

Personal Memories of The Evode Group



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**1938 -1943 Dr Simon's first secretary at Evode
1963 -1968 Secretarial**



Service: 1938-1943 & 1963-1968

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EVODE - MY MEMORIES OF THE EARLY DAYS

In the year 1938 I started working at Evode (which was then known as Dove Chemical Works Ltd). At that time most of the work seemed to consist of making polishes, shoe and floor polishes. The firm had previously been known as Spic and Span Polishes Ltd., and was, I believe run in conjunction with Lotus Ltd.

When I started work there I well remember that there were just a few girls standing at long tables in a large room - this was in Glover Street, just off the Stone road and a short distance from Gaol Square. Large containers of polish were heating and the girls were filling out tin after tin with the polish. Mr John Forman, one of the directors was in charge and appeared to be constantly supervising the procedure. One girl who worked there for many years was called Lily Locke and she seemed to be in charge of the other few girls. The secretary of the firm at this time was a Mrs Irene Wood. Mr George Rowlands was the local rep. For polishes. At this time the manufacture of chemical products had only recently been introduced - hence the change of name to Dove Chemical Works Ltd. Dr H Simon had only been in this country for a short time, having escaped from Hitler's clutches. He had been a director of a large chemicals works in Berlin.

It was decided that Dr Simon should now have a secretary. When I went for my interview I was first of all seen by Mr Forman and a Mr Clipstone from Lotus Ltd. Dr Simon was then called in and eventually I was offered the job. I was later told that I would be acting as secretary to Dr Simon. Previously I had been working as a short-hand typist at a large local garage and though happy there I had no chance of promotion. This job was very different but quite a challenge. I had difficulty at first understanding the Doctor. However, in a little while I think we both came to understand each other very well and I well remember a remark of his one day "Sometimes I think you know better what I want to say than I know myself"! If any technical difficulty arose the Doctor would talk it over with Mr Forman, who, of course, spoke fluent German. The Doctor had a small office down the end of the building and I shared a large office with Mr Forman and Mrs Wood at this time. This was just inside the main door of the building and opened into the large room where the polishes were made. I understood Mrs Wood remained with the firm for many years until her retirement. Once I became well used to Dr Simon's ways and his speech I found him an excellent boss. He was a hard worker and a perfectionist, but was always very appreciative of one's efforts on his behalf. When Geoff, my fiancé, came on leave from the Army (after

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war broke out) he was always very willing to allow me a day off to go out somewhere with him.

Incidentally I do remember Cyril Lawton coming to Dove Chemical Works and being trained by the Doctor as his first laboratory assistant and as far as I can recall he was still there when I eventually had to leave.

In 1939, of course, the War broke out and eventually both Dr Simon and Mr Forman were taken away for internment because of their German origins. Mr Forman had a German mother and an English father and had lived in Germany for some years during his boyhood. The doctor went with minimum of fuss and he said to the police who came to the works for him - "You are only doing your duty" We all felt extremely sad when this happened and looking back I find it difficult to remember just how we carried on. Fortunately, we did - due largely to the efforts of Mr Clipstone and Mrs Wood. It was not too long before the Doctor and Mr Forman were back with us. The Doctor had been interned in a camp at Huyton, near Liverpool and Mr Forman had been in Peel on the Isle of Man. I wrote several letters at that time to Dr Simon as one did in war-time to cheer people up a little.

Shortly after Dr Simon's release and his return to the company the solicitors of a firm called Dove Wailes Bitumastic Ltd. were in contact with the directors had requested that the company should change its name because of confusion over the similarity of the name and the fact that they were producing some similar products. Apparently they had been established for a considerable number of years.

I do recall that we were all asked by the Doctor to "put our thinking caps on" and come up with suggestions for a new name. The final decision was that the firm should be called "EVODE" (in other words - "Dove" round the other way with an 'e' on the end of the name). This new name was then registered and, of course, has remained to this day.

About this time the firm were told it was imperative that they moved away from Glover Street because of its close proximity to the Gas Works - a safety measure in war-time. Eventually the firm moved to a three storey building in Stone Road, near the junction with Eccleshall Road. This is now know, I believe, as Manhattan Design. Premises were naturally very difficult to obtain in war-time and this building was far from ideal. Being on three separate floors made things difficult in many respects.

