52 I What activities did you used to do in your free time when you were younger?

01:57 R Er what... sorry

01:58 I What activities did you used to do in your free time?

02:02 R In my younger days, well to be honest with you it's a bit hazy as to exactly what my interests were apart from collecting bus tickets, I remember so I could play bus conductor. But, as I say that's a bit hazy because in actual fact I was, when the war broke out I was sent off to my grandparents in North Devon and I spent the war years there, so that was my impression of all time in actual fact. Again I had quite a good war in a way, because we didn't see any bombing down there at all and I had a lot of relatives down there. When I first went down I was billeted out with a couple of aunties in various villages around Ilfracombe, and eventually landed up with grandma in Ilfracombe itself, cause granny always liked the boys anyway so I was treated very well by grandma and granddad, although I remember granddad chasing me round the kitchen table giving me a whollop of the backside for me and I remember

grandma saying “*you leave the boy alone*” so that was my impression, and of course we used to go climbing rocks and whatnot so yea I had a good war in actual fact, I really did, and then of course when I came back just before the war ended, they fetched me back to Birmingham.

03:53 I Which church did you used to go to when you were younger?

03:55 R Well father in actual fact was never what I'd call a developed Christian. Having said that, he had this habit of going round and testing various churches, he seemed to like to sort of go into various sort of Christian organisations to see how they operated and of course granddad and grandma were Plymouth Brethren so in those days very, very strict and we used to have to go to church on a Sunday morning. Granny used to open up the front room which was locked until then and we all used to congregate in there and down to church we used to go. Granddad used to lead the singing, and he also always had a pocket full of peppermints, very strong peppermints which he used to break in half and break in a quarter and hand me a quarter because apparently one peppermint was far too much for me.

05:06 R So that was in those days as I say, but then of course they brought me back to Birmingham, and dad had been down to the Salvation Army citadel, scared him to death because there were young lasses apparently, knelt by his side praying for his soul, so got out of there rather quickly, and he landed up going to this Baptist church here and he took me there with him and Cyril Robertson who was the captain of the Boys Brigade at that time down here, approached him, said would I like to come and join the Life Boys, which is now the junior brigade and so that's where I started in actual fact, and then I graduated into the Boys Brigade and went right through there taking the rank of corporal eventually, and most of my activities in those days was church based and we had a youth club, we also used to come down to church and that's the old church here which was a big building, had balconies and we used to sort of sit in the balconies, and if we chatted too much the minister used stop his preaching and stare at us so we had to shut up sort of thing you know, and in the, after church we used to pair up with the girls and what not and go for a walk up Wake Green Road and you went up with one girl and came back with another one very often. It was quite a sort of free and easy business. So that was those days sort of thing, but they were good days, there's no doubt about it, they really were and we had a good youth club, we had a good boys brigade company and so it was quite enjoyable. And then of course as far as I was concerned National Service came along and they put me in the signals as the keyboard operator. That's a Telaprinter and I was stationed at Northern Command in York, I was hoping to go abroad to Germany or something but no they stuck me there for the rest of my service. Eventually I got promotion and they stuck me in charge of a signals office as a lowly lance corporal in actual fact, which rather sort of got on my nerves because the other supervisors were all sergeants, but there you are, and there I was until the end of my service in actual fact. They came out and

approached me about the Boys Brigade, put me on the staff as a Warrant Officer and from there on I graduated to Lieutenant. In those days the company was quite strong actually, eventually I took over the company as Captain down here. With girls and boys combined and staff there were very often a hundred on parade.

08:33 R So that's how the youth were down here in those days. We had, by that time we had coloured people coming in to the church and into the company, and so although it wasn't the sort of ratio that it was later on, we had a reasonable amount of West Indian people and that, lads in the company and also in the church and you will read that in the document that I gave you. So that was that sort of period, but now of course I'm going out now into the sort of 50's/60's, so I took over the Captaincy of the company a couple of times, and I spent a period with them and sort of got worn out as you do with jobs like that, and decided to sort of turn the job in, but then I got called out again by a couple of the officers down here and they said they lost their Captain and they wanted me to go back, so I'm back again, so that's how things were going then. But I say that's now going into the sort of 60's and in those days we used to have a hut on the side of this old army mission hut actually in the side of the building here, and we had a couple of table tennis tables in there and billiard table and a little canteen and a darts board and it was open all week, there was always one of the staff down here to sort of look after it, and that was quite a good time, as I say the company was quite strong in those days.

