

**Interview with  
Mr. Douglas Charles Odell Glenister**

Interviewed by

Terry Pankhurst

24 September 2016

The following is a direct transcript from a recording and as such contains memories and statements that may require verification and correction.

Memories are wonderful but very fallible.



Douglas talks about his life, his complex family and his working career, plus a lifelong interest in playing music, namely drums.

*Terry*

First, Douglas, please can you tell me who your parents were?

*Douglas*

Percy Glenister, that was my father, and Daisy Glenister my mother.

*Terry*

What was her maiden name?

*Douglas*

Daisy.

*Terry*

No, her maiden name.

*Douglas*

Glenister.

*Terry*

Was she a Glenister as well?

*Douglas*

No, no, wait a.... don't know, I have to go back, see, and jump your gun. She was one of the four family, four daughters and their father was killed on the railway cleaning the brass sign along the side of the engine in Grantham, that's what I'm led to believe. And they never paid any compensation to his wife because it was stated that he was doing the fireman's job at the time. So with that in view, they were all farmed out to various places. My mother Daisy, everyone had the name of flowers, Daisy, Rose, Violet, what's the other one? May Gray. Now Mrs. Gray was the wife of Mr Gray who were very religious, my mother was very religious and they were dedicated to the Congregational Church which they are thinking about knocking down at the present moment. Which we are going to have a go at, trying to maintain that they don't do it. Where that church is there was a manse house built into the house itself, a big house, and that was where the parson lived that were named there. But of course as the time's gone on and the number of people has withered, they put it out to anybody coming in there, whatever organisation they belonged to, I don't know. They take the service, you know, six o'clock at night on a Sunday. But I was brought up in that chapel, I had to go to Sunday school every Sunday, Amalgam four times a day. For Sunday school in the morning, out of Sunday school into the big church, if they were pushed I'd help blow the organ. Then back at night at six o'clock for the evening service. That was what I had to do. And so we were all brought up in that area, like that you see. Now May and Daisy were farmed out to somebody in Wheathampstead. Now they used to call her Aunty and she [May] lived with them. Now I never really knew what she was or who she was, all I know was, she was Aunty. And the house that she lived in up the top of the hill, was named Rose Cottage and it was built by Uncle Sam. And he lived with them all his life, but eventually he died and Aunt May of course came into the property.

Well, when she died it was sold up and Mr Gray... I don't quite know there was some connection between him and some bloke. I can't remember the name, but he was looking after his affairs. You know he was in his nineties. So all in all it was a bit of a jumble, I don't really know who is who. That was the end of it. Aunt May... My mother died first of the two of them and Aunt May died later, secondly. Rose later died, [she] was living at Leagrave with Vi, Violet.

*Mrs. Glenister*

Your father died first.

*Douglas*

I'm not mixing up the male and female. My dad died at about 65 maybe 67, not sure, I've got a death certificate I can soon find out. That's the right era. And he worked at the Amalgam Rubber Mills in Batford, and he worked there for 30 odd years, 35 years, and it killed him. He died of lungs. He was a rubber mixer and he used to come home, remember we had no

bathroom. He used to come home black, red, bright blue, whatever the day was they were doing, he had to have a wash down to the waist every night in what was a scullery, in the old house, a bit of an outhouse on the old house really, but it was all part of the house, and it wasn't very... it was cold, just an outhouse. But that's where we lived and ...

*Terry*

What was the address?

*Douglas*

The name of the house was The New Holm, The Hill, Wheathampstead. Later numbered 51, which bought in the end, because I was left with my mum. I had a brother who unfortunately was born with a weak heart. And when we were kids I used to have to stick with him wherever we went because if we got in any trouble I had to do a double job, help look after him, because he couldn't run. So I was left behind whatever the episode was so he got looked after. And poor old Jack, if it had been today I think he would have been better able to have done something for him. But he was born with a bad heart, something wrong with the heart, that's all I know. And he finally finished up at 26 years of age, and he finished in hospital in St. Albans, Hill End, which has now gone. He was there in the war. I went to the Royal Air Force in the war. I volunteered for the RAF. And he died while I was in the RAF at 26 years of age. Yes, and he turned out... He got to know someone in Harpenden, we never knew much about it. He lived out; he didn't come home. He only came home on Saturday dinnertime at one o'clock to bring the meat because he was a butcher, he took a butcher's job which is about the last thing you should have had with a weak heart. His policy was, "I'm going to do what I want to do while I've got the time. When it comes, whatever happens that's my lot, but I'm going to do what I want to do." And he not only did that but both he and I were in a dance band. I played drums all my life since I was eight years old and I've got a drum kit now. The drum kit's in my outhouse, see them before you go if you'd like to. And I have to break the story here. We've got a bit of a problem in the family. I have one daughter and a husband turned out a bit of a pig to say the least. Don't want to go further than that, but she's got two sons. So I bought this drum kit for one of the boys, right, I thought that maybe it would make it. Because you see I have to tell you that drummers are not taught they are born. You either can do it or you can't. Now if you want to play the piano, put your fingers on the five keys at one time, that's the only way I can explain this, you'll play an exact chord as a professional, but you can't do that if you don't hold the sticks right with the drums. That's why you are looking at these gigs today, your television with your abominable music that's coming out the BBC, right, and ruined what I call the beautiful hobby of music. Because it's nothing but a lot of utter rubbish, that's my opinion of it, and I'm not on my own in that. I've played in big bands and small bands all my life. All through the Air Force, not only did my job, I was an engine fitter during the war, Lancasters. I did my job and I also played in a voluntary band, and we were made, because the amount of work you could do was limited. In Bomber Command in Lincolnshire, Group 5 Bomber Command, that was one of the groups, that's where we were. We started off in Honington in Suffolk or Norfolk whichever we were. We started off on Wellington bombers. That was the early part of the war. We were the second squadron to get the four-engined Merlin Lancasters. And we never looked back. Number 9 and I stayed with them for five years. I was there with them for five years. We did the Tirpitz, the Ramona Dam. Then in for 617 doing a big job and it was all go. So really it was a wonderful life as far as I was concerned if there's a war on, it was just I had

