

Memories on a Monday: No Place Like Home

Monday 1 June 2020

Welcome to Memories on a Monday: No Place Like Home - sharing our heritage from Bruce Castle Museum & Archive.

Since March, homeworking has been the new temporary way of working for many people, wherever that has been possible. There have always been homeworkers of course, not just in recent times. Our oral history collections preserve an important and often overlooked history of homeworking in Haringey. This post today looks at a selection of oral histories undertaken during the late 20th and early 21st centuries, and includes a homeworker from the Greek Cypriot community, and a couple who were blind and worked at home all their working lives.



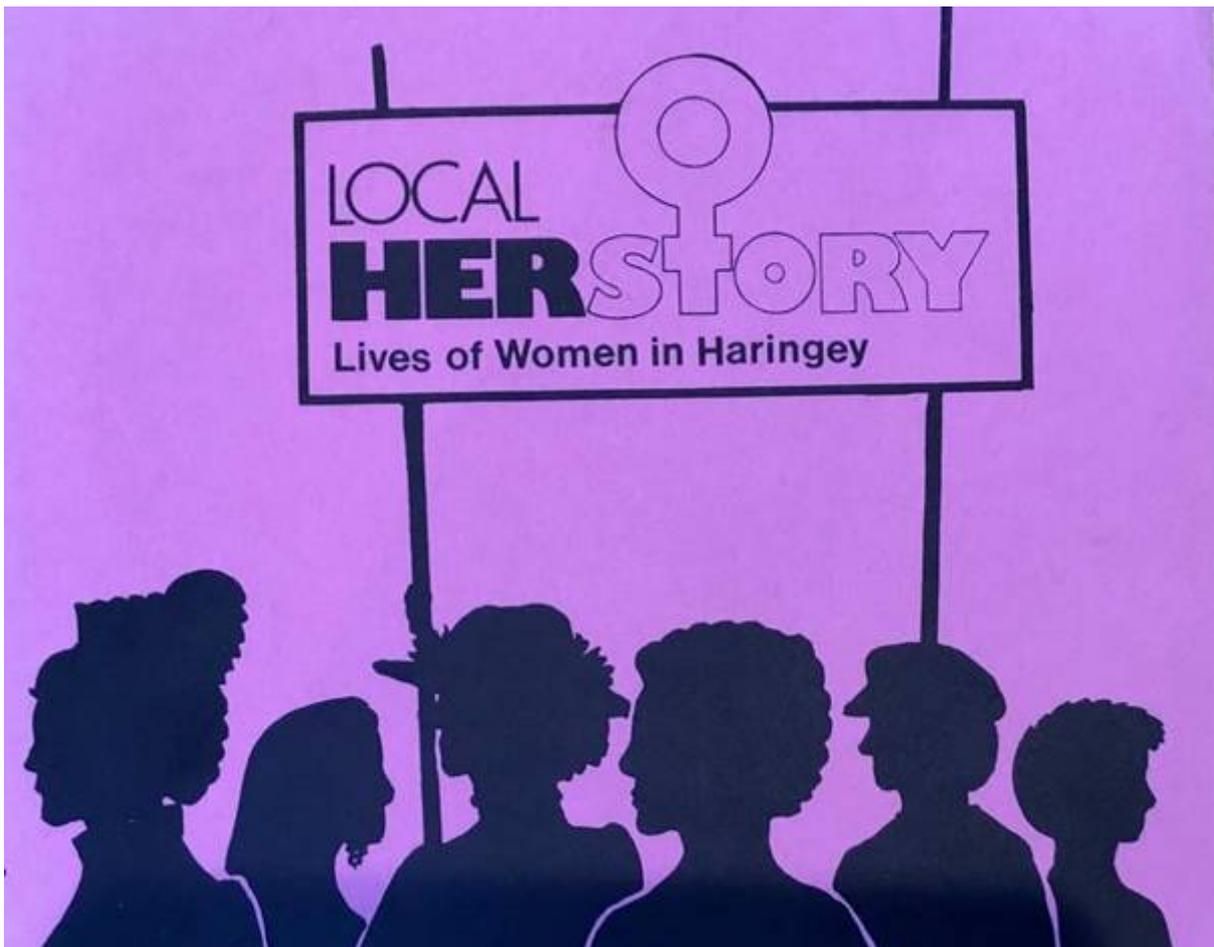
Washing drying in Colsterworth Road, Tottenham in 1971
From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum & Archive

Some of the other interviews we have of local women who were homeworkers go back to the early part of the 20th century. As mothers, often with large families, they had childcare responsibilities and yet needed to help make ends meet for the family. They tried to find whatever work they could and do it from home. Needless to say it was low paid. The work included taking in laundry and ironing for wealthier families or local churches (ironing [vestments](#) for clergy and the choir 'habit', for example). Other types of jobs included [piece work](#), where even the children might have had to help – putting together toys, or stuffing home-made

crackers. The work would come at such irregular intervals that it was almost impossible to make a living by it alone.