10:34 R But unfortunately of course the whole thing went and mainly because the area became predominantly Asian, and of course you've got no recruiting, and that's what's happened in the end of course was we've just ran out of lads that wanted to join or were allowed to join. I think that's it unless there's anything else you want to know, that's about it as far as my sort of period of recollection goes. Of course I've been here, I've now been on the diaconate for years and years here and one thing and another, so yes my sort of membership here has continued onwards, but it's awkward now because as I have to come all the way from Harborne, my lady friend's a Methodist now in fact and she lives in Shirley, so fortunately because I go up at the weekends usually, I can get down here, so quite a long journey, about eight miles from Harborne to here, and then back again of course. So you know that's where I am now, I'm just sort of you know, Don's here, I think I'm one of the fixtures and fittings sort of thing you know and it's as if I've grown roots. It would be much easier actually to go to the Baptist church in Harborne, much easier, but I don't know, I feel obligated somehow or another. So yea, that's about it I think, as I say you will pick up quite a bit of information off that sheet I think. You don't want to know the prior to forty I presume, but there is stuff on forty to seventy nine in there.

12:26 I Can you tell me a bit about the fire that happened at the church?

12:28 R Yes erm what happened is we moved out of the church and had one, this is when Edward Williams was minister here, and moved into this building which they renovated in actual fact because the heating cost of that church and the boiler being very ancient, was getting far too great, so they decided because the congregation had shrunk quite a bit, I mean not to the extent it is now but it had in those days, to renovate this church and make the upstairs the sanctuary, put a lift in which sort of went from ground floor to the upstairs, put a baptistery which is still there actually under this floor here, and you know what a baptistery actually is, a sort of bath they dunk people in when they're baptising them (*laughing*). Yea anyway we moved out of the church so they hired it out to a photographer who used it for his photography and whatnot and during his period, and I think it was probably something to do with the faulty equipment he had got why the church burnt down. By that time of course we were already in here anyway so we weren't affected really, apart from some broken windows and the heat that got at it. So yes that's when we sort of moved into here and the original church I think was the largest Baptist church in Birmingham, and originally was right on the edge of the greenbelt as it would be called nowadays. Nowadays of course it's swallowed up in the inner city, so yea.

14:32 I And are there, have there ever been any major celebrations or events during your time here that you can remember?

14:39 R Celebrations and events, erm let's have a think about it. I'm trying to think actually what we were celebrating at the time, I think it was a hundred years of the church's existence when we had a do down here and we were quite sort of overcrowded almost. That was one after the hundred years that was one celebration that we had down here. Erm we've had a lot of baptisms and that sort of thing, in fact a couple of weeks ago this church was absolutely heaving at the seams for a christening, for a dedication, we don't do christenings in here with young people in the Baptist church. They're baptised when they get older and accepted and that was a dedication and there were so many people we even had to fill out these side rooms with chairs. All of them or most of them anyway were West Indian origin. Of course when I first came down here, the first immigrants that came into this place were Irish and they were followed then by the West Indians who were then of course were followed by the Asians, and so bit by bit they all sort of take their place you know. Nowadays of course there's still a few Irish round here but not that many, there used to be quite a few at one time, and the West Indians of course in decline in a way, because as I say mainly and if you look up there up the Stratford Road and down the Stratford Road, they're mainly Asians. So that's how things have sort of altered really in a way.

16:48 I Are there any landmarks that have changed or have been knocked down that you can remember?

16:54 R Landmarks, mmm, well I wouldn't call them landmarks of course but they've

been doing a lot of alterations just recently with the Stratford Road here with the junction and that sort of thing, a lot of the old buildings have been flattened there. I wouldn't exactly say they were landmarks. The church was the biggest landmark here. You can see the spire for miles. But erm I think Sparkbrook in general is much as it ever was to be honest with you. They've been very restricted actually in Sparkbrook in so much that there was planning blight for years here because they kept on saying they were going to extend the Stratford Road and widen it and they never did anything about it, so nobody could do anything, you couldn't redesign or redo anything at all here and eventually they took the planning blight away, but of course nothings been done since very much, apart as I say from this little bit of a development here. If you go down towards town and towards Camp Hill, it's much the same as it ever was down there. Erm, yeah.

18:13 I Do you remember when there were trams in the area?

