

# Examples of questions for the oral history of post-war Leicester 1945-1962

The most important thing is that people are able to talk about things that are important to them. This might mean that you have to listen to other subjects before you get onto any of the ones mentioned here. Some of these subjects might not get mentioned at all.

Some of these subjects won't interest your interviewee – that doesn't matter. Find the ones that do and go for those.

The broad themes are Home & Family, Life in Leicester and The Broader Picture.

# Home & Family

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## Starting questions

If you remember the end of WW2, what happened? What happened after that?

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*If you know the family had a bad time e.g. lost a family member, you might want to either leave these first few questions until later or ask if it's ok to start with them.*

What effect did the war have on you and your family?

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What was your and/or your family's situation after the war ended in 1945 – were you single, engaged, married; employed or unemployed; financially ok or struggling; looking for a place to live or in a room/flat/house.

What did you hope for in the future?

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*The summer of 1946 was particularly wet and was followed by the coldest winter for three centuries, which was followed by flooding. Could start with an ice-breaker (literally) –*

Tell me what you remember of the winter of 1946/7.

## Home & Family

*There was a housing shortage at the end of the war and it took a while for house building to start again. Over 7,000 houses were built at New Parks, Stocking Farm & Mowmacre Hill, Thurnby Lodge and Eyres Monsell between 1946-1953. The pre-war slum clearance programme started again in 1954.*

Where were you living in 1945?

Describe the place you were living in (If stuck you could ask 'What would we see when we opened the front door?')

Who lived with you? (e.g. Grandparents, parents, family, lodgers)

How did you decorate your home? Where did you get furniture from?

Were there any rules or regulations you had to follow? What were they?

Were there any social pressures to do things in a certain way e.g. wash day on a Monday, scrubbing front door steps, keeping the garden tidy. Were there people who didn't conform or who stuck out?

*If moved house:*

Where did you move and why?

If you were in any of New Parks, Stocking Farm & Mowmacre Hill, Thurnby Lodge, Goodwood or Eyres Monsell, describe what it was like when you first moved there. What did you think of your new home? What were the pros and cons of being on the estate?

What did you think of the design of the new estates and houses?

When you first moved there, what sort of facilities did it have – e.g. shops, school, a pub, bus services?

How do you feel people coped with moving to new suburban estates? How did it affect you? E.g. contact with family, friends, neighbours.

How did people treat newcomers on new housing estates in established suburban villages e.g. Evington?

We're also interested in hearing about people who lived in pre-fabricated houses (pre-fabs) or had to become squatters due to the lack of housing.

## **Family**

*Dr Spock's book, 'The Common Book of Baby & Childcare' came out in 1946, but did anyone know about it or care? Only ask the following questions if they are relevant!*

What was your attitude or approach to bringing up your children? E.g. discipline, manners, playing with them.

- How did the war change your attitude to bringing up your children (if it did)?
- How did this differ from your childhood and how you were brought up?

How important was it to you that your children got a good education?  
How much was money an issue regarding education?

What was the influence of religion in your family?

What family traditions or customs did you have, if any? This might be favourite recipes or games, or things you did at Christmas, Easter, other particular times of the year.

What games did you all play? - inside and outside the house.

What programmes did you listen to on the radio? Did everyone listen together or were some programmes for parents, some for kids?

## Family & Food

*Food rationing finally stopped in the summer of 1954. Bread came off the ration in 1948, sweets and sugar in 1953.*

What did you eat at home?

- Different times of the day? (e.g. breakfast, mid-day meal, evening meal)
- Different occasions – Christmas, Easter, birthdays...?

Where did you eat (in a particular room? Sat at a table?)

How important were table manners, if at all?

Who cooked? Who washed up?

If you were the main cook, how did you learn to cook? If interested – tell me about your kitchen, your utensils, recipe books, influences etc.

Was 'foreign' food ever eaten? e.g. Chinese take-aways, curries – did these exist in Leicester before the 1960s?

Favourite and least favourite foods – why?

Where did the food come from? e.g. allotments, shops. When did you notice supermarkets start to come in?

What & where did you eat outside the home? (Pubs, restaurants, cafes, takeaways)

## Family & Health

*The Beveridge Report of 1942 laid the foundation of the modern welfare state (compulsory contributions to cover unemployment, sickness, maternity, widows, old age benefits, and funeral grants). The National Health Service (NHS) started in 1948 and, initially, it experienced a rush of people asking for false teeth, artificial limbs, spectacles etc. For the first time, people could get medical treatment free, although charges for false teeth and spectacles were introduced in 1951.*

After the war, what health issues did you and your family have and what did you do about them?

