

Alice May Williams

An
Unreliable
Witness

KEY: WITNESSES

Jessie *(on audio and in this text)*
Great-Great Grandma; Jessy Jane Ayers aka Jessie Mary Ann Hart (1865-1959)

AM **Alice May**
JA **Mum: Jane Anne**
EJ **Nan: Eileen Jessie**
Ken **Jessie's Grandson-in-law**
Margaret **Jessie's Granddaughter, Nan's cousin, married to Ken**

(in this text only, transcribed from oral interviews)

AM **Alice May**
JA **Mum; Jane Anne**
EJ **Nan; Eileen Jessie**

(in this text only, quoted from sources listed at end)

VW **Virginia Woolf (1882-1941)**
JE **Jane Eyre (Charlotte Bronte aka Currer Bell 1816-1855)**
OO **Orlando (1600-1928)**

(in script only, narration)

AMW **Alice May Williams**

{1930}
VW

Here is the past and all its inhabitants miraculously sealed as in a magic tank; all we have to do is to look and to listen and to look and soon the little figures - for they are rather under life size - will begin to move and to speak, and as they move we shall arrange them in all sorts of patterns of which they were ignorant, for they thought when they were alive that they could go where they liked; and as they speak we shall read into their sayings all kinds of meanings which never struck them, for they believed when they were alive that they said straight off whatever came into their heads. But once you are in a biography all is different...

{2015}
AMW

But what if the figures escape from their magic tank, grow a little larger than life size, and refuse to be arranged into the patterns we draw?

{2014}ⁱⁱ

EJ Well I know my grandma, she was a very very kind, and, loving woman and er, I used to go there, and stay there, cos she lived quite near us

AM In, Battersea?

EJ Yees, quite near the park

AM mmm hmm

{2015}ⁱⁱⁱ

AMW At Christmas, over our turkey dinner, my nan, who had been quiet for some time, turned to us and said she had spoken to her grandma on the phone. Mum looked worried and for a moment nobody spoke. This was a sign of something amiss, facts being untethered from timelines, words and thoughts slipping out of time. But Nan wasn't crazy, or stupid, and she hadn't lost the plot. She just didn't have the words to describe the medium which had channeled her grandma's voice to her. Being almost blind she hears everything; disembodied voices from one small black box are much the same as any other, and the plot she hadn't lost is the thread which led us here, there, back, forward, sideways, hovering slightly above the timelines, here is the past and all we are, we were, she is and the

{1800}^{iv}

VW sunsets were redder and more intense; dawns were whiter and more auroral. Of our crepuscular half-lights and lingering twilights they knew nothing. The rain fell vehemently, or not at all. The sun blazed or there was darkness.....the poets sang beautifully how roses fade and petals fall. The moment is brief they sang; the moment is over; one long night is then to be slept by all..... The withered intricacies and ambiguities of our more gradual and doubtful age were unknown to them. Violence was all. The flower bloomed and faded. The sun rose and sank. The lover loved and went.....

{1825}^v

ii It was the present moment.

iii It is the present moment.

iv A date; the dawn of the 19th Century. A Daughter; Rebecca Ayers is born in Gravesend.

v A son; George Ayers, is born on December 11th to a mother; Rebecca Ayers and a coachman; George Ayers, in Mile End.

{1834}^{vi}

{1847}^{vii}

{2015}^{viii}

JA So who's Jane? Jane's.....

AM Jane

JA Oh?

AM Jane

JA Jane...

AM You know Jane!

VW Jane Eyre used to go up on to the roof when Mrs Fairfax was making jellies and looked over the fields at the distant view. And then she longed - and it was for this that they blamed her - that *then I longed for a power of vision which might overpass that limit; which might reach the busy world, towns, regions full of life which I had heard of but never seen:*

VW every tree and plant in the neighbourhood is described first green, then golden, how moons rise and suns set; how spring follows winter and autumn summer; how night succeeds day and day night; how first there is a storm and then fine weather; how things remain much as they are for two or three hundred years or so, except for a little dust and a few cobwebs which one old woman can sweep up in half an hour..... time passed.....

{1865}^{ix}

{1959}^x

Ken Mrs Hart of London speaking, now what year were you born Mrs Hart? What...

Jessie Eighteen er, now wait a minute (*throaty chuckle*) eighteen.....