Back in 1987, there was the exhibition '*Local HerStory: Lives of Women in Haringey*' at Bruce Castle Museum. It was the first exhibition to feature just women. The exhibition inevitably highlighted many aspects of the history of the clothing industry in Haringey where women played a crucial role. In the mid-19th century, the Census recorded 179 dressmakers in Haringey, as well as 44 needlewomen, 22 seamstresses, and several tailoresses, hat makers and shoe binders. Women worked as 'slop workers' – needlewomen who were working at home and were parcelled out with piece work from the clothing trade. They had to buy their own needles, thread and other trimmings, as well as candles to work by and 'firing' to heat their irons. They worked from 5am to 9pm. Constant sewing ruined their eyesight, and so young workers were always in demand. The journalist [Henry Mayhew](#) in his investigations of working conditions among the London poor, wrote:

'I could not have believed that there were human beings toiling so long and gaining so little, and starving so silently and heroically, round about our very homes.'



By the late 20th century, from 1980 onwards homeworking regulations began to change and improve. A survey carried out between 1982-4 showed that one in five women in Haringey was involved in some kind of home working. The most common form this took was machining for the garment industry, although other

types of homeworking at this time included light electrical goods assembly, and the use of VDU computer links to provide office services for large businesses.

Here, local resident Elli Karavokyri described what life was like during the 1970s for many Greek and Turkish Cypriot women who were homeworkers in Haringey at a time when the Town & Country Planning Act forbade the use of domestic premises for industrial purposes:

“Now coming to the women, the women are going to the dress-making factories; if a woman had grown up children, or no children, she went to the factory, but if there were children either school age or under school age, she couldn’t go out. There were no nurseries, no place to leave children, no grandparents to look after them. She stayed at home.

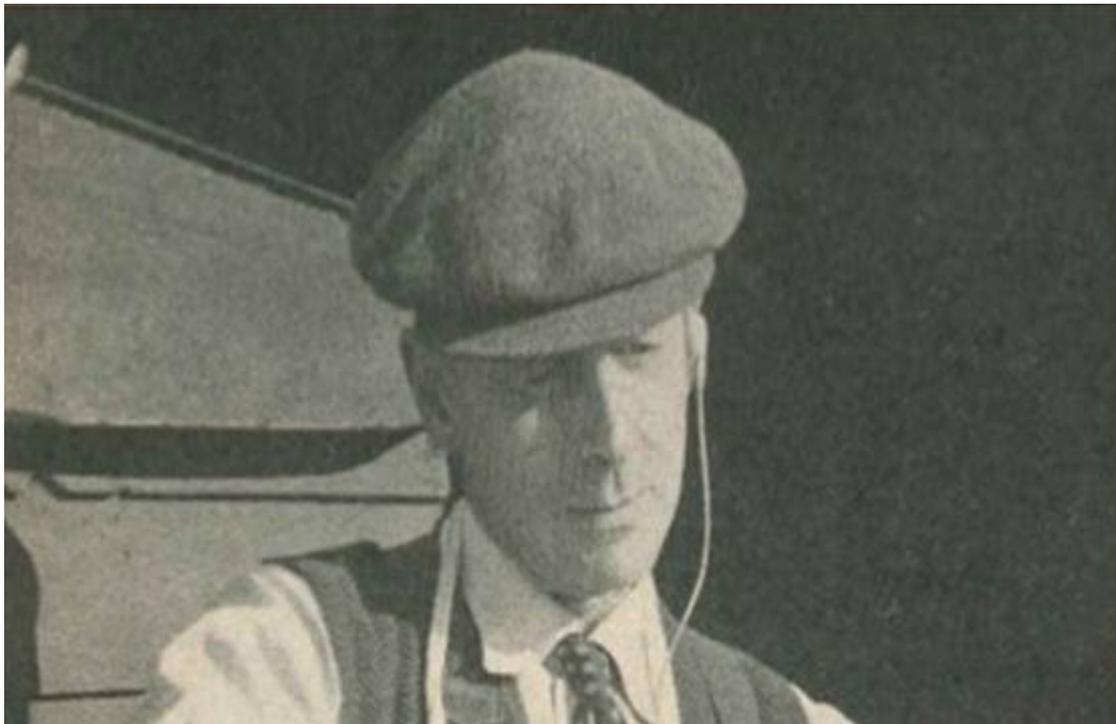
What is home? What do we call home? It was one or two maximum bedroomed flats, one small kitchen or a cooker on the landing, shared bathroom and toilet. Now in that accommodation they had to put a sewing machine to work for their living. Life was terrible. This is how that woman was carrying on her day:

In the morning get the husband ready to go to work and get the children ready to go to school. She had to take the children to school ... and then go back, maybe look after her house for a little, and sit down at her machine and finish the work. When small children are playing in the same room, or sleeping in the cot. She was getting up from the machine just to give food to the children ... about 4 o’clock go back to school, get the other children back, and then cook for the husband and family ... After doing all that ... she would have to sit down at the machine again to finish the work for the morning’s delivery.