What difference did the start of the National Health Service make to you compared with the pre-NHS period?

- How many people in your family got new false teeth, artificial limbs, spectacles etc. How did they feel about this?

What differences, if any, did you notice regarding state benefits for unemployment, sickness, old age, funerals, compared with the pre-war years?

Particularly for women (but for men too), what is their memory of how the health service dealt with them having babies? If people are happy to talk about their experience of having a baby, ask about this.

- What advice was given?
- How were people treated?
- How was this different from what happened before (as far as they know) – or perhaps what has happened more recently?
- How long did they stay in hospital after the birth?
- What sort of help did they have when they went home with the baby?

## **Working Lives**

*At the end of WW2 many factories had to be converted back to peace time work. The country was almost bankrupt so much effort was put into exporting goods, to the detriment of the home market. However, by 1957 the Prime Minister Harold McMillan was famously saying that most of the people in the country had never had it so good.*

Where were you working at the end of the war? How do you remember your first days at work after the end of the war?

How did ex-servicemen and women adjust to work when they returned to civilian life? How did you adjust (if relevant)?

How did your workplace adjust from wartime conditions to a peace-time footing?

**If female** – what was your attitude to work/raising a family? If you had to give up your job for a returning soldier, how did you feel about this?

How would you compare the work prospects for women with those for men?

If in industry - how busy were you/how much work did you have? How much of what you did was for export? Was there any trade with countries behind the 'Iron Curtain' (i.e. East Europe)?

If interested – describe the work you did, what was a typical day like?

What were pay and conditions like? Was it thought of as a good or bad job? What were the chances for promotion? What was your attitude to work?

What changes did you see in the workplace during the 1950s and into the 1960s? If the main changes came later, you could ask about that.

Were there migrant workers at your place of work at this time? If so, how were they treated?

Were you a member of a trade union? What was your attitude to unions? What was the attitude of employers and workers to unions where you worked? If relevant ask about what the trade union did. Were there was any industrial action, such as strikes – ask about these.

What did you enjoy/dislike about work?

## **Family & Money**

*Immediately after WW2 there was little money around, but most of the time there was plenty of work in Leicester and by 1962 it was looked on as a prosperous city with good shops. Of course, not everyone would have felt well-off. BEA introduced flights to Valencia in 1957 and Spain became one of the first overseas tourist destinations.*

Who earned money in your family? (men and women, old and young)

Who was in charge of the finances?

What was your attitude to money? Were you a saver or a spender?

How did you spend your money?

How much did you plan ahead? For example: How important was it to own your own house, to plan for when the children left home, to save for a holiday, to have a pension or savings etc.

Would you borrow money? If so, where from? Hire Purchase (HP)?

Who could afford cars, televisions, washing machines etc.? When did you get your first washing machine, television, car? What do you remember about it – are there any good stories?

How affluent or well off did you feel as the years went by?

## *Holidays*

Where did you go on holiday? Where did you go and why? How long did you save for the holiday? When was your first foreign holiday (if ever) – where, why, how much?

What did you and your family know of the world outside of Leicester, of Leicestershire, of the UK? (If appropriate) Had service in the war affected your attitude to 'abroad'? E.g. service in Europe or elsewhere.

## **Social Class**

How would you describe the social class of your family e.g. working class, middle class etc.?

What was your attitude to class differences at the time?

What do you feel were the main differences between working classes and middle classes at this time?

What sort of effect did this have on things like education, work, leisure? Examples might include: knowing the right people to get a job, how people were treated by the authorities, access to certain clubs/societies etc.

## **Being Young**

*The Leicester playwright Joe Orton, b. 1933, was a teenager in the late 1940s and early 1950s and hated Leicester – he thought it was dull, boring, grey.*

If you were a teenager in this period, how do you remember being young and being in Leicester (or wherever you were)?

Where could young people go, and what could they do? Which places were only for young people (if there were any)?

What are your earliest memories of 'pop' culture? What did you think of it? What did your parents think of it?

What did you like doing and why? (E.g. reading, football, stamp collecting, train spotting, knitting)

How much do you remember magazines/radio/TV starting to target young people with things to buy? Were there things you wanted to have at different points in your childhood e.g. particular toys? (Adults may have views on this too as they would have had to pay for the toys).

How much did you feel you were different from your parents or grandparents?

## **National service**

*From 1 January 1949, healthy males 17 to 21 years old were expected to serve in the armed forces for 18 months (this went up to two years during the Korean War), and remain on the reserve list for four years. They could be recalled to their units for up to 20 days for no more than three occasions during these four years – and this did happen. The last call up was in 1960 and the last person out was in 1963.*

If male – describe your National Service.