to go to work and you came home if you weren't working out until the kite was done ready for going at night. Because you know it was red hot and you know the whole day was full of work. I thrived on it. Not only did I thrive on it, I thrived on the music, the money I earned with the band. We got 30 bob per man because I was not doing a job I was in the Air Force for. I was doing a spare job for which I could get paid. And I got 30 bob a night for playing for dances in the whole of the Lincolnshire area, we did five nights, five, seven nights a week and two tea dances and each gig, as we called it, paid 30 bob.

*Terry*

That was quite good money.

*Douglas*

My trade money, I finished up as an NCO, that was ten and ninepence a day. Big money wasn't it, but that was it, and I could go out and earn 30 bob. I had only got to say to any one of the lads at the time; I was a corporal because I had to do a duty at night every seven days. It went with seven NCOs. When my turn came they were all climbing up to see who could do it for me, because I could go out and earn 30 bob and pay them as well, give them a few quid out of it. That's how things went. So you know life has been very very full.

*Terry*

Now this all started when I asked about your mother's maiden name. Let me take you back to ask a basic question, tell me your date of birth.

*Douglas*

Third of May 1921.

*Terry*

Lovely, thank you, that makes you 91 years old.

*Douglas*

I had to gabble like that a bit for you because it all falls in with everything.

*Terry*

What do you remember about your early childhood in the village?

*Douglas*

I went to St. Helen's School and started off in the, what do you call it, the two early classes. She was called Miss Young, that was her name, and the other one, I cannot remember her. She lived in a house down Marford, but she lived to be quite old as far as I know. As I was never in her class it doesn't mean a thing to me. She was on a par. There were two classes, the early starters and as you got on the next range of teachers were various people with various names, which again I can't really remember. But I can remember the schoolmaster's name was Mr. Housden.

Now I have to go back to Mr. Gray the husband of Mrs Gray who was my mother's sister. I've already explained that Mr. Gray was very devoted to the church, Congregational Church. He took every job there was in it. He was the kingpin there, and he finished up being a caretaker in the school there Mr Gray did. So that's how he finished up. I also remember the name Hoppy Hampton, because he was a nice old boy. He was very helpful when examinations came around, because what he used to do. I never knew how he did it, we didn't ask any questions. He would always take his own class for the exam while most of them changed. But it all seemed as though he got in taking his own class and he would sit at his desk and he would watch out for who was looking in the air because they were a bit stuck for answers. "What's your trouble, what number?" "Number 9", up on the blackboard, answer, all seen? Yes? Cleared the board. And he was a good old stick to us. And when he took gardening, we used to have a garden each, right. If you wanted to go to the toilet we used to say to him, "Want to go to the toilet Mr Hampton". "What is it, number one or number two?" If it's number one go behind the shed. He was a real character. Only we called him Hoppy Hampton. He was a good old boy. If anyone was a necessity to be chastised and he was taking the class. "Come out, come out", pick his cane up, "put your hand out." Whack, that was just a hummer you go back, right that's what it could have been like. He used to write it off. He really was a likeable character you know. I can remember him, Hoppy Hampton. He lived near the churchyard right opposite the church, you know the flint school? You know the electricity shop? You know there are two houses standing forward on the road there and he lived in one of them, right near the school. And that's me schooling, I got on all right and when I, what's the word when you leave school? Recommendation, what is it and Mr. Housden when we came to leave school, two of us left school together. There was two of us left school together. One of those was called Garpy Swallow and his father lived along here in this cottage along the end here sticking out in the road, flogging tyres, worn tyres. That was George Swallow his name was, his proper name. And Garpy Swallow and I, we were going to Murphy's when our time came for a job. He got us both a job at Murphy's. When they were doing the Mortegg.

*Terry*

Mortegg?

*Douglas*

Mortegg for gardens, right. That was in the winter. We used to can, bottle, cork and pack in boxes which we also made up for Murphy's Chemical Company. We both worked there.

