

**RECOLLECTIONS OF GASTON VIGNAUD
RECORDED IN THE CELLAR OF PATISSERIE BERTAUX
ON 13 JULY 1988 TWO DAYS BEFORE M VIGNAUD'S RETIREMENT**

I was born in Shaftesbury Avenue at the French Hospital but I was brought up in France because my mother died when I was young. I came back to London in 1926 to work for my father who had come to London in 1909 to work for M Bertaux senior. My father took over the business in 1924 with a partner. My father died in 1952 and I carried on with my wife.

In 1950 we moved the bakery to the third floor and used this basement for storage and for the staff. Originally the bakery was in the basement with the coke fired ovens under the pavement. They were fired from the coal cellar which was the next vault along. All the baking was done in these ovens – from 7am to 5pm with a break of one hour for lunch.

During the War my father stayed in London. He managed with rationing. I was away in the Army. He stayed open with shorter hours. Even the coke was rationed.

Staff? At one time we had eight pastry cooks with my father, and a porter to clean up and fire the oven. We had a considerable wholesale business and supplied Mdm Tussauds. We had two tricycle boys on deliveries – later we had a van.

M Bertaux when he started in 1871 lived in the two upper floors of this house. My father knew Bertaux from Paris and came to work for him here though he had not intended to stay. Yes, I knew the Martellis across the road at the Savoyard and also Mrs Rickards. And the Restaurant D'Italie when they changed the name. I also dealt with all the old businesses – Benoit Bulke, the Bourbons at Epicerie Francais, Bifulco.....

Now, we have only a few cousins in France. I'm retiring but still remember every detail of the business from when I started in 1926 all the time to now (1988) except for during the War when I was in the French Army, and a Prisoner of War in Liepzig for five years. I came back in 1945 – I was so glad to be back.

There were changes after the War. Then rationing stopped and we increased production. Electricity has made a big difference with machines and refrigeration. We used to buy ice in sacks. My father made ice cream for Mme Prunier in St James's with the ice packed round the machine. The dough for the croissants was originally kneaded by hand but machine is much easier.

Yes, we make the best croissants in London. It's very simple, we just use the best ingredients and always, always butter, not vegetable fat.

(After making this recording Gaston's wife, Vera, who had been shouting down the stairs telling him to hurry up as they were closing, came down the stairs. They were talking about their retirement in two days time and Gaston said - in his marked French accent - he was glad to retire: there were so many changes taking place in

Soho, he heard there would be a VD shop next door. Stupid, said Mme Vignaud,