- How did you feel about doing it?
- Where did you go and what did you do?
- Any anecdotes?
- What did you think of the experience at the time, and what do you think about it looking back?

# Life in Leicester & Leicestershire

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## **Shops and shopping**

Where did you go for what, how did this change over time? Local shops or city centre?

What effect did rationing have on clothes or food shopping (or anything else)?

Which coffee bars, pubs, cafes, restaurants did you use? Who went where - places for different social classes, for men or women, for young people, for disabled people, for migrants, for LGBT people (who, of course, wouldn't have been known as LGBT at the time)?

## **Groups and organisations**

*Leicester once had many working men's clubs as well as many other sporting, cultural, or special interest groups. Examples: Wildlife clubs, sporting clubs, the British Legion, religious clubs, Rotary Club, Forresters, working men's clubs; intellectual groups like the Lit & Phil, etc.*

Which clubs, societies, groups or associations did you belong to?

What happened at these groups? Who went to them?

Were you an organiser at any of these? – what did you do?

## Popular culture

High brow, middle brow, low brow?

- Folk music – Leicester was a major centre for folk in the 1960s but what about the 1940s and 1950s? Ewan MacCall, Peggy Seegar and others.
- Jazz music – from trad to swing to be-bop, the ‘battle’ between traditional and modern in the 1950s/1960s. John Dankworth, Ronnie Scott, Ken Colyer, Humphrey Lyttelton in the UK; Miles Davis, Charlie Parker and many others in the USA.
- Classical music – “Leicester Symphony Orchestra - A History and Celebration” has been written by Neil Crutchley. The Leicester Schools Symphony Orchestra. What other ensembles or solo players were there?
- Pop music – from post-war swing music to Bill Haley (first visited UK in 1957), Elvis Presley (his first UK number 1 was in 1957), Tommy Steele, Cliff Richard, the Dallas Boys, Gerry Dorsey. In 1958 the Dallas Boys (Britain’s first boy band) became regulars on the TV show Oh Boy! The influence of music from the USA & from the Caribbean.
- Sport – football, rugby, cricket but also speedway, cycling, boxing, and many other sports. Who played or watched what, where, when and with whom?
- Cinema, theatre & show business – where did you go, who were your favourite performers, who did you and other people model themselves on? Were Leicester audiences really as bad as their reputation?!
- What did you listen to on the radio? On the TV, if you had one? Did any programmes focus on Leicester? ITV started in 1955.

## **Migration**

*If you were a migrant arriving in Leicester, most of the above will apply, but your situation will have been different. There were race riots in London, Nottingham and elsewhere in the 1950s, and the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962 was created because of a popular perception that there were too many immigrants. It permitted only those with government-issued employment vouchers, limited in number, to settle in the UK. Other Acts designed to limit immigration followed in 1968 and 1971.*

What was your first impression of Leicester? What are your favourite/least favourite memories of arriving here?

How were you treated? How aware were you of discrimination? How aware were you of a colour bar, in places?

What were the issues around finding a place to live, a place to work, a place to meet and socialise?

How much did the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962 affect you? If it did affect you, what happened?

## **Places**

Descriptions of places, shops, streets, buildings no longer here.

Descriptions of favourite or least favourite places.

Where did you go then that you don't go now?

## Transport

The last tram in Leicester ran in 1949. At this time Leicester had three main train stations, but the M1 motorway didn't arrive in the county until the mid-1960s.

How did you travel mainly? Bicycle, taxi, bus, train, motorbike, car or horse?

Please describe the experience of travelling? This sounds like an odd question, but...

- What was it like travelling on the trams?
- If you got your first car before 1962, what was it and how did it change life for you? What was it like driving before many of the major roads we have today were constructed?
- What was it like using the rail network before the Beeching cuts of the 1960s? Memories of steam trains, small out-of-the-way train stations, early diesel or electric trains.
- What was it like travelling by aeroplane? Was it any different to now?

## Planning

(Be prepared for most people not to know much about this. There are probably stronger memories of the Konrad Smigielski period in the 1960s)

*'Leicester of the Future' was published in 1947. There were exhibitions in places such as New Walk Museum, explaining how the city was going to be changed. How do people remember the changes to Leicester's built environment before Konrad Smigielski arrived in 1962 (John Beckett was the man in charge during our period) and what did they think of it all?*

What do you remember of the state of Leicester's roads and traffic before the 1960s? *In the 1950s Vaughan Way/Burleys Way was the first part of the central ring road to be started.*

What do you remember of the state of the housing and buildings in the older areas? *After 1954 large areas started to be demolished for slum clearance, while housing estates were being built at New Parks, Eyres Monsell etc.*

How much attention did you pay to town planning issues at the time? Did you visit a planning exhibition? If so, what do you remember of it?