*Terry*

How old were you when you left school?

*Douglas*

14, both of us together. Both of us got that job together. And I worked there and didn't like it, because it ... Mortegg yes, but when it came to the summer we had to do what they called powders. And you, what they call Arsenic of Lead and it used to frighten me to death it did. Because I used to take my sandwiches to work. My mother used to make sandwiches for me, save coming home to dinner. I used to say, "make sure you put them in two bags." Because all we got to put down there where our food is was boxes which we put up

ourselves which we made into a little, well, your personal holdall. And that's the only thing we got. Now, one day in summer, it was a very very hot day and I came over queer. I shall never forget it, and I was looking around like this and somebody said to me, "what's up?" I said "I don't know I feel queer, what am I going to do?" "Oh hang on", they called the foreman and he phoned the doctor and the doctor came down there and he looked at me, Doctor Smallwood, nice man, very nice man. "What you been up to then?" "Nothing." "Not taken anything?" "No." "Well, I don't know what to say about you, you'll be all right I think. Best thing we can do with you is send you home." So I got sent home. I walked in the back room and my mum was in there, she was doing her needlework, she was a needleworker, she used to do dresses for people with money. Poor old mum. She used to cover an eiderdown for a pound. I know that price because I used to have to take them home and collect the money. I said, "you know mum, I ain't going there no more." "What's the trouble?" she said. I said "I don't know, I don't like that place" I said. "It's a dangerous job in there. They're playing with stuff that's" ... I was told that a certain amount of ounces through the skin you're gone, through the mouth, you're gone also with less. That's how fatal it was apparently. So I don't know quite what it was, Arsenic of Lead I think they called it. Well arsenic is and lead is dead, so you know what the combination was, I don't know. But that's what they used to do in the summer. That was one of their biggest sales. So I never went back there. My dad, when he came home. "Out of a job now, mate", he said "are you what's the trouble?" I told him the story. "Oh well," he said, "what do you want to do?" Now. I have to change the story now, because Aunt May who lived with them up Wheathampstead Hill with us about five houses apart. She used to go and see my mother every afternoon, because she was a bit of a lady. She wasn't a worker. She'd be in on everything but not on the working side. You know what I mean? Where my poor old mum she was in on the tool sort of thing you know. And I always used to think she wasted my mum's time, because my mum used to be there doing the sewing and they were talking about the church, Tuesday night, Thursday night, now, they were both in the choir of the high church, because they were both good singers. That's where they used to do the cantatas, things like that. Because not in a small church because they hadn't got a choir that big. So the bloke who ran the church choir, St Helen's, was only too willing to ask them to join in the church for all those functions that took place. That's where they spent a lot of their time. So you know.... I have to say it was a little bit of a hindrance to the household because Tuesday it was Women's Guild, Friday was band practice, Sunday morning church, Sunday evening was church. My old dad didn't think too much about it, he wasn't a religious man, but if he came home from the factory down in Batford, black or blue, red or whatever colour, if there wasn't a pot of boiling hot water in the sink she'd get told off. And there was a bit of a row took place. And that caused more than anything else, that and religion caused a little bit of friction in the household. Do you follow me? You know, nothing to get hectic about, it was just one of those things. He rather thought she put him second best, put like that.

*Terry*

This was all going on in your childhood?

*Douglas*

Yes, oh yes, it's well within there. Eventually you see I got away as I grew up and I thought I didn't want to go to church three or four times on Sunday, everybody else don't do that so I

said to me mother "I'm going to have a bit of a change on what we're doing, Mum. I want to see what other people are doing." So I gradually drifted away. But I still maintain my connection with the church. I go to festivals.... He only went on two services a year, harvest festival and Armistice Day. The two days my father went to church, and my mother went every Sunday religiously with Aunt May and Uncle Herbert. Aunt Vi and the other two were out at Luton. We used to go and see them, Luton was such a long way away then, there's no transport, so we didn't see much of them.

*Terry*

Did you not use the train very much?

*Douglas*

Well, it was a lot of money, see my father ..... I will have to wander off again you see because he used to do the shopping because my mother was never a good buyer. He always reckoned she never did make the money go far enough, that was his hokum so he always used to do the shopping on Saturday night in St Albans on a bike. Now he was a very keen cyclist, he was one of the members of the Luton Wheelers and his early days he used to go bike racing with the club. Now he brought me up on a bike. I made up all my bikes by myself with rubbish that came from the dump on the Codicote Road. Up the Codicote Road there today, the only thing that will grow on them is elderberry trees, if you know the area it's a very stricken place. It's full of elder trees. That's full.... that was a gravel pit and we used to go up there on a Sunday night with my dad for a walk because he used to like to pick sloes on the bushes to make wine. He never drank, a teetotaller, but he used to give his wine away, but he liked wine making. So while my mum was in church we were picking these things waiting for her to come out, then we'd go for a little walk and we would go somewhere towards where Bernard Shaw lived.