

**WM0826 Elizabeth Jean McElroy**

**SPEAKERS**

Elizabeth Jean McIlroy, Una Walls

**Elizabeth Jean McIlroy 00:00**

I was one of the first pupils at Down High School when it opened in 1933.

**Elizabeth Jean McIlroy 00:07**

I was there until 1939 and passed my senior certificate.

**Elizabeth Jean McIlroy 00:13**

I was awarded the King's scholarship for training at Stranmillis College.

**Elizabeth Jean McIlroy 00:18**

During the outbreak of war, the college was closed.

**Elizabeth Jean McIlroy 00:22**

That was my dreams faded.

**Elizabeth Jean McIlroy 00:24**

So they were recruiting for the Ministry of Food.

**Elizabeth Jean McIlroy 00:28**

And with another girl, we both got in.

**Elizabeth Jean McIlroy 00:33**

During the month of September, we got intensive training on all aspects of food rationing and national registration.

**Elizabeth Jean McIlroy 00:43**

We had to learn the electoral divisions and the townlands in each one to prepare for the issue of ration books.

**Elizabeth Jean McIlroy 00:54**

And then I stayed there until... until 1947.

**Elizabeth Jean McIlroy 01:04**

Well I was on the consumer section, and that other girl I was telling you about, she was the trade sector dealing with grocers and traders and butchers, coming in to get permits whereas I was issuing ration books, issuing of national registration cards, and things like that.

**Una Walls** 01:26

And how were they distributed? How were the cards distributed?

**Elizabeth Jean McIlroy** 01:30

Well at the outbreak of war, every household in the country was issued with a form called an RGM-1A, listing all the people in it, they came in and then they were divided out into electoral divisions, and townlands.

**Elizabeth Jean McIlroy** 01:49

So then, they could start writing the ration books.

**Elizabeth Jean McIlroy** 01:55

And then they were distributed that way, which... it was quite a large problem at the time, but interesting too.

**Una Walls** 02:04

What were the main problems that you remember?

**Elizabeth Jean McIlroy** 02:06

Well people couldn't understand. You know they couldn't understand.

**Elizabeth Jean McIlroy** 02:14

At first one was all about, well, then they quickly got used to it.

**Elizabeth Jean McIlroy** 02:19

And there's one thing I did learn, the public were much easier to deal with in those days than they were in later years.

**Elizabeth Jean McIlroy** 02:28

They accepted the situation as it was.

**Elizabeth Jean McIlroy** 02:31

Well then things were not quite, you know quietly and simply until Belfast was bombed.

**Elizabeth Jean McIlroy** 02:39

And then evacuees come down from Belfast and they were billeted in Down High School.

**Elizabeth Jean McIlroy** 02:47

And we were sent up from the food office to issue temporary ration cards to them.

**Elizabeth Jean McIlroy** 02:55

And really, it was so pathetic seeing a very, very frightened people.

**Elizabeth Jean Mcllroy** 03:02

And there was a baby there, which had been born in an air raid shelter.

**Elizabeth Jean Mcllroy** 03:09

Now, some of them had ration books, they must have brought a handbag with them.

**Elizabeth Jean Mcllroy** 03:15

And one particular, which was a rather funny incident.

**Elizabeth Jean Mcllroy** 03:17

I opened the ration book and a flea, a flea flew out of it (laughs) it was more (laughs) and then the flea floated away.

**Elizabeth Jean Mcllroy** 03:29

So then, people after that were billeted out to different homes around the district.

**Elizabeth Jean Mcllroy** 03:39

And that was quite a problem now too, they were stationed in Clough and all around the countryside.

**Elizabeth Jean Mcllroy** 03:47

But I must say the years I spent in the Ministry of Food, were the happiest of my working life because everybody got on well.

**Elizabeth Jean Mcllroy** 03:58

Some of the staff came in at ten past eight in the morning on a bus and we worked from nine o'clock until six o'clock, six days a week.