Margaret Granny dear
Man's voice Sticks in the garden (?)

vi A son; John Henry, is born July 25th to a mother; Rebecca Ayers, in Shoreditch.

vii A book; *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography* by Charlotte Bronte is published under the pseudonym Currer Bell, in London.

viii It was the present moment.

ix A daughter; Jessy Jane Ayers is born in Lambeth, to a mother; Caroline and a Steamboat Captain; George Ayers, at 2 Ceylon St, Battersea (gone). She is christened June 11th in Battersea St George the Martyr (gone). In the church register the name is spelt first as Ayres, and then crossed out, and rewritten; A Y E R S. The same year; a steamboat; Princess Alice, is built in Glasgow. She will soon be bought by the London Steamboat Company.

x A grandmother; Jessie Mary Ann Hart, of no fixed abode, is staying with a granddaughter; Margaret and her husband Ken, up country. She is ninety-four.

Jessie What about it? (*unintelligible murmur*) fifty odd, eighteen..... eighteen sixty-five

Ken 1865

Jessie Yes

Ken In the reign of Queen Victoria

Jessie (*quickly and matter of factly*)

Yes. Quite right Sir. What else do you want to know?

Ken Where do you live now?

Jessie Well I'm at er.... Hinckley at present, at my grandson's, with my clothes on (*at the moment?/as much as I know?*)

Ken Number 1 Springfield Road

Jessie Number 1 Springfield Road

Ken Staying with Ken and Margaret aren't you?

Jessie Yes, yes

Ken And are you enjoying yourself?

Jessie (*interrupts*) On a very nice time

Ken How did you come up here?

Jessie By Car

Ken And enjoy the trip?

Jessie Yes

Ken Because he drives too fast doesn't he?

Jessie No, no, I didn't know you were drivin' fast

Ken Very glad to hear that

Jessie Ha ha! I didn't really...
I'm going back to my son.

Ken You're going back to stay? At Marham Gardens?

Jessie That's right

Ken On Sunday next we hope

Jessie Yes

Ken All being well. Sunday the

Jessie (*interrupts*) You 'ope I'm going back next Sunday?
Ha ha ha!

Ken Well, if all goes well; we don't hope! (*laughs*)

(*Both laugh*)

Jessie That's what I thought

Ken We hope, we hope you have another nice sunny journey down again

Jessie Yes I hope so

OO “Look at that!” she exclaimed, some days later when an absurd truncated carriage without any horses began to glide about of its own accord. A carriage without any horses indeed! She was called away just as she said that, but came back after a time and had another look out of the window.

{1867}^{xi}

{1871}^{xii}

AMW

Jessy Jane is nowhere, everywhere, she is without address, facts, names. She is changing, growing, shifting, travelling, discarding letters, numbers, unnecessary baggage behind her. She is a spelling error, a forgotten birthplace, she is out of the house. She is elsewhere, hovering above the recorded facts of it all. She is Jane E. Ayres staying in Camberwell with a butcher & journeyman, she is Caroline Jessie Ayres in Reigate, she is Jane, she longs

JE

for a power of vision which might overpass that limit

AMW

She does not exist; she is more alive than ever. She is weightless, paperless, free, she is Air. She is six years old. she longed

VW

JE

then I longed for a power of vision which might overpass that limit; which might reach the busy world, towns, regions full of life which I had heard of but never seen: that then I desired more of practical experience than I possessed; more of intercourse with my kind, of acquaintance with variety of character than was here in my reach.....

Who blames me? Many, no doubt, and I shall be called discontented. I could not help it, the restlessness was in my nature; it agitated me to pain sometimes.....

{1878}^{xiii}

{MUSIC: Farewell Then My Trim Built Wherry}

xi A daughter; Her Serene Highness Princess Victoria Mary (“May”) of Teck is born on May 26th 1867 at Kensington Palace.

xii A daughter; Jessy Jane Ayers, is missing from the census. Her mother Caroline and a brother George (a Waterman) are missing presumed dead. An uncle; John Henry Ayers (a Waterman) is missing. A Waterman; George Ayers, his mother; Rebecca Ayers, five sons and daughters, a son-in-law and grandson are listed at 31 Chatham St, Battersea (gone). She is five.

xiii A steamboat; Princess Alice sinks on the Thames at Tripcock Point. The Paddle Steamer is owned by the London Steamboat Company and packed with day-trippers from Gravesend, 650 people lose their lives. A helmsman; John Eyres is the sole survivor of the crew and is called to give evidence at the inquest. The spelling of EYRES shifts in various documents from AYERS to AYRES to EYRES. Eyres is criticised for being unable to provide a stable account of what happened preceding the disaster and is criticised for changing his story frequently. Shortly after the inquest he becomes suddenly, profoundly deaf. She is six.