18:15 R Oooh yes, yes I do. Yes I remember trams because I used to live in Ivor Road, actually, after the war we moved from Wake Green Road to Ivor Road up the top in Sparkhill there and of course there were trams around in those days and I remember that I went down on my bicycle actually to fetch a couple of young ducks. I built a pen for them, I thought we might like duck eggs and I got these ducks on my bike and the blessed things got out right in the middle of the tram tracks and there was me scuttling all over the place trying to pick these flaming ducks up before a tram came along **(laughing)**. Oh dear, yea. **(laughing)**. I sort of, the mind boggles doesn't it! **(laughs)**. I also remember getting my bike tyre stuck in the tramline and coming off it as well whey hey! Oh dear. So yes we used to have tramlines going up the Bristol Road which goes over that way right up to the Lickey Hills and right through the central reservations there. I used to go up to Lickey's quite often in actual fact on those trams and I always remember them actually because they had a little place in Summer and it was open and you used to sit there and you know fresh air and I always remember the trams, clickidy clickidy clickidy clickidy clickidy, as they go over the lines. They used to go to the top and then they used to swing the old arm around and go back down again, and there were trolleybuses in them days as well.

20:24 I What were they like?

20:25 R They went on the same thing as trams do and they get the lines but they were free to steer, yea.

20:35 I Whereabouts where they?

20:37 R Very eco happy they were, yes so they were quite good. In fact I don't know why they did away with them because traffic wise they weren't really sort of stuck in the centre of the road particularly. Yeah.

- 20:57 I Do you remember any of the jubilees or anything, did any events or celebrations happen in the area?
- 21:08 R Jubilees? Well obviously I do remember them at the end of the war and when we had all the tables out in the roads here and we all got together and had a feast, that was quite interesting. That was when the war ended. Well we had two celebrations actually, one after VE Day and one after VJ Day and all the people used to get together and of course there was rationing in those days they used to put all their rations together and we used to be sitting along trestle tables out in the middle of the road there and yea it was quite a happy event *(laughing)* I'm sure there were some more somewhere, I can't bring them to mind at the moment but err as I say I remember that being a young lad anyway sort of thing you know. That was during the days when you used to be able to play marbles up the gutters as you're coming home from school you know, because there were no cars parked there *(laughing)*, it would be hard pressed to play marbles on the gutters nowadays I tell you, yea.
- 22:27 I Do you remember any weddings that happened at this church?
- 22:33 R Mine for start off yea. Yes I remember a lot of my friends and that and sort of people of my age or slightly younger getting married here obviously and this was in the old church of course, you had a sort of setup for a decent wedding because you had the aisles and everything and you had a lovely porch where photos could be taken and that you know and erm yes I remember one or two weddings here and absolutely great actually the church building was, had a lovely big organ there for a start, playing the bridal march on that really sort of put something into it. *(laughing)* But as I say we had the Billy Graham meetings as well you know when we were relaying Billy Graham's speeches here. I thought he was exceptionally good, he was an American evangelist as I don't know whether you know or not but he was and I was quite impressed with his speech the first time I heard it but I heard it half a dozen times after and he'd said exactly the same things it put me off him completely *(laughing)*, just me I'm afraid. You know this is from a script you know *(laughing)*.
- 14:25 R I've taken church services down here myself, quite a few in periods in between when we've lost ministers and that where I've had to step up to the mark and keep the church going. I'm not being big headed about that but it was just you know, nobody seemed to know what to do you know and I've always been a stickler, perhaps as my army training and my Boys Brigade training, I've always been a stickler for order and you do find especially with the West Indians and the coloured people, it's manana you know, they drift in any time they feel like it sort of thing and they drift out the same way. You can't get anything sort of anchored you know. So I do tend to step up to the mark occasionally and sort of pull em up over it *(laughing)* yea. Don't you tell them what I said.

