

**Dollis Hill Oral History Interview Transcript**  
**Frances Carder**

**Anna Ramsden (AR)**  
**Frances Carder (FC)**  
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1.

FC: Problems with the trade secrets

AR: Right

FC: Because if they are inventing things, they don't want somebody picking it up and getting there first

AR: Oh I see. Right OK so if we can just start with your name and date of birth and place of birth

FC: Yes I filled all those bits in on the letter too

AR: Oh

FC: They will have some fun reading that won't they. It must have dropped off on the bus I think

AR: Yes

FC: I can't think of anywhere else it would have gone

AR: Not to worry

FC: Anyway my name is Frances and make sure it is spelt with an E because it can cause rather problematic things if you, it's spelt like that, like the spelling for a man.

AR: OK

FC: I very nearly got called up into the forces because of that

AR: Really

FC: First, err, Second World War. First World War of course I was only in existence for a few months

AR: Ahh

FC: Oh yes, lots of them

AR: Yes? That must be nice (08:22)

FC: Well I contact them mostly through the erm, retired people's erm, luncheons and things

AR: Right, OK

FC: But I do have a few contacts in other ways, some of the people that erm, I worked with got bored with what they were doing afterwards and have written to me since (AR laughs) We usually exchange Christmas cards and things like that

AR: Ahh, that's nice. Right, is there anything else that you can tell me about any work that was done at Dollis Hill? Particularly anything in the war? During the war years

FC: No I wasn't there then

AR: You weren't there then?

FC: No

AR: Right you went afterwards

FC: 31<sup>st</sup> December 1945 was the day I joined

AR: Oh I see, so you came

FC: And there was I watching everybody going out of the, out of the erm cashiers with their monthly pay (AR laughs) and I'd only just got there, I was sitting waiting to find out what I had to do

AR: Oh I see

FC: And there were all these people coming out with fat pay wallets (AR laughs)

AR: So did you know anything about the Paddock?

FC: Yes

AR: You knew about that one?

FC: Yes, I worked in it

AR: Oh did you? What were you doing down there?

FC: Err, err, we had it for special tests, before they had any erm, special arrangements made

AR: Right (09:50)

→ FC: For very special tests, we used to use it for places where we didn't want any drafts or anything like that, because it is all underground

AR: Oh I see

→ FC: And we used it for, the drama group used it, although not many people knew, because when they had makeup on and that sort of thing, in the middle of a, in the middle of a Christmas party, as soon as the pantomime was over they wanted to get clean so we used the bathroom

AR (laughs) Oh wow, gosh, so had you, did you know what it had been used for before or was it just

→ FC: Err, a little of what it was. We knew that it had been built for Churchill and one or two members of the

AR: Yes

→ FC: government during the war, but we didn't know much else

AR: OK

→ FC: Not about the official use

AR: Right

FC: But mind you, being me (AR & FC Laugh) when I was doing jobs, one of the jobs we had to do there was, myself and err head of one of the other laboratories, his daughter

AR: Right

→ FC: The two of us were in the job of growing copper sulphate crystals for some special piece of equipment, I think it was something to do with submerged repeaters, but I'm not sure

AR: Right (coughs)

→ FC: And we had to go down there and grow these crystals in a solution and they had to be a special, carefully shaped which they would do if they've got perfect conditions

AR: Right, so that was stable (11:16)

FC: You see, we were, we were just doing that, we had a whole room, I suppose it was about, probably three times as big as this one

AR: Oh right

FC: All laid out with the erm, facilities for water and all that sort of thing, and erm, well having a bathroom up above that wasn't difficult. We were in the erm, second floor down, underground

AR: Right, oh right

FC: And erm,

AR: Wow

FC: That was an interesting point because while we were doing that Prince Philip came to err, paid a visit to us

AR: Really?

FC: And he was taken down to see these things because although they weren't in use at all they were hoping to get crystals good enough to get them into the, into the apparatus

AR: Oh right

FC: And err, he came down and he suggested that erm, that it would be far more interesting and far more conclusive if we had automatic photography, every so many minutes or seconds or something like that, I don't know exactly what unit it was he suggested

AR: Mmm

FC: But they took up the idea

AR: Really

FC: And they had these hidden cameras which every so often took a photograph of the crystals so that we could see, I think they had them in for about three or four years, something like that

AR: Gosh

FC: So that erm, you, we could see the rate at which the crystals grew

AR: Oh right (12:48)

FC: And the accuracy of them, you know whether the sides were alright or whether theyÆd got chips in them or anything like that

AR: Wow. Gosh, so you did some really interesting things didnÆt you

FC: BUT while the place was empty you see, having that to look at every so often, I had free access to that particular room

AR: Right

 FC: but a lot of times, other rooms were unlocked although they werenÆt occupied, so I used to go around exploring (AR & FC Laugh). In one room I found the most fascinating maps

AR: Really

FC: They were maps of the bed of the Atlantic ocean

AR: Right

FC: Erm, where erm, German submarines might be

AR: Wow

FC: You see. And by looking at those you got all the little, bak e, err, bottom of the ocean, with all its humps and bits of rock sticking up and all that sort of thing, and all the islands that stood up, parts of which stood up out of the water, and I was able to go and look at all those