VW Let the barrel-organ sound and transport us on thought, which is, of all carriers, the most clumsy, the most erratic, over the roof tops and the back gardens where washing is hanging to - what is this place? Do you recognise the Green and in the middle the steeple and the gates with lion couchant on either side? Oh yes, it is Kew! Well, Kew will do.

{1959}^{xiv}

Ken And your father was a river pilot?

Jessie Not a river pilot

Ken River...

Jessie Captain

Ken Captain

Jessie No e's, he's done, all 'is family were pilots, used to take the ships right out to sea, those pilots.

Ken Yes

Jessie But father didn't go up there didn't very often, unless it were a trip special, 'e used to go to Kew, and Hampton Court... 'is licence was from Windsor, to the North

Ken Yes

Jessie That n a long way wan it (?)

Ken hmm

Margaret And didn't he Granny, when the bar was doing badly, run the ship aground?
Is that right?

Jessie Oh because they had the... the captains had refreshments you see. It was theirs. And er, one of my sisters used to be serving downstairs, and if they were doing bad, Sunday morning especially, she'd look up to father on the bridge board, and make sign they were doing bad

Margaret hmm

Jessie So father'd run the run the boat on the sandbank

(all laugh)

Jessie And get stuck

Child's voice Why would they do that?

Jessie They'd all, they'd all have a drink then

Woman Yeah

Jessie Yeah

xiv It was the present moment.

Jessie Ooh I say!

(woman laughs)

Jessie

Margaret

Jessie

Ooh they 'ad luncheons as well it was lovely

Yeah

Beautiful aha!

{1880}^{xv}

POLITICIAN 1 {asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department}

Whether it was true that three powerful steam-tugs have been specially licensed to accompany the Boat Race on the 20th, and whether he is aware of the danger likely to accrue therefrom; and whether, in view of the fact that one of them swamped, last Saturday, a twelve-oared outrigger belonging to the London Rowing Club, he will have the licences cancelled and prevent the tugs from accompanying the race?

POLITICIAN 2 Sir, I understand that the usual arrangements have now been made with the London Steamboat Company, and steam tugs will, therefore, not be used. The police authorities do not license steam vessels to accompany the race. This matter is entirely in the hands of the Thames Conservancy.

{1959}^{xvi}

Ken

You were telling me about following the boat race one time?

Jessie

Ooh yes, I always used to get the boat race full of em

Ken

They used to follow it up?

Jessie

Yes 'e got the Cambridge boat, what they call the Cambridge boat

Ken

Yes

Jessie

And Oxford had a steamer you see

Ken

Yes

Jessie

And I always used to go.

Ken

I see

Jessie

And of course they'd dancing on board after the race

Ken

Yes

Jessie

Bring 'em back to London

Ken

I see and where do they bring them back to? Tower Bridge?

Jessie

No; London Bridge

Ken

London Bridge, I see

xv A man asks another man a question on March 19th at the House of Commons, in Westminster.

xvi It was the present moment.

Jessie They'd go to a hotel and they'd all dinner
 Ken I see, they'd make a full day of it?
 Jessie Ooh yes!
 Ken And who were the people that used to go on that trip?
 Jessie Why all the, all the directors of the firm
 Ken Of, of the firm that ran the ships?
 Jessie Yes, of of the er London Steamboat Company^{xvii}
 Ken I see, oh yes

(noise bounces)

Jessie So when he was thirteen I think 'e was apprenticed
 Ken Yes
 Jessie And he was seventy-two or seventy-four when he left
 Ken And what was his name? Captain?
 Jessie Captain Ayers
 Ken Captain Ayers
 Jessie And there was my brother Captain Ayers; Captain Henry,
 and er my father's brother, all three captains
 Ken Yes
 Jessie My father was the eldest
 The pilot, the men used to have a cap, and they'd go away
 be pleased but e'd never wear it ashore. He'd always
 another suit on the boat to change
 Ken I see
 Jessie He didn't like walking the streets with it
 Ken With his uniform on
 Jessie No

VW ...these selves of which we are built up, one on top of another, as plates are piled high on a waiter's head, have attachments elsewhere, sympathies, little constitutions and rights of their own

{1881}^{xviii}

OO

"I am growing up," she thought, taking her taper at last. "I am losing some illusions," she said, shutting Queen Mary's book, "perhaps to acquire others" and she descended among the tombs where the bones of her ancestors lay.

xvii A steamer packet; London Steamboat Company is formed in 1875, goes bankrupt and changes its name four times before finally dissolving in 1897. The boatyard is situated on the west side of Battersea Bridge.

xviii A daughter; Jessie Ayers lives at 88 Bridge Rd, Battersea (gone) above a cigar shop with her sister, a tobacconist; Annie, and her father, a River Steamer Captain; George Ayers. She is fifteen.