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I shared an office on the first floor with a very pleasant girl who had recently joined this firm as a junior short-hand typist, being two or three years younger. Several new representatives had also been taken on and I remember a well-qualified man called Mr Fishburn who was appointed as Sales Manager. Another Scottish gentleman called Mr McPhee was taken on as a representative for Scotland, and there were a few others, but I am afraid that their names escape me although I do remember that orders did not come in from them with quite the same frequency. Mr Rowlands, the Stafford man was acting in our particular area.

The firm was now expanding and I believe financially sound and several men were engaged on a part-time basis (they worked shifts at St. George's Hospital in the town). They were taken on to help out with orders for Evode Frost Protective, which was now in great demand during the war. Large orders were received from all over the country for this product and also Mellitol, etc. Polishes were no longer produced and it was purely a Chemicals Works.

I remember quite well that about this time I received a substantial increase in my salary and was now on good remuneration, this was why I felt the firm were doing well financially and were really progressing well after quite a struggle in earlier years.

Dr Simon had some idea of having a brochure printed, enumerating the various products which Evode now manufactured. A few members of staff were therefore sent down to a local photographer named Bertram Sinkinson - he was actually the main photographer in Stafford at that time. I well remember Dr Simon saying to us with a big smile on his face "with photographs such as this on our brochure I am sure we should get orders worth thousands of pounds!" Actually I never saw any such brochure and maybe the idea was not carried out after all.



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A sad incident I recall was when the Doctor came in one morning with his hands heavily bandaged. Apparently a young maid employed by Dr & Mrs Simon at this time was rather careless and his elder daughter's nightie had caught fire. He had dashed to the rescue and in putting out the flames had suffered some rather nasty burns to his hands. Fortunately the healing process did not seem unduly long.

Another incident I remember - this time a happy one - was the morning Dr Simon came into the office all smiles and announced that his wife had given birth to a son His jocular remark was "Now we have an Englishman in the family at last!"

As time elapsed it appeared that Dr Simon and Mr Forman had some doubts about the integrity of Mr Fishburn and his complete loyalty to the firm. I know I was told that if I was ever on my own in the office and Mr Fishburn approached me I was not to allow him any access to our filing system, no matter how persuasive he might be. I did have rather an embarrassing moment one day but stood firm and Mr Fishburn finally realised that he would not get any information. His manner changed from friendly to rather "frosty" - before this he had always been quite a charmer! Later he actually left the firm and joined another chemical firm in the London area.

It was evident that the fears of Dr Simon and Mr Forman had been justified. In the case of the Doctor I was always of the opinion that he was quite a good judge of character.

Time went by and the war dragged on. I reached the age of 21 years and because I was not deemed to have a reserved occupation I was sent my conscription papers. This meant that I would have to attend an interview in the town and following this would have to join either the Land Army, Munitions, Army (A.T.S.) or Air Force (W.A.A.F.). I chose the A.T.S. And a medical examination soon followed. The year was 1943. Dr Simon was particularly annoyed about this and maintained that Evode were supplying various products for the war effort. However, although he made an appeal to the Government Department concerned, it did no good. I subsequently heard that I had passed my medical A1 and was therefore called up on the 12th March 1943 and informed that I should report to Hermitage Army Camp, Wrexham, at a certain time, as per the enclosed Railway warrant.

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Naturally I felt sad that my days at Evode were numbered, for I had enjoyed my time there and, of course, I recently had a good pay increase! It was a bit of a shock to the system to know that my pay in the Army would just be 12/6d per week, with of course, full board and uniform provided.

I travelled around quite a lot during my service life but on my three-monthly leaves when I was at home again I called at Evode to see my colleagues. Before the war

ended - in December 1944

I was married to Geoff Wilkes (S/Sgt. Wilkes as he was by then). Some members of the Stafford Royal Artillery Battery had come home quite unexpectedly to re-equip with heavy artillery. By this time I was in Northern Ireland, but with great difficulty I managed to get home and we were married shortly after Christmas by special licence at St. Paul's Church Stafford. Soon afterwards we both went our separate ways. I returned to Northern Ireland and Geoff to Europe and the War, of course, went on until the summer of 1945.