Now I must mention here that the women who were working at home, besides all the other troubles, had the fear of the Environmental Officer, any officer, come and find them and stop them [because homeworking like this was not allowed]. Now, it was the duty of the Cypriot Women’s League to do something; we called other organisations; Greek and Turkish and Asian organisations, all those people who had homeworkers, and we formed a committee which decided to fight against the decision.”

The success of this campaign led to a change of attitude by several other London Councils as well. In Haringey a Homeworking Officer was appointed by the Council and training schemes were organised. Homeworker fact packs were also produced by the London Wide Homeworkers Group to support workers and printed in different languages: Arabic, Greek, Turkish, Chinese and Spanish.

Looking back to 1950s Tottenham, we have the following article printed in the Review edition of 1957 – 58 of the *Journal of the Royal London Society for the Blind*, which introduces us to a local couple – Harry Bradley and Annie Bond (when reading the article, please note it is written in the style of the time of the 1950s):



“ This skilled woodworker (above) is Harry Bradley. For most of his life he has been completely blind. Twenty-seven years ago he went to a social at Swiss Cottage. There he met another blind person, Annie Bond. She had lost her sight in an accident when she was a child of two. Harry and Annie fell in love without ever seeing each other. After a quarter of a century of marriage, they are still lovers.

At the Swiss Cottage social evening Harry and Annie discovered they had both been at the Brecknock Day School for Blind Children. Annie described how, after finishing school, she had been taught knitting on machines. Harry talked of his growing skill in basket work and carpentry.

Acquaintance grew into friendship. They arranged to meet again. Friendship ripened into love and very soon they were sweethearts.

Her work is her hobby



A few months later Annie Bond gave up her work at the workshops of the Royal London Society for the Blind and became Mrs Harry Bradley. Her husband still works in the Workshops for the Blind in Tottenham Court Road.

Annie took up knitting at home as an out-worker under the society's "home workers" scheme. And she does this work still, as you can see in the picture, besides doing the housework, cooking meals and doing all the chores of a normal housewife. Her hobbies? Believe it or not – hand-knitting and rug-making. All the carpets and rugs in her home are her own handiwork. She's an excellent dancer too, and she enjoys both modern and old-time dancing.

Grandparents

Now in their fifties, the Bradleys have two handsome daughters. Iris is about 23 and married, with a baby daughter. Mavis – 15 – is just about to leave school.

Harry and Annie have been lovers for over a quarter of a century. And they have never seen each other once. “

At Bruce Castle we have a collection of oral histories and objects all relating to the homeworking of Annie and Harry Bradley, with examples of the knitted socks that Annie made and a cane chair seat made by Harry. Annie was interviewed when she was 98 years old (by Hazel Whitehouse, Reminiscence Officer at Bruce Castle), whilst she was still living in their home at 31 [Teynton Terrace](#) on the Tower Gardens Estate in Tottenham. She died in 2005, just before her 100th birthday and also before an exhibition held at Bruce Castle that included the story of her work. The Bradleys' daughter and grand-daughter produced a book about her life called '*Are We All A Little Blind?*'. The knitting machine used by Annie to make her trademark woollen socks for men went to the [Ruddington Framework Knitters Museum](#).

Below is a photograph of a large wooden bobbin with grey wool, used by Annie for her sock-making work. Annie would have waxed the wool using a candle before threading onto the knitting machine.