{1959}^{xix}

Ken Can you remember your grandmother?
 Jessie I can, my mother's mother?
 Ken Yes, can you remember her?
 Jessie Ooh yes!
 Ken How old did she live to be?
 Jessie Oh, she died in the 70s, oh yes she was a dear soul, she was a nice tall woman...
 Ken (interrupts)
 Didn't you say that your other granny lived to be...ninety-six or so?^{xx}
 Jessie Yes
 Ken That was your fa...
 Jessie Father
 Ken Father's mother
 Jessie That's the time I shall go!^{xxi}
 Ken And you (laughs) and when do you remember her?
 You remember her when you were in your twenties?
 Jessie (talks over him)
 Ooh when I was a little tot

(inaudible woman's voice in background)

Jessie

(talks over top)

We knew grandma was coming to see us...

Ken

She died, she died when you were about twenty?

Jessie

Oh she died before then

Ken

hmm

Jessie

But she knew Dad

Ken

Yes

Jessie

Couldn't see him because she was blind

Ken

Yes

Jessie

Aha ha!

Poor old granny

(woman's voice in background murmurs)

(noise bounces)

xix It was the present moment.

xx A great-grandmother Rebecca Ayres dies in 1896 in Battersea.

xxi A great-grandmother; Jessie Mary Ann Hart, will die this same year, a few months after the death of her daughter, Ethel Jessie. She is ninety-four.

{1882}^{xxii}

VW

Her room is hung from photographs. Her mind is like a family album. You turn up Uncle George, you turn up Aunt Maria. She has a story about each of them. It is crowded with things people threw away, things they didn't want..... She represents a world that is gone.

{1886}^{xxiii}

OO

"The wedding ring has to be put on the third finger of the left hand," she said, like a child cautiously repeating its lesson, "for it to be of any use at all."

{1959}^{xxiv}

Ken

Tell us Granny, when were you last at Tower Bridge?

Jessie

Ooh, when you when your first James? (unintelligible) was born

Ken

So 1949?

Jessie

Yes

Ken

When John was born?

Jessie

Uhuh

Ken

And when did you see it before that?

Jessie

Hadn't seen it before

Ken

When were you last down that way?

Jessie

That was the last time I was down there, when I went to see Margaret

Ken

I see

Jessie

Hadn't seen the Tower Bridge before, and Henry, I said oh I haven't seen the Tower Bridge I

Ken

At all?

Jessie

So as when we left Margaret...

Ken

(interrupts)

Well you're a Londoner, how is it you've never seen it before?

Jessie

Never went up that direction at all

(chuckles)

I wasn't allowed out really..

JE

they must have action; and they will make it if they cannot find it. Millions are condemned to a stiller doom than mine, and millions are in silent revolt against

xxii A Daughter; Adeline Virginia Stephen is born on 25th January at 22 Hyde Park Gate. She will be a Writer. She will be a Woolf.

xxiii A Daughter; Jessie Mary Ann Ayers, of 6 Flood St becomes a wife to Henry Hart, a Clerk of 10 Flood St, on March 21st in St Luke's Church, Chelsea. She signs her own name in looping copper-plate script. She is twenty - one.

xxiv It was the present moment.

their lot. Nobody knows how many rebellions ferment in the masses of life which people earth.

Ken

(interrupts)

Yes but you've been past er Rotherhithe

Jessie

(cuts in)

No I haven't

Ken

When you were younger

Jessie

Oh my dear yes right down to Sheerness!

Ken

That was before it was built then

Jessie

Ooh yes of course!

Ken

Really? How did you go down? By?

Jessie

Steamboat

Ken

On the river?

Jessie

(indistinct burble of words)

Over the river 'n my dad.

With my father

Ken

Your father was um

Jessie

Captain

Ken

Captain, captain of a... river steamer?

(Man and woman talk in background)

Ken

And you went down on the ship

Jessie

Ooh yes, of course

Ken

And when you went where Tower Bridge is now....

Jessie

Yes

Ken

...It wasn't then built?

Jessie

Wasn't then, No, no

Ken

Good heavens, we thought it had been there much longer than that, when was it built?

