

## Joe Sheeran - Transcript

*Audio quality – good.*

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**JS:** My name is Joe Sheeran, I'm an Irishman and I've lived all my life, well, most of it obviously, in Bradford.

**LMI:** Now Joe, your mum used to work for a famous mill owner.

**JS:** That's true, she worked for Denby's, Tong Park Hall, which is just above the factory, Denbirayne as it was called, the higher ground above the factory in its own grounds. The main entrance, which was two gates, a bit like Buckingham Palace, it was huge, it was a huge mansion. And I first encountered it when I was six, seven years of age, towards the back end of the war, I seem to remember. My mother worked there, she worked there daily, she went every day. But I had an aunt who lived in, and she was a housemaid. And so I was allowed to really wander around. They were very tolerant, I didn't understand how tolerant they were.

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**JS:** But I wandered round that house every time I was there. And I could make my own way there from Swain House where we lived, all the way down. I walked all the way down to Thackley Corner, then across the woods and up the street at the other side of the main road, Ottley Road, and up the street and into the field. Walked along the path to the field and then through the main gates and up to the house and went to the side entrance which was the servant's entrance.

**LMI:** So, who lived in the house?

**JS:** There was two brothers, sorry three brothers and a sister. There was Mr Harry, who was the oldest, big heavy white man. Mr Richard who was much slimmer than him and younger. Mr. John, who was the youngest. And then Miss Alice, who was the sister. And she really controlled the house, which as I say, was a very, very big house.

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**LMI:** And so your mum was a day servant and your aunt was a live in servant?

**JS:** Yeah.

**LMI:** So what kind of things did they do?

**JS:** Well, I mean, it would be dusting every day obviously, cleaning properly each room in its turn and my mother did a bit of cooking. They didn't have a main cook. They did get one eventually, well they had one but she left, and my mother then was recruited to do some cooking as well, so it was a bit like that.

**LMI:** So, as a six or seven year old you made your own way over to Tong Park to the house? So, what did it feel like being in that house? What was the impression that it had on you?

**JS:** Well to say this honestly, I wasn't impressed. I wasn't impressed with anything at that age! But I liked it, I liked its makeup, the way it was laid out, which was in a square. And the main entrance was at the front of the square and servant's entrance was towards the back of the house. It was a huge, huge house. And the lower floor... it didn't have a cellar, or anything like that, but the lower floor had different rooms off.

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**JS:** One was a lounge it was called, and it was where they had, I think must have had parties, celebrations. There was a grand piano in the middle of the floor in there. Then there was a room called the morning room, and that was just an ordinary kind of sitting room, but it's where when people got up out of bed they went in there, and they'd read the paper and that kind of thing, you know. And then there were other rooms around. And then the bedrooms were on... had a balcony. Not each bedroom, but all of them had a wooden balcony which was again square. And different people had their own bedrooms all the way around. And I used to wander around and I'd open doors and look in and see what was going on, you know. I was a nosy character! I enjoyed it enormously. I thought it was really good. None of my contemporaries had that opportunity, you know, [to] look into a big house like that. Owned by a quite wealthy family. Mill owners, in fact, who were really quite generous towards their servants, and people who worked for them. And very friendly. I mean one Christmas I remember they were without a cook, and my mother was asked to go and prepare the Xmas lunch, the Xmas dinner. But then the buses stopped at 6 o'clock on Christmas day, as you're probably aware. When it had got time to go home, Mr Harry, the oldest of the brothers, put us into his car and away he came, up to Swain House, all the way to Swain House and dropped us off. And we were very grateful to him. And my being in that house was because my mother was in there. And she was working all day long while I was roaming around, poking my nose in here there and everywhere and getting to know the place and I did... I got to know it very well.

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**LMI:** What about the grounds around the outside?

**JS:** The grounds outside there, they had a garden where they grew food. And they had a gardener and an assistant gardener - two men. The garden at the front was decorous, it was well laid out, lawn and plants, and what have you. Flowers and all this, very very lovely. To look at the house from the front of it, as you go in through the gates, the main gates, and it was drive down from the main gates to the house itself. To look at, it was just... a mansion. It was huge.

**LMI:** And how far away from the mill was their house?

**JS:** It was above the higher ground. Not so you could see the house... well you could at some stage, you could see, [if] you were going to Otley, on the bus, for example, started to climb Hollins Hill, you could see it through the trees, just... you know, the outline of it through the trees, you couldn't see it plainly. And the mill itself was at the bottom of Hollins Hill, on the left-hand side, just before the hill started to rise. Then on that ground above the mill was the house, quite a distance from the mill itself.