From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum & Archive

Here is what Annie had to say about knitting during the Second World War:

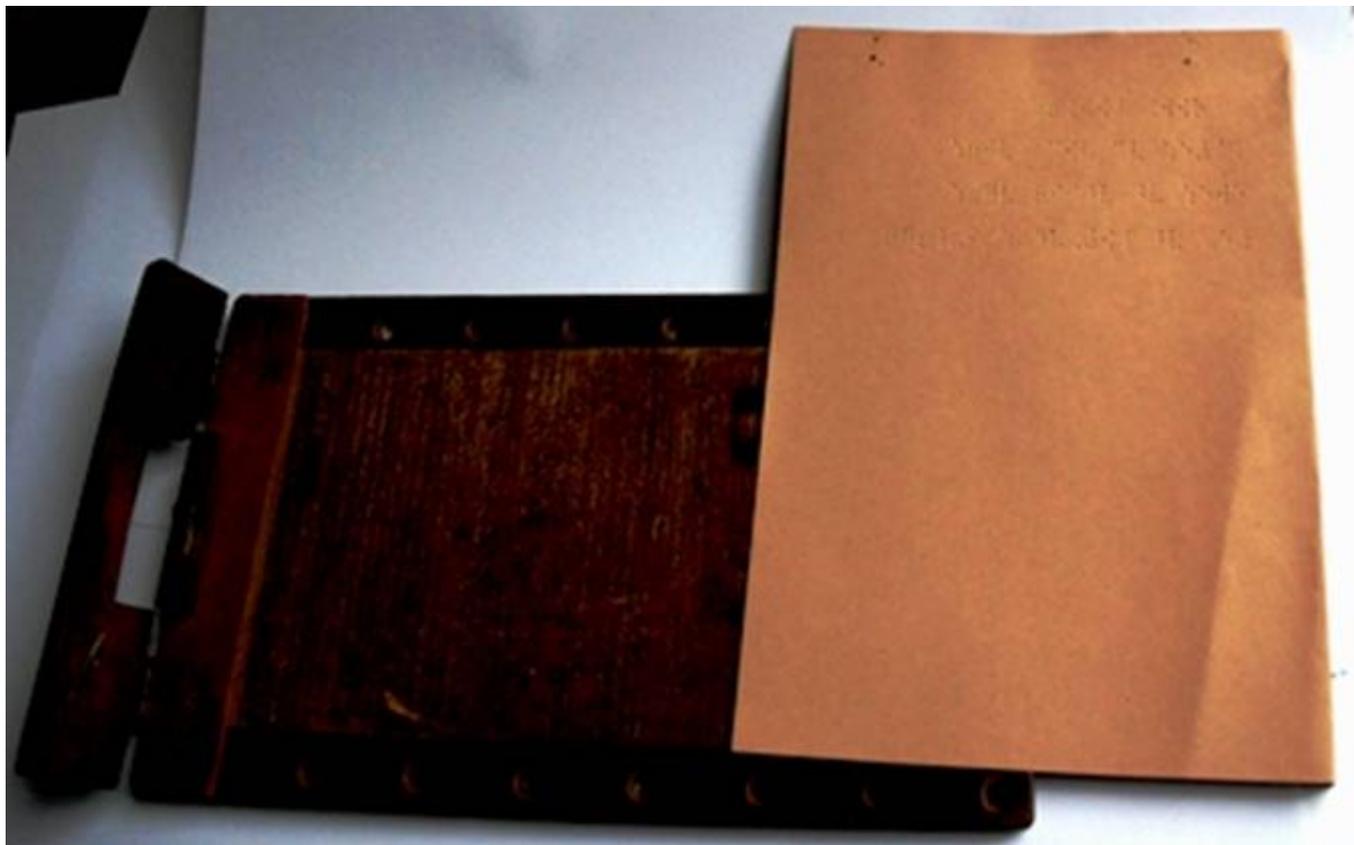
“ During the War I was evacuated. I had to take my machine and all. I went to a relation in Lincolnshire.

And they used to send my wool down there to me to knit. So I worked. ‘Course really I suppose they wanted the socks. Cor, I had hundreds! But the thing was, you were rationed with wool then, I had to deal with the coupons and all, in those days.

And anyway I stopped down there for about 8 weeks, I think that was all, and then I came back home. That was, like, the beginning of the War, we never had

any raids, beginning of the War. But the rest of the time I was here [in Tottenham]. We had a 'Morrison' shelter, and most of the time I stopped in the house. We had all our windows blown out once."

Below is a photograph of a 'style' or 'dotter' used in the writing of Braille. These are wooden 'handles' to hold the sheet and then a metal 'pricker' was used to prick the holes in Braille. Annie used her Braille writing frame for recording sock orders for her homeworking.



From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum & Archive

If you are recording a diary or writing down your thoughts about homeworking during lockdown, we would love to hear more and see if we might add your recollections during this time to our collections at Bruce Castle. Just get in touch.

And that ends today's post. With thanks to all the women who shared their memories and details of their working lives with us at Bruce Castle.

Until tomorrow – take care, keep well, and keep up the social distancing. Please do ensure you think of others too when observing the social distancing rules, especially when passing someone who may be blind or visually-impaired.

Best wishes from us all at Bruce Castle

Deborah Hedgecock
Curator

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