AR: Just go and look at them

FC: And that was where it was that I discovered that the distance between the Isles of Scilly and Penzance was almost exactly the same as the distance between erm, erm, oh whatÆs the one in here the boats to France go from? Not Portsmouth, anyway it was this, this, the other place its so well known, if you looked at a map youÆd know exactly where it, should be

AR: OK

FC: But its almost exactly the same distance, from there to France, a itwa from the Isles of Scilly to

AR Oh

FC: Penzance

AR: Oh, wow

FC: I can't resist maps

AR: No? (14:55) My sister is doing cartography

FC: Oh lovely

AR: At university, yeah. So she's loving it

F: Now here's a personal thing that might interest you, is the fact that when I went to Australia I went to erm a big fashioned mansion that had been built for erm, a goldmine owner

AR: Right

FC: Way back, they call them what? Erm, they've got a special name for them, if they are British design in a foreign country, colonial

AR: Right OK

FC: Colonial type of house and erm that one, erm, had all these things in it and it had erm, coloured windows and that sort of thing, and erm, you know coloured glass and all the windows depicted wildlife in that particular spot

AR: Oh really? Wow, amazing place

FC: But that was round, that was a National Trust erm, Australian National Trust Property

AR: Oh right

FC: Which was borrowed by the army

AR: Oh

FC: And they were allowed to build erm, allowed to build temporary buildings for the extra army

AR: Right

FC: Like stables for the horses and things like that, for some of the equipment and so on

AR: Oh (16:47)

FC: What was the thing you mentioned?

AR: Cartography

FC: Arr yes, thatÆs right. We went into the cartography in this magnificent building, and I was looking around all the maps and err, the, they showed you not only the cartography in the form of maps but also you got a certain number of photographs from which they collected

AR: Really

FC: the layout

AR: Wow

FC: And I was looking at some of these maps when we went in and I said to one of the people who were taking us round the place by a suppleton, err, or some rank of that sort erm, that sort of err, err, rank, you know the people who did that sort of thing

AR: Mmm- humm

FC: And err I said Oh thatÆs, IÆd like to have a map like that, I wish I could buy a map like that one somewhere, erm, it had got all sorts of, oh it was a whole map. Most of the maps that you get when you buy them for travel or anything like that youÆve only got one particular part of it

AR: Right

FC: You see, this state or that state

AR: Right

FC: In some, I some cases, where you have a tiny country like Lucensten, this country or that country (AR Laughs) I have been there actually

AR: Have you

FC: Mmm, anyway, they let me look at tem a litt le bit longer than ome of the others

AR: Oh how nice

FC: And then I went and chased the others and caught them up, and then as we were leaving erm, this man came, you know sort of said, in a very polite an genial manner

AR: Yes

FC: And then when he came to shake hands with me and do the same for me he said, æWait a minute IÆve got something for youÆ, so he went inside again and he came out with a map of the whole of Australia erm, a meter long, and not quite a meter wide but very nearly. And on the back of it in very faint letters, although I could read it of course, because my siteÆs pretty good, erm, they had all the places written on the back, that mentioned on the front

AR: Oh

FC: On the proper part of it

AR: Oh what a nice present

FC: So all you have to do is look at the map and think of the area that you want and then you just turn it over and thereÆs the, all the list of names

AR: Wow, what a nice present

FC: Well I hadnÆt sort of emphasised my interest I wouldnÆt ever have got it would I

AR: No, of course not, no

FC: But there was, in the basement of, that was another part of the sub basement, we called it, the second floor down.

AR: Right

FC: They had this room with the whole of one wall covered by a part of the Atlantic Ocean, that err, borders our shores

AR: Oh really

FC: It wasnÆt only the little bit of, down in, Isles of Scilly and that area

AR: Gosh so you got to have a wonder round

FC: Actually it went right across to the Azores

AR: Did it?

FC: Mmm, it wasn't until I saw that map that I realised that, how steep the sides of the err, islands like erm, Madera would be

AR: Right

FC: If I'm slightly interested in something I'm always interested in knowing more

AR: Is there anything else that you can remember about Dollis Hill that you want to (20:52)

X

FC: Oh well they did have a cricket club there

AR: (Coughs). Oh did you? Oh

FC: Yes, and as I played a lot of cricket when I was at school I played twice in their matches

AR: Oh did you?

R

FC: Until one of the opposing sides, it was erm, a different department, I can't remember which one, I think it, it may have been the radio department

AR: Oh right

R

FC: Not the chemical labs, but erm, we had a complaint that they didn't like playing against women in case they hurt us

AR: Oh, typical

FC: The fact that I played cricket for something like five year and I was in the cricket team at school mad no difference

AR: Ohh

FC: Mind you it wasn't quite so easy as I hadn't got the right sized bat

AR: Oh, shame

FC: I used to use the one they usually give, usually give to, to, the size that they usually give to erm, 10 year old boys or something like that, no because, that was at school

AR: right

FC: We had girls bats, which were a certain size, no it was the weight more than the size I think for girls