Jessie

Couldn't tell you

Ken

Bout eighteen...

Jessie

Not the faintest idea, I'm a Londoner but I don't know anything about Londoner

(throaty cough)

OO

"A toy boat, a toy boat, a toy boat"; she repeated, thus enforcing upon herself the fact that it is not articles by Nick Greene on John Donne nor eight-hour bills nor covenants nor factory acts that matter: it's something useless....

{1888}^{xxv}

{2014}^{xxvi}

EJ What wh, oh i know, we'll have some of those...
 AM Chocolate fishfingers?
 EJ Mmm
 Oh you've got one of these?
 AM That's a recorder
 EJ Yeah
 AM Nan that's recording what you say
 So your mum was a Hart?
 EJ Yes, Miss, Hart
 AM What was her name? Ethel?
 EJ Ethel and then there was, the eldest one was, what was it,
 was Hilda, she was Hilda, and then there was Elsie, they,
 she was the mother of Henry, and er, he's still, he's still er
 Yeah
 EJ He is. Yes
 AM You saw him didn't you?
 EJ Yes I saw him

{1895}^{xxvii}

{1901}^{xxviii}

{1959}^{xxix}

Man *(in background)*
 She, she
 Woman *(in background)*
 She never stopped being a carrier (? indistinct)
 Man *(in background)*
 She remembers King Edward...
 Margaret Did you see Kind Edward the 7th?
 Jessie Er... Yes I've seen King Edward
 In the King's Road, Chelsea, he was in a carriage
 Margaret Oh yes?
 Jessie He was a gay old dog

xxv A daughter; Ethel Jessie is born on August 19th, to a mother; Jessie Mary-Ann Hart and a clerk; Henry Hart of 30 Henning St, Battersea. She is twenty-three.
 xxvi It was the present moment.
 xxvii A bridge; Tower Bridge is completed and opens to the public.
 xxviii A grandmother; Queen Victoria dies. A son; Edward VII takes the throne.
 xxix It was the present moment.

(All laugh)

Jessie Oh you mustn't put that case somebody ears it from you!
(indistinct)
 Ken Its alright, its dark, its dark, *(its down?)*

{1901}

OO
*It was an odd sort of weather nowadays. The sky itself, she could not help thinking, had changed. It was no longer so thick, so watery, so prismatic now that King Edward - see there he was, stepping out of his neat brougham to go and visit a certain lady opposite - had succeeded Queen Victoria. The clouds had shrunk to a thin gauze: the sky seemed made of metal, which in hot weather tarnished verdigris, copper colour or orange as metal does in a fog. It was a little alarming - this shrinkage.
 At a touch the whole room was bright. And the sky was bright, all night long; and the pavements were bright; everything was bright. She came back again at midday. How narrow women had grown lately! The looked like stalks of corn, straight, shining, identical. And men's faces were as bare as the palm of one's hand. The dryness of the atmosphere brought out the colour in everything and seemed to stiffen the muscles of the cheeks.
 It was harder to cry now. Water was hot in two seconds.*

{1908}^{xxx}

{1910}^{xxxi}

{1959}^{xxxii}

Jessie *(coughs chestily)*
 Margaret Um, Queen Mary of course you remember Queen Mary?
 Jessie *(cuts in)*
 Ahmygod I love Queen Mary! I used to copy 'er hats.
(laughs throatily)
 all....
(laughs again)
 Margaret Those you made yourself?
 Jessie Yes
 Margaret Those kind of hats (?)
 Jessie Oooh yes! I like 'em.

(cat meows)

xxx A theme park; Dream City is proposed to be built on a site in Nine Elms, east of Battersea Park.
 xxxi A grandfather; Kind Edward VII dies. A son; George V is crowned and a wife; Mary (May of Teck) becomes Queen Consort.
 xxxii It was the present moment.

Jessie The day I was coming out
(*cat meows longer*)

Jessie I was er I was coming along the corridor and I saw one of the nurses she got, and she got this hat on. She was laughing. So I look, So I said.... Half a minute, I said, its my hat she got on!
(*laughs*)
Margaret Allen had left it at the gates she said
Jessie Yes
Margaret Oh she's a, I was like, but after she got it the wrong way
Jessie round
(*laughs*)
Margaret So I put it on, you know, pulled it up...
Jessie hmm
Margaret Ooooh! she screamed Mary!
Jessie (*throaty chuckle*)

(*noise bounces*)

OO

"I am growing up," she thought, taking her taper at last. "I am losing some illusions," she said, shutting Queen Mary's book, "perhaps to acquire others" and she descended among the tombs where the bones of her ancestors lay.