**LMI:** So what did they do at the mill?

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**JS:** They were dyers, I think that's what, yeah, it was a dye mill. So they were known as **Denbirayne**, that was their commercial name.

**LMI:** And did it employ a lot of people?

**JS:** Oh, I think it did, yeah, they had quite a number of people working in that mill. It was a good size. It was in off, just, just, just in off the road. The way into it was a gateway really and it would begin immediately at the edge of the public footpath. And in through the main entrance, and the house was sort of on just on one side there.

**LMI:** So at the house could you actually see the mill down below?

**JS:** No, no, not really, not really. No, you couldn't see the mill. It was low down, like down, almost in a well, down below. I never went into the mill in all the time I was there. Never went into it. I never had the interest to want to see what was going on in there. Well, I know that they dyed materials, you know, and cloths and what have you.

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**LMI:** So there were the three brothers and a sister, were any of them married?

**JS:** No, not that I'm aware of, no. The three brothers lived in, no the three brothers did live in the house. The youngest, John, I think was, when I was there, at university, and he was living somewhere in the south. I'm not sure where. The other two brothers lived there, and the sister. And she was a housekeeper, she looked after the house, saw to its needs, as it were.

**LMI:** And is either the mill or the house are they still standing? Or are they gone?

**JS:** I'm not sure, I'm not... I've, you know, I've often thought 'I must go up and have a look.' because I think after they did go... they went eventually. I think Harry died, I think Richard wasn't far after him, or was it Richard died first and then Harry, I'm not sure which. Anyway, it was too big a house for a sister and one brother, so they left it and it was taken over by the educational authority. And it became the equivalent of a house for bad boys I've forgot what they used to call those... Penitential, something like that. I don't know. I don't know. But yeah, that's what happened to that house. It was huge, it was a big house.

**LMI:** Did it have a name?

**JS:** No it was just Tong Park Hall. They were the lords of the manor, as it were you know, there's a village, Tong Park village. And they owned the houses, there were cottages that were built in that, and they got rent every week, you know, from the villagers. And I'd reckon there'd be about 20 houses just in a row, terrace, and they were all occupied.

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**LMI:** So you have pretty fond memories of being there?

**JS:** Oh I do. I remember it well. It's full of memories. I didn't often see the owners, Richard and Harry, hardly ever. Occasionally Alice, as she was called. She would see that I got her dinner and all that kind of thing, you know, when I was there. My mother was doing her work, she was in the house doing the work. My aunt, she was about six foot two, she was massive. My dad used to...she used to come to our house on her day off, come to our house on Swain House Estate, and spend all the day there. And then if she wanted to go home at night, she'd need somebody to walk with her, so my dad used to walk with her. He wasn't all that tall and it was funny watching them going off. He was at the side of her and she was up there. But yeah, she was the maid servant that lived in there.

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**JS:** And they were good to her and she was certainly good to them. She worked very, very hard. But I didn't... I saw, when I was six or seven years of age, when I was that age I saw quite a lot of Miss Alice, because she used to come in into the kitchen, as it was. There was a kitchen and then next to it was a kind of a quite large dining space, which was called servants hall. So there's the servants kitchen and the servants hall. And she used to come in quite regularly to talk to my mother or talk to my aunt about this that and the other. She was at home all the time. I think Richard worked somewhere, but I'm not sure where, whether it was the mill or somewhere else, I'm not sure. And John as well, I'm not sure. I didn't have that kind of curiosity about where they worked or what have you, at that time. But it was a big, big house. I mean, in its own right it was splendid. It really was splendid. But as I say, many rooms. And lots of electric bell pushers, you know, all here there and everywhere. I counted them once over and I can't remember how many I counted, but I think it was more than 20.

**LMI:** So your mum could always be summoned?

**JS:** Yeah, and in the servants... or in the kitchen, rather, there was the bell.. the thing that told you that a bell was ringing, it used to shake like that, two rows of these things that responded to the bell push, wherever it was from. Which could have been anywhere in the house, you know, there were that many of them.

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**JS:** Yeah, and they were very good, they were very good to my mum, and to my aunt as well. They looked after my aunt and saw to it that she got all she needed. During the summertime

my aunt would go home to Ireland to see her mother while she was still living, and we did the same and had some great great great holidays.

**LMI:** Were there a lot of Irish young women in service at that time, Joe?

**JS:** I'm not sure, I would imagine they would be, because they would advertise in Ireland. I know that they did quite a bit of advertising for maidservants and for cooks and for chauffeurs and all the rest of it, you know, that would make up a household service. But a lot of people came from Ireland for jobs, they didn't have any work, no work in Ireland, you know. You had to be something special to get a job in Ireland, because the jobs weren't there anyway. That's why we were in Bradford.

Transcribed with Cockatoo