Evode continued to do well and after the War were able to obtain a brand new factory on Common Road where they still are today. When my daughter and son were grown up I did return to Evode to work. Although the Personnel Manager did try to persuade me to take a full-time job I was adamant that I only wanted a part-time secretarial job. Quite soon I was offered a part-time job, which I accepted, because I only worked 19/20 hours. Most of my time was spent in Customer Service working for Clive Beard, who later emigrated to Canada. I did also help out on some occasions in the laboratories - working for John Chard.

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I did not have much contact with Dr Simon or Mr Forman on my return, as things were very different, of course, but I did meet them from time to time and have a chat. I was amazed to see how the firm had grown and certainly very pleased to see such progress, which I felt was well deserved.

Needless to say I am sad to see just how much things are altering. Not for the better, unfortunately, but that is the way of the world nowadays.

Notes taken during a conversation 29 May 2001

My father worked on the railway and we came to Stafford from Swansea when I was about 12 years old. Stafford was full of shoe factories, all over the North end of the town, Lotus, Jennings, little factories all around Marsh Street. Of course they have all gone now. I had been to secretarial college on the Newport Road for a year before starting work. It was a private college and my mum paid for me to go

In 1938, when I was 18 years old, I answered an advert in the local paper, I had been working for about a year at a garage on the Lichfield Road when I thought I could do with something else. I was interviewed at Glover Street by Mr Forman and Mr Clipstone, Dr Simon came in on the interview, but he only stayed briefly, his English wasn't too good then. I had only been at Evode a couple of weeks when the girl who was senior to me at the garage left. The garage asked me if I would like to go back and take her job, it was a promotion, more money. When I mentioned this at Evode they asked me if I would like to stay, I said yes and they gave me a pay rise to match the money I would have got at the garage. I didn't regret staying

Sometimes I would baby-sit for Mrs Simon when they went out. Mrs Simon would always leave me a lovely supper, of course in those days they never gave you money for baby-sitting, it wasn't done. Instead you got sweets or something like that. When I baby-sat it was the first time I had ever seen a duvet, we had sheets and blankets then. I would say to the two little girls "Is this all you have on the bed?" "Yes" they replied. "and are you warm?" I would ask "Yes" they would say as they bounced happily around on the bed!!

When the girls would walk from St Johns Road down Crescent Road, people would ask "Who are these little girls dressed exactly the same

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with little black hats and black coats with brass buttons like Army great coats. They were always dressed identically. I said "I know who they are, they are my bosses children – Marion and Petra" In later years when I went to work at Common Road Barrie Liss said he would endeavour bring his wife, Marion to see me, but I never met up with her again which is sad.

When Marion's nightie caught fire she would have been about 7 (I was about 19 then), the Doctor came into work with his hands all bound up. I remember he was so proud when his son was born.

The Simon family lived in St Johns Road in the early days, not at Thark, that was later. Dr Simon had lost a lot of money in Germany when he came here, he was head of a chemical works in Berlin and he came out through a devious route through many countries to get here and he left a lot of possessions behind including a lovely house but he was very astute and saw what was happening in Germany at that time. I think that it was something that he wanted to forget, he was the sort of man who, once he was here counted his blessings that he was still alive and had his family. He must have lost a lot of friends. Although he was very clever, he was never bombastic and had a lovely sense of humour and was quite generous. I did like taking dictation from him

I can remember a funny incident, it was about 1941 and we had a really bad winter, it was very severe with lots of snow and people had to walk down the main road. I lived in Eastlands with mum and dad, and as I walked down the Wolverhampton Road past Crescent Road, Dr Simon came out on skis, he said "Sorry Enid, I cannot offer you a lift this morning!" When I told people about Dr Simon on his skis, they never believed me, but he went to work a couple of times on his skis when the snow was bad

My work involved a certain amount of filing. I have a good memory, even now, and I'm 80! But then I had an exceptional memory. I could remember letter heads and when they wanted a quotation I could go straight to it. Mostly I did dictation from Dr Simon, sometimes a bit from John Forman. I would help the Doctor with words, but not technical words which he would lapse into German and John Forman would help him

Sometimes if I was a bit late finishing something Dr Simon would come and say "Are you nearly ready to go home?" And if I said that I was finishing something off he would say "I wait and he would go back into

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his office. One day when I was alone typing he came and stood in the back of the office and said "One day I am sure that typewriter will burst into flames!" He was full of funny sayings!