{2014}^{xxxiii}

AM Do you want me to do your nails for you Nan?
EJ Oooh Alice!

{1928}^{xxxiv}

VW for some seconds the light went on becoming brighter and brighter, and she saw everything more and more clearly and the clock ticked louder and louder until there was a terrific explosion right in her ear. Orlando leapt as if she had been violently struck on the head. Ten times she was struck. In fact it was ten o'clock in the morning. It was the eleventh of October. It was 1928. It was the present moment.

xxxiii It was the present moment.

xxxiv A book; *Orlando*; *A Biography* by Virginia Woolf is published in Richmond. A lover; Vita Sackville-West is the inspiration for the character of Orlando, whose life spans four centuries and shifts between genders.

VW all we have to do is to look and to listen and to look and soon

{2014}

EJ and all of a sudden I heard like a fire alarm going off

AM Oh really?

EJ Oh my god fathers

AM You don't have a fire alarm do you?

EJ In the hall I have, and i got up I thought what's that? So i got out of bed

AM mmmm

EJ and went and looked and listened, and it wasn't that at all I thought where is it?

OO

"What then? Who then?" she said. "Thirty-six; in a motor car: a woman. Yes, but a million other things as well.

{1929}^{xxxv}

{1939}^{xxxvi}

VW and it may have been her love of poetry that was to blame for making Orlando lose her shopping list and start home without the sardines, the bath salts, or the boots. Now as she stood with her hand on the door of her motor-car, the present moment struck her on the head.

{2014}^{xxxvii}

AM Ok let's do this one
EJ Is your second name May?

AM Yes

EJ Yes I thought it was

AM Alice May

EJ Alice May yeah

AM Get these bits out. Mum doesn't like her middle name Anne she doesn't like

EJ Oh think its a nice one

xxxv A building; Battersea Power Station, begins to be constructed on a site in Nine Elms to the east of Battersea Park. A theme park; Dream City, never got built here.

A home; 2 Ceylon St is demolished. The same year; an essay; A Room of One's Own by Virginia Woolf is published. The text employs a fictional narrator to discuss the idea of women and fiction (both as subjects and authors) but is largely viewed as non-fiction.

xxxvi A building; Battersea Power Station is completed. A war breaks out. An industrial area; Battersea is heavily bombed. A company; Morgan Crucible begins to turn out munitions for the war effort on a site just west of Battersea Bridge, formerly the boatyard of the London Steamboat Company.

xxxvii It was the present moment.

AM You don't like your middle name either do you?
 EJ Not much no
 AM Jessie
 EJ No
 AM Its after your grandma isn't it
 EJ After my grandma
 Haha
 EJ Haha it's odd now that you're doing this Alice
 AM Yeah
 EJ Cos the other day, oh i was doing something, think I was
 filing them or something, and i thought "I want Alice here"
 She'd do them
 AM Right! Lets do the filing
 and this one

 (*filing noises*)

 Did you used to do the filing when you were a hairdresser?
 EJ I did
 AM Or just hairs
 EJ Manicuring, beauty culture, when I think....
 AM But that was at college, you didn't do it at ...
 EJ I did! in the salon
 AM You did, Ok
 EJ Sloane Street where I worked, yeah....God
 AM Must a been a lot of posh ladies in there
 EJ There were. One day a week...
 AM nmmm
 EJ There was one day when the nannies used to, were allowed
 to bring in the children
 AM mmm
 EJ It was they were only allowed to come into the salon once
 on this certain day
 AM mmm
 EJ And the children all had their hair done, and the nannies
 they were called used to bring them in I can remember that
 now!
 AM That must have been a fun day
 EJ Yep, it was nice, and every one of us had a senior male,
 above us, over us
 AM Why?
 EJ Well I don't know why but er the House of Jean it was called

AM Jean?
 EJ Yeah
 AM Like the French
 EJ Yeah
 AM Was he French?
 EJ He was I think yeah. I can remember all that, don't suppose
 it's there now
 AM It might be^{xxxviii}
 EJ Cos it was a very very nice place, lovely
 AM And then you stopped working there after,
 when the war came
 EJ I did
 AM Where did you go and work then? In the munitions?
 EJ mmm I did, I had to! either that or you went out and
 AM Farmed?
 EJ I worked, went into the Morgan Crucible^{xxxix} company
 and I used to sit and um OW!
 AM Oh sorry! What were you making there?
 EJ Oh I wasn't making them, oh it was some little instrument
 that went in the tanks
 AM Ok
 EJ It was funny enough I think cos it was David worked in the
 tanks
 AM Oh so you were making the bits for the tanks he was in
 EJ Yeah haha! and then the war came on yep
 AM So you all lived in Battersea all throughout the war?
 EJ Well mainly most of the war, Battersea rise
 AM Till you got blitzed
 EJ Near the park

{1953}^{xl}

Jessie Ooooh! she's the Queen Mary!