- 25:35 I Do you remember any of the shops around here?
- 25:39 R Shops? As I say in the early days of course because they are all sort of Asian shops with Asians clothing and Asians food and Asian this and Asian that. Not that I've got anything against the Asians, but I do feel sometimes that we get sort of flooded out you know, you get too hemmed in. But in the days I'm thinking of course they were on the corner of Ivor Road for instance, just up the road here, there was a Co-op and a Woolworths and a Prapner Westwoods, the sort of fruiter and vegetable shop and erm of course there was the Commercial School just around there, my sister went to Commercial School, actually just down the road there, so yes there were quite a few nice shops around then you know, which aren't there anymore of course, but it wasn't a bad shopping area in actual fact. I always remember the Coop because they used to have one of these lines across to the cashier's desk and they used to put the money in there and click it on, pull the lid, it went zoop and off it went to the cashier and boop it came back with a receipt **(laughing)**, don't see any of that any more do you. You see you young people don't know one half of it.
- 27:22 I Do you remember the Co-op Dairy at all?
- 27:24 R Hmmm?
- 27:25 I Do you remember the Co-op Dairy?
- 27:26 R The Co-op Dairy? Well I remember the Co-op delivery, I can't say I particularly remember the Co-op Dairy in actual fact. We used to have Co-op milk which used to be delivered originally by horse and cart in actual fact. In fact most things were delivered by horse and cart just after the war, and dad used to send me out with a bucket when the horse did his naughties on our, because he wanted it for his rhubarb, so **(laughing)** so he used to send me out to collect it **(laughing)**. Oh dear.
- 28:15 I And did you go to any of the cinemas in the area?
- 28:17 R Any....?
- 28:17 I Of the cinemas?
- 28:19 R Oh yes the Carlton and the Piccadilly, the New Imperial that was a flea pit that was by the way, they used to take your knife off you before you went in there **(laughing)**. Well in those days as youngsters you thought nothing of having a sheath knife, nobody ever stabbed anybody incidentally but they used to take that off you before you went in for a start. That was on Moseley Road that was, and then of course there was Sparkhill Baths, they are opening them up again I believe as well now eventually. Those were lovely

baths that was actually, they had diving boards and everything in it, and there was another baths in Moseley Hall, I used to go to both of those places swimming. There was plenty to do for youngsters in those days and nowadays it's no wonder they go off the rails or sit sort of square eyed looking at the box all the time, there's nothing else for them to do pretty much which is a great pity. Erm we had plenty to do, there was plenty of organisations you could join you know, Scouts, Boys Brigade, Youth Clubs. Most churches had some sort of entertainment for youngsters, so yea. I think they are very much different nowadays I'm afraid. I don't know where it's all gonna end eventually frankly but still that's old age speaking isn't it *(laughing)*. I shan't be here much longer, don't worry about it *(laughing)*.

30:08 I Could you describe when you lived at Ivor Road, some of your neighbours?

30:11 R Did I....?

30:12 I Yeah do you remember your neighbours when you lived at Ivor Road?

30:14 R Oooh yes we had on the one side I used to see a friend of mine, Brian, we used to go cycling together and they were very nice, they had a nice little family and we'd think nothing about getting on our bikes at night and going to Stratford-upon-Avon and back again. We cycled there in those days. But the other side in actual fact, he worked on the roads. Now he in actual fact was a rather peculiar gentleman cause he was extremely well spoken, really gentlemanly and he used to come back with all this tar over his shoes and absolutely filthy dirty and the house used to smell something terrible and now Jimmy the young lad, the youngest, a right little scallywag he was. He was always full of himself and you know he turned out eventually to be one of my officers in the Boys Brigade *(laughing)* yea. Oh Jimmy. I still hear from him now, he lives in Shirley, he married one of the girls from the churches, from the church here which a lot all did in those days, there was a lot of pairing up going on in this church and they lasted as well those partnerships funnily enough, so yea.

31:48 I What type of house did you live in? Was it a terraced house or a detached House when you lived in the area?

31:53 R What was...?

31:54 I What type of house did you live in? Was it detached or terraced...

31:56 R It was a terraced, large terraced, yea. They were quite substantial houses actually I believe, in fact if I remember rightly the one we moved in had a sort of service bell on it, so I don't know what that should be, I may be wrong there, you know it's just something that sort of comes up here sometimes. But we moved in when the war ended and my father who had been in the fire service during the war driving petrol around, to fill the fire engines up

with in the air raids, I can't think of anything worse. He was a carpenter by trade in actual fact and he went to work for Central Fire Station and he was there until he retired as the charge in carpenter down there. I applied when I came out of the army to join the Fire Service and I got through my exams mainly because they fiddled it, my dad got hold of the form of all of the questions and that and got them all ready. So I wasn't feeling very happy about that really, so I went for the interview with the officers including the Chief Officer, "*Why do you want to join the Fire Service?*" Well I couldn't think of a good reason, well I could, but I thought no I've fiddled this. No, no, no that's not me at all, so I didn't get the job. Anyway dad went up and saw them afterwards "*Why hasn't my son been sort of accepted?*" "*You should have told us, if we'd known it was you we'd have pushed him through*" **(laughing)**. That's what it was like in those days, oh dear. So that was my service in the fire service, finished before it began.

34:14 I Did you go to any of the pubs ever?