# The Broader Picture

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## Politics

*There was a Labour 'landslide' in 1945 and the Conservatives, led by Winston Churchill, were defeated. Leicester returned three Labour MPs, Terence Donovan, Herbert Bowden and Barnett Janner. The new government's nationalisation programme (the public taking ownership of certain industries) saw the Bank of England nationalised in 1946, the National Coal Board in 1947, the Railways in 1948, and the Iron & Steel industries in 1950.*

*City MPs in this period were:* Terence Donovan, Herbert Bowden, Barnett Janner, Lynn Ungood-Thomas, Capt Charles Waterhouse (Con), William Peel, Tom Bradley.

*These were the Lord Mayors:* Charles Edward Worthington, C.B.E. (1945–1946), William Henry Smith (1946–1947), John Newton Frears (1947–1949), John William Wale (1949–1950), Alderman Frederick Ernest Oliver (1950–1951), Alderman Thomas Rowland Hill (1951–1952), Alderman Geoffrey Morris Barnett (1952–1953), Alderman Charles Robert Keene (1953–1954), Alderman Cecil Herbert Harris (1954–1955), Alderman Samuel Cooper (1955–1956), Alderman Alfred Harkyard (1956–1957), Alderman Frederick John Jackson (1957–1958), Alderman Sidney Brown (1958–1959), Alderman Bertram Powell (1959–1960), Alderman Dorothy Russell (1960–1961), Alderman May Goodwin (1961–1962).

If you did vote, how did you vote in the 1945 election and what did you think of the results? Why do you think so many people voted Labour? Would people have thought of themselves as socialists at this point – would you (if voted Labour)?

What did you think of the government's nationalisation programme?

Who did you vote for in the 1950s and why? (1950 was a Labour win nationally, 1951, 1955, 1959 were all Conservative wins)? Leicester was mainly Labour but not everyone in the city was – Leicester South East was represented by Capt Charles Waterhouse (Con) for most of this period.

How do you look back on the politics of this period?

## Events

How do people remember major events? For example:

The Partition of India (1947)

The London Olympic games (1948)

The Korean War (1950-1953)

The Festival of Britain (1951)

The Coronation (1953)

The Suez Crisis (1956)

And, of course, Leicester City FC's FA Cup Final appearances in 1949 and 1961?

## The Atomic Age

*Following the first atomic bomb in 1945 the first hydrogen bomb was detonated in 1952 and Britain tested its first in 1957. The UK's first nuclear reactor was started at Calder Hall, Windscale, 1956. Nine more came into operation in the 1950s and 1960s.*

How aware of the nuclear 'threat' were you? How much did you talk about it?

What would you have done in the event of a nuclear strike? Were there any shelters near you?

Did you or anyone you know go on any protest marches such as the Aldermaston marches (1958-1965)?

What did you think of the first nuclear reactor starting in the UK?

## **Being modern**

*The Festival of Britain (1951) showcased a lot that was modern and new in design, arts, science etc. From 1952 jet aeroplanes carried people around the world. New materials in the home included formica and vinyl. Modern jazz – be-bop and ‘The Birth of the Cool’ – was ‘hip’. Christian Dior introduced a ‘new look’ in fashion, Coco Chanel championed the ‘Little Black Dress’ (think of Audrey Hepburn). The Mini car was launched in 1959, the Jaguar E-Type in 1961.*

*Locally, Leicester has a grade II listed 1950s ‘modernist’ house in Clarendon Park. The churches, shops, houses and flats in New Parks, Goodwood and Eyres Monsell are also in a modern style.*

What would you have thought of as progressive and modern? What was seen as old and backward?

Did you ever see anything, buy anything, or do anything that was very new and modern? Describe this.

What was the effect of the USA – Americans actually being stationed in the city during the war and the idea of America through films and music?

**And finally....** What do you remember of the harsh winter of 1962/3? *Snow lay on the ground from Christmas through to the beginning of March 1963. This will be in the newspapers, with lots of photos, so not a priority for oral history, but we would ask everyone about these winters.*

How would you sum up your memories and impressions of 1945-1962?

Can we learn anything from it?

What would you have changed about it if you could?

## **And if there is time....**

Tell me what it’s like being in your 90s (or your 80s) now.

How does this compare with your parents or grandparents?