(*throaty chuckle*)

(*noise bounces*)

^{xxxviii} I know that it's not. I went there to look once, when I first moved to London.

^{xxxix} A company; Morgan Crucible takes over a site; on the west side of Battersea Bridge, previously home to the London Steamboat Company boatyard.

^{xl} A grandmother; Queen Mary (May of Teck) dies ten weeks before the coronation of her granddaughter; Queen Elizabeth II.

VW so that even now we know not why we go upstairs, or why we come down again, our most daily movements are like the passage of a ship on an unknown sea

{2015}^{xli}

AM S' nice isn't it
JA Tis nice innit. Haha. Thats very kind, thank you very much.

She lived with like the three generations on was it the top floor or the middle floor? Middle floor, Mum and Dad were on like, the ground floor with the kitchen lounge, and they lived on the next floor up, and they had their own little kitchen and that up there

AM What all of them?
JA Yes, and then the attic rooms, I slept in and Martin did in the attic rooms, in the roof, but it was nice it was like having two families in the house sometimes, I used to go up and er spend time with Great Gran upstairs.

AM So did she live there all the time?
JA No, I mean we, I think I was only six when we left, in fact, to me its, I thought they had been there a long time but they had lived in Ellerton Road, was it?

AM So that's just the next road up. Yep.
JA And there was lots of family round there but, I don't think she was actually there that long but at that age...

AM Yeah
JA I just remembered her so I assumed she's always been there but erm well its a bit y'know Victorian isn't it? living mothers and others and grandmothers and all that sort of....

AM Yeah
JA We didn't, we didn't own the house it was rented

AM No of course not
Jessie Ooh Yes! Of course
JA Yeah she was always very hearty is how I describe her, she was not a feeble frail soul at all, haha

AM That'll be the Guinness wouldn't it?

JA Yes haha

AM So, what she had that for breakfast?

JA I don't know probably for lunchtime but she always had her stout she called it

AM Ha
JA Aha. I must find, I'm pretty sure I've got this jewel, which if it was her grandmother's is quite old. I can picture it it's brown and it's on a little gold link, must get it out...

AM Well probably um, well I don't know

JA But obviously quite old

AM But very old

JA hmm

AM Did she wear a hat?

JA Don't remember that, I just remember her wearing black and great big wooffy petticoats on her skirt that had pockets in them

AM For the sweeties?

JA Hmmm

AM And she'd sit on the stairs?

JA Yeah sat on the stairs, I don't know why, and I used sit next to her

AM Haha

JA Aha

AM Sounds like fun

JA Ha! She was fun, Gran was quite a character she was

Jessie Ooh yes, of course!

AM Yeah

JA Oh yes quite a bold, sort of strong lady I would describe her as

VW for the poet has a butcher's face and the butcher a poet's; nature, who delights in muddle and mystery, so that even now we know not why we go upstairs, or why we come down again, our most daily movements are like the passage of a ship on an unknown sea

AM So when did her husband die? Do you remember him?

JA I don't, I don't

AM When did he die....

Jessie Couldn't tell you

JA Don't know when he died

Jessie But she knew dad

Ken Yes

Jessie Couldn't see him because she was blind

Ken Yes

Jessie Aha ha, poor old granny

(womans voice in background murmurs)

(noise bounces)

{1959}^{xlii}

VW Nature, who has played so many queer tricks upon us, making us so unequally of clay and diamonds, of rainbow and granite, and stuffed them into a case, often of the most incongruous, for the poet has a butcher's face and the butcher a poet's;

AM **Who's this one?**

JA **Don't know**

AM **Who's this one**

JA **I don't know**

Has she got a hat one? Look at her face, her face is quite strong

VW for the poet has a butcher's face and the butcher a poet's; nature, who delights in muddle and mystery, so that even now we know not why we go upstairs, or why we come down again, our most daily movements are like the passage of a ship on an unknown sea

AM **Don't think that's a hat, think it's her hair,**

JA **Is it wooffed up? Yeah**

AM **This one's got a hat on**

Who's this?