34:16 R I've never been a drinker, no. I do drink, I love a glass of wine, I always buy a glass of wine every week and I have it with about three of my meals in the week. I like a glass of ale, but I'm not a drinker, as I say it's three pints and I'm anybody's you know. I'm off my feet with three pints, so no I couldn't sit there in a pub and drink all night, no, no, no, no and I don't find it very entertaining anyway and of course the trouble is I've got bad hearing as well and there's a lot of noise, I can't get into conversations so it doesn't help very much, but I'm not a pub person anyway and as I say although I do like a drink and I belonged to a walking club for years up at Shirley and we always used to go into a pub and eat our sandwiches in the ground and have a beer before we set off on the second half of the walk, that was very nice, I enjoyed that, but as for being a drinker in pubs, no. I mean I still go down the gym at Harborne, I'm in the twice a week and there is a local pub, "*Did you see so and so in the Junction and The Green Man?*" And I go *oh goodness me is that all you've got to do when you get out of here?*" **(laughing)**. Oh dear.

35:58 I You mentioned you do ballroom dancing, did you do this when you were little?

36:03 R Do...

36:04 I Did you do ballroom dancing when you were young?

36:06 R I started when I was in the army, I took a bronze medal and I passed the bronze medal while I was in the army and then I came out and my wife who I had met when I was a junior salesman at Smarts the furniture shop in town, that was when I'd come out of the army and I decided I was gonna wear a suite and look posh with white cuffs and what have you. And I took this job at Smarts as junior sales man, she was the cashier, she came in actually when myself and Bill Galley the senior salesman there, he was one of the Dam

Buster pilots incidentally and she came in and she was walking round and I said to Bill "oh she's lovely" (**laughing**) before I knew where I was we were courting and that was her and not me incidentally, she did all the running, I was too damn shy really. And that lasted for nearly forty years and she died of lung cancer. So that's a bit of a sad ending to that episode and I've got four children, one daughter and three sons. I ran an electrical repair business after I went to Hoover first and after they made us all redundant I took over the job of doing the jobs myself so opened up an electrical repair business self-employed and that lasted until I retired in actual fact and my eldest son does the same thing now. David.... Oh Janette rather, the next one in line that's going up the ages and not down them, she's an assistant teacher and married to a chap that runs his own carpentry business and I've got two grandchildren now, young Reece is now trying to sort out Universities, he got I think it was eight A Levels, most of them all with stars. I don't know where he got that from, it weren't from me that's for dead certain (**laughing**). Yes well now Kenny in actual fact, the youngest one, because I still see him regularly every week and David the second one. David incidentally works for the Post Office, he runs round delivering cash to the outlying districts and what not. Kenny started off as a carpenter and he's now landed himself a job as a productions manager with a firm at £60,000 a year. He came and told me yesterday, I said "hoooooow much?" (**laughing**) I said "good evens above, that put my £5 a week I started work on down in the gutter somewhere." So there we are yea. Anyway he's a Building Surveyor by profession, he's done very well actually. I'm pretty proud of them all to be honest with you, they've never been unemployed and they're a bit like I was in the early days, if you lost a job, you went and got yourself another one, but of course it was easy in those days, jobs were ten a penny, they weren't well paid, but there was no reason at all not to work and if you weren't too fussy and if you wanted a try at something else, you could do it you know, which was always my attitude through growing up really or getting as I got older. Until I settled down as I said and ran my own business.

40:50 I Did you bring them to the church as well when they were younger, your children?

40:53 R Did I...?

40:54 I Bring your children to the church?

40:56 R No because it's too far in Harborne and they went to Sandy Road Methodist Church, and the lads I put them into the Boys Brigade Company there. They used to come to camp with us when we had camp, I used to take the lands to camp every year and they used to come to those camps. My wife used to come as well and she'd do the cooking for us, so as a family unit we was very much involved sort of thing. But I thought it unfair because I couldn't make sure that I got them down here for events they might want to come down to, it was unfair that I make them join this company so they joined Methodist

Church. Cause I always felt that the Boys Brigade was a damn good upbringing for a lad. It taught him discipline and responsibility you know, so that's how that went. Janette my daughter has always been interested in horses so I bought her first pony when she was twelve years old. She's just lost her last horse and she's now in her fifties (*laughs*). Absolutely dedicated to horses she was. Poor old Pat her husband, I don't know how he put up with it, although he did have a horse himself I must admit. Oh dear.

42:26 I Well that almost answers all of my questions. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

42:32 R I can't think of anything, I could ramble on all blooming day. It's no good me rambling on all day. I'm dam sure.

42:38 I It's not rambling, it's fascinating (*laughs*). Well in that case I'd just like to say thank you very much for letting us interview you.

42:47 R That's alright, I hope it's been reasonably interesting.

42:50 I It has.