We always called Dr Simon 'Dr Zimon' even though it was spelt Simon. He was a very nice man when I got to know him, I must admit I was a bit in awe of him at first, but once I understood him and his ways he was very nice, he could be brusque or abrupt but he was OK. It was a nice family firm with a nice atmosphere and I think that's why everyone pulled together to try and get it going. I loved it once I was settled. I don't recall doing anything for Christmas or socially but one lunchtime I did go to the Swan Hotel for a meal with Mrs Wood and Mr Fishburn

I can remember Cyril Lawton starting, he was Dr Simon's first lab-boy and Dr Simon trained him. I can remember the tables of polish tins in the factory, and singing, always they were singing and John Forman was always dashing hither and thither doing a lot of supervising. Things were tough and they did struggle in the early days until things got better and they were financially sound. When they changed the name from Dove to Evode we all were asked to think of a name, but I think Dr Simon and John Forman came up with Evode

Lily Locke worked in the factory supervising the girls, I remember her saying that one girl, Kathleen, was pregnant, and when you said to her "You're pregnant" the girl denied it. Of course she was pregnant but she covered it very well but she had to leave. Lily was small, brusque and full of energy, I got on well with Lily. I can remember May Swanson, she was a very nice person who filled out the polish, also Nora Nicklin.

Mrs Wood and her husband Jimmy lived on the Tixall Road, one evening Betty Simkin (who was my junior) and I went to her house for the evening but the weather got so bad we had to stay overnight. Mrs Wood worked there for many many years. She ran the Company with the help of Mr Clipstone from Lotus during the War. She was very efficient.

Mrs Wood, Mr Forman, and myself were sent separately into the town to have our photograph taken the Doctor wanted to produce a brochure with our pictures on it, the factory girls didn't go. I don't think the brochure was ever made

When we had to move to Stone Road it was a funny 3 storey building and it was very inconvenient but it was the only place that they could get things were so difficult during the war (such a difference to the new place

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that was later built on Common Road) - All these men working on Frost Protective, we even had men from St George's hospital, about 12 of them, they were shift workers there I think they were nurses and probably glad of the extra money. I would pass the men and say "Good morning". I can remember the big orders coming in for Frost Protective, they worked all hours, it was a really big seller once the War broke out

I don't know what the Company would have done without Mrs Wood during the War. It's funny how some things are so clear it's like they happened yesterday. 2 policemen came to Glover Street and said to Dr Simon "We're afraid we have to take you for internment" They hated having to do this but said it wouldn't be for long, they were very sorry. But Dr Simon said "You are only doing your duty" He was very philosophical. When they came for Mr Forman a few weeks later he didn't know why he had to go he said "I have been with this company for some years and my father is English" But of course they took him. I remember feeling quite shocked, but I think that they were expecting it. Once they returned the Company really got going, but Dr Simon was very careful about protecting his formulations.

We would send parcels to Dr Simon while he was interned at Huyton, we would put chocolate which you couldn't really spare as it was rationed, some sweets and some pots of chicken pastes - something for him to put on his bread and butter, sometimes we would also send a little cake. I would send my own parcels out of my own money, and I may also have contributed to joint parcels from the office. I remember mum saying "What are you going to send, things are so short?" I was so sorry that Dr Simon was interned

I used to go and sit with Else Forman when John was interned. She lived in Park Avenue which was close to Eastlands. They'd not been married long, and as she was German people were not too friendly with her which was sad as she was a very gentle person. I would take my knitting and we would both knit together. I met her mother and sister when they came over from Germany to visit her. I also met John's parents when they too came over from Germany to see him. When my Auntie came to see us, I was walking down Wolverhampton Road with her and my mother when John Forman pulled over and gave us a lift in his car. My auntie was quite taken with him "Isn't he good looking, isn't he charming" He was a very charming man.

I was conscripted on 12 March 1943. I could choose the Army WAAF's, Land Army or munitions. I chose the Army (ATS). I was engaged to

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Geoff Wilkes by then, I would be taking dictation from the Doctor and he would look out of the window at Stone Road and if Geoff was walking up the Road he would say "I am looking out of the window and see your young man is waiting for you, are you nearly finished?" Geoff liked Dr Simon.