VW these selves of which we are built up, one on top of another, as plates are piled high on a waiter's head, have attachments elsewhere, sympathies, little constitutions and rights of their own, call them what you will (and for many of these things there is no name) so that one will only come if it is raining, another in a room with green curtains, another when Mrs Jones is not there, another if you can promise it a glass of wine - and so on;

{2015}^{xliii}

AM **But nowadays of course, its a very expensive area**

JA **Oh I know, it's changed so much**

Jessie **I'm a Londoner but I don't know anything about London**

AM **Oh my god, literally I looked up all the addresses, let me get my notebook, all the addresses that she lived in and they've all been knocked down**

VW and the sailors at their mast-head ask, pointing their glasses to the horizon; is there land or is there none? to which, if we are prophets, we make answer "Yes"; if we are truthful we say "No"

xlii A grandmother; Ethel Jessie dies April in Wandsworth. A great-grandmother Jessie Mary-Ann Hart dies June in Wandsworth. She is ninety-four.

xliii It was the present moment.

{2015}^{xliv}

AM **You wouldn't know Battersea now**

VW and the sailors at their mast-head ask, pointing their glasses to the horizon; is there land or is there none? to which, if we are prophets, we make answer "Yes"; if we are truthful we say "No"

JA **Well its become trendy isn't it?**

AM **Not trendy, just exceptionally**

JA **Expensive**

AM **Wealthy, but at the same time, really rundown in parts as well**

JA **Is it?**

AM **Yeah but then they're gonna re do, you know they're gonna do a multi million pound development at the pp power station but like**

JA **They've been talking about that for ages haven't they**

AM **But like, huge, its gonna have its own tube stop, its gonna change, I mean they're gonna change the whole thing, and its gonna be so expensive. Shame really**

JA **They're gonna keep the building? The base of it?**

AM **mmmm look at this**

JA **Quarter**

AM **Its not, its like, its gross isn't it**

JA **God, the world's finest retailers, restaurants, the old power station**

AM **It's not for people like us**

Jessie **Ooooh! she screamed Mary!**

(throaty chuckle)

(noise bounces)

JA **Global launch exhibition details....this is the problem with London isn't it?**

AM **Well of course it is**

JA **Everything's so crazily expensive**

AM **Because foreign investors buy all the flats and then**

JA **I know!**

AM **And people can't afford to live in them**

JA **Kuala Lumpar and places**

AM **I know its something thats decided it needs to have a global launch is clearly not aimed at people living in London is it?**

xliv A building: Battersea Power Station is being redeveloped into luxury flats.

JA It's really annoying,
Haha
AM Yeah, don't think Jessie would like this
JA Oh no
AM Yeah so it, they're saying it's going to have such a huge
impact on the area
JA Dubai, Shanghai, Beijing, Hong Kong, its sick-making isn't it?
AM Yeah, I think its going to be the biggest development in
London for
ah
It's gonna be bigger than that Olympic Park thing, its gonna
be huge
JA And there'll be more people who are all buying the
property and nobody can afford it here can they?
AM No.....no
VW For what more terrifying revelation can there be than that
it is the present moment?

(noise bounces)

Jessie Now you talk
Man No I'm talking to you er
Jessie You are
Man To what do you attribute your long life?
Jessie A Good 'usband and a good table ha ha!

That's that.

Quotes from Virginia Woolf are taken from the following sources;

Orlando; A Biography (1928)

A Room of One's Own (1929)

and Hermione Lee's biography of Virginia Woolf, which includes excerpts from many diaries, letters and notebooks.

Quotes from Charlotte Brontë are taken from;

Jane Eyre; An Autobiography (1841, published under the pseudonym Currer Bell)
as quoted in Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*.

This text is printed in Baskerville and **Futura**.

Commissioned by the Jerwood Charitable Foundation to accompany
An Unreliable Witness, 2015.

The music featured in the audio is an original composition by Alice May Williams
based on *Farewell My Trim Built Wherry*
from *The Waterman* (c1775) by Charles Dibdin,
the sheet music of which is available royalty free at the British Library.

Laser engraving and CNC milling provided by Machines Room, London.
Fabric printing from FabPad, University of East London.

With thanks to Camden Archives, Wandsworth Heritage Services,
London Metropolitan Archives, British Library,
Oliver Fuke and Hannah Pierce,
Jennifer Boyd, Jane Laurie, Gareth Owen Lloyd, MoreUtopia!,
Mum, Nan, Ken, Virginia Woolf and Jessie Jane Ayers.