Mrs Wood said to the Doctor "Enid will look very nice in her uniform" and Dr Simon replied angrily "I'm sure she will but I prefer her in her Civvies working here" He appealed against my conscription but wasn't successful he didn't see why I could not be a 'Reserved Occupation' and the Company was doing so much for the War Effort. Many of my friends in other companies such as Burgess didn't go they were 'Reserved Occupation'

I worked in Personnel selection I worked alone and went all over the country. I didn't really like working in London at the War Office, travelling on the Tube, it was quite lonely. I preferred working on camps where they had dances and more of a social life

Geoff was stationed, in Europe, in the Stafford Battery Royal Artillery and thought I was in Matlock Bath when he was in Stafford stocking up, he went home and his mum said "It's a shame about Enid" I had been posted to Downpatrick in Northern Ireland. I couldn't get a direct boat home and had to come back on a boat which chugged all night up the Clyde, and then got a train from Glasgow arriving home 6pm Christmas evening. We were married at St Paul's Church by special licence on 29 December 1944, I was married in borrowed finery!! Dr Simon and his wife sent us a wedding present of a tall lamp

We had a couple of days together then Geoff went to Welbeck Abbey, Worksop, it was terrible weather at that time of year, rain and snow I telegraphed for an extension of leave as Geoff was in England, I got my leave then applied for another week and got it. I was put up in a hotel in Worksop and Geoff would go off to work early in the morning and I had to amuse myself for the day reading and knitting before I went back to Ireland. Geoff was later stationed in Belgium and then Germany, we didn't see each other again for over a year.

When I went back to work Evode was then at Common Road and had grown so much. I had been working at the Inland Revenue when I saw the job which was advertised in the paper and thought I would like to go back to Evode, Mr Knowles came to our house in Rising Brook to interview me. I was offered a full time job but I really only wanted to

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work part-time. A couple of weeks later a letter arrived offering me a part-time job. When I went into the Doctors office to take some things in, he was writing something down and just muttered "Don't put them there, - put them over there" I said "I am sorry Doctor but I have not been here long" He looked up and said "What are you doing here? Why did no-one tell me you were here?" I think John Forman forgot to pass the message on that I was going back Dr Simon used to say to people at Common Road

"Do you know who this is?" and they would say "Yes, it's Enid" then he would proudly say "She was my first secretary, the very first one that I had in this country"

I worked in Personnel with Mr Knowles, he was a very pleasant man. I did 19 hours a week working afternoons. I would get the bus from Burton's in the town up to Common Road. Geoff would give me a lift, he was working at Venables in charge of Maintenance, he had a little gang under him and they were in charge of the kilns, garage and old machinery.

As well as working in Personnel I would move around. I worked in the Laboratories with John Chard. In the Flooring section I did a few letters for John Forman. I also worked in the same office as Pauline Mold in Customer Service for Clive Beard. It was so busy Mr Knowles said would I go and work for Clive while Pauline was away for a fortnights holiday. After the holiday Clive said to Mr Knowles could he have me for another week, - and then another week. Then he got a typewriter, and then a desk, he said he wanted me there permanently and that's how I ended up there! John Birtles and John Gooch also worked in Customer Service under Clive Beard – and later – Maurice Chard. When Clive Beard emigrated to Canada with his family Maurice Chard took over in Customer Services.

We went to a dance at the old Top of the World about 1965, I remember talking to Dr Simon there. I was able to take Geoff and we sat up in the balcony, I think it was a Christmas Dance.

My son Stephen started work at Evode when he had done his GCSE's at school. He started in the Labs and was back and forth to college in the evenings, Wolverhampton, Walsall for about 6 years. He then went over to Marketing. He married and has two children, Peter and Helen and has been with the Company for 33 years.

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My daughter, Glynis, lives in East Leake, near Loughborough, Leicestershire and for the past few years has been Rector of the village (responsible for 4 other churches in nearby villages). Glynis and her husband have two sons, Philip and Timothy.

Sadly my dear husband died just six years ago – but fortunately we had 52 happy years together – and a really good retirement taking several sequence dance clubs for age concern, and making money for charities.

I did enjoy my time with Evode, Dr Simon was lovely man a real gentleman. I was very sorry that the War came along, given the choice I would never have left, and the Doctor was so sad that I had to leave.