

Jean Garbutt – Transcript

Audio Quality : Background noise throughout

Focuses on job roles and management and workforce

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LMI: If I can ask your name, please?

JG: Jean Garbutt.

LMI: And Jean, I'm going to ask you some questions for Lost Mills and Ghost Mansions. We're going to use your information to create some archives... to create an archive, and to create some educational resources. Would that be ok?

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JG: It's perfect, I think it's great that it's going to be done because there's so much happened during that, you know, in that transition from... Asian people first came in like, what, the '60s?

LMI: Yes.

JG: Things have progressed incredibly since then. Sorry, carry on.

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LMI: No, it's ok, thank you. You're more than welcome to carry on at your pace. I don't have to ask the questions; you go with your flow. I was going to ask you, can you start off telling me about your mum's experience of the mills. Where she worked. What her job role was?

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JG: Well, she was, I think she said she was 14, she left school at 13. And her memory is... one of her memories is walking into the mill, up the stone steps. And if you go to that mill now, Lister's Mill, you can see the worn stone. You know, all those people, in clogs usually...

LMI: Yes.

JG: ...I don't know if she wore clogs. She said it was hard but she never indicated that it was frightening for her or anything. I think they were just getting better at looking after the children when she went. But she didn't stay all that long.

LMI: Good. Did she say how old she would have been?

JG: She would be 14 years old.

LMI: And do you remember which department she worked in? Or what she did? What was her title?

JG: Oh, I know it was to do with bobbins. Bobbin... I honestly can't remember the name of it now, but she had to see that the bobbins were all in place properly and cleaned and everything. And... They all had special names, you see, for all these things. I forgot a lot of them now. Where I worked, it was wool merchants and top makers. People used to say, 'What's a top maker?' You know, I'd try and explain it was like the way the wool was all in long skeins. And it's wound into a big round thing like that. So, I was... Oh god, 25 years. It was really good.

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LMI: And in terms of the wool merchants then, what did they do? What was their role at the Wool Exchange and how did that work?

JG: They were buying from Bradford and selling to Australia, South Africa. So...

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LMI: The mill owners in Bradford, did they come to the Wool Exchange as well and buy it from there?

JG: I think the mill owners were definitely at the Wool Exchange, yes. In fact, there's a photograph somewhere of them all on the Wool Exchange. It must have been the time when they were all wearing bowlers.

LMI: Right.

JG: And I know my boss was on one of them, but I think that was a bit later on in life. But yes, the mill owners, who... Some were regarded as good employers, and some were regarded as not so good.

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LMI: Are you able to remember the difference? Can you remember anybody, like, you know, saying who was good and why?

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JG: Erm, let me think. Well, my own boss. He wasn't a mill owner, but he was very caring of his staff, looking after us. But we heard the reverse.

LMI: Right.

JG: Some were still badly treated at their jobs. You know, long long hours sometimes. But things were beginning to improve by the time I was involved I think, you know.

LMI: Are we talking '70s?

JG: Let me see. Yes, that's right...I went to ...No! I went to work in the '50s. [1950] I left school at 15, that's it... so I was there until '75 or something like that, 1975.

LMI: And you were here at the Wool Exchange in Bradford in the city centre?

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JG: I was in the, you know where.... Little Germany.

LMI: Yes.

JG: Wonderful. Our offices were in Little Germany. So there were lots of German merchants. And they were beautiful buildings, you know. Ours was a beautiful building. Sadly it's been burnt down since. But that's where I worked, in Little Germany.

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LMI: In terms of your role in the office, what did you do there?

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JG: I started off as an office... just as a little runabout and tea maker, and... I was learning...you see, I went to grammar school and everything, but we didn't get... I had to go to night school to learn shorthand and typing...I did that at night. And so... I then was secretarial. And I also learned accountancy. But I never ever went for training for accountancy. I was taught by the people I worked with. When I think about it now, really doing the books for the firm, because... Mind you, as I say, he was a good boss, and he was very patient.

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LMI: What was his name?

JG: John Hardy. [?] A lovely chap. A really... very kind.

LMI: What was Bradford like in those days then? Especially '70s onward, when the mills were closing down, etc. How did it feel?

JG: I think there was a lot of upset about... of course people losing their... Well, no work. Because if a big mill closed you can imagine how many thousands, sometimes thousands of people are working at the mills. So it was a transition... a big... a time of change.

LMI: In terms of the Wool Exchange, how did that get affected then?

JG: How did that what?

LMI: How did the Wool Exchange get affected?

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JG: Well, it kept going... just kept going until... what would it be now, when Waterstones took it over? Must have been the... I think it was the 1990s.

LMI: Right.

JG: Something like that. But they did all the trading there, you know. They'd go back with their orders, get them off. It was just a different way of doing business in those days, you know.

LMI: Did you ever go?

JG: I... Go to the Wool Exchange? No, women were not allowed.

LMI: Women were not allowed?

JG: No!

LMI: If you needed to get in touch with your boss, what did you do?

JG: We had to ring up. We had to ring up and say, 'This is John Hardy & Company, will you put our number on the board please?'

LMI: Right.

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JG: We got a little man would say, 'Yes, ok', put the phone down, put our telephone number on the board and stick the board up.

LMI: Right.

JG: So everybody's head turned towards the board to see whose number it was that was in the newspaper.

LMI: Who you should call.

JG: That was the way it was done in those days.

LMI: In terms of clothes and uniform, was there was an expectation that you'd go to the office wearing certain types of clothes? Or dress in a certain way?

JG: It was never any... there was no rule at all about... Oh, we were offered... oh, they were sort of office coats. They'd have liked us to wear office coats but... there are three of us, three girls and we didn't really care for that. We would do it if... We did it for a little while but not long.

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JG: And the men could wear white coats as well. Because they were always handling the wool samples and things. So they wore white coats, which were sent off every week to be washed and starched and brought back.

LMI: Right.

JG: But we were just expected to be smart.

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LMI: Yes.

JG: And my boss's idea of smart was smart. He didn't... And he would say, when the mini skirt came in, 'Jean, that skirt is too short.'

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LMI: And his expectation had to be met.

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JG: Yeah. So, yeah, I knew a lot... got to know a lot of people. Because Bradford City Centre was just a mass of wool offices... wool merchants' offices and things. So, it was all... When I think back now, it was very good. And I learned a lot. I mean, imagine being taught by them! I went to the training for short-hand and typing, but...

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LMI: Yes. Everything else you learnt from the job?

JG: Everything else. Doing the books, I mean...

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LMI: Well, the thing is, it's by experience, isn't it? I bet you were very good at it.

JG: Well, I certainly, I think...I don't know how I'd have gone on going to a bigger concern. A bigger company, you know.

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LMI: Yeah.

JG: But because it was a smallish office, I got away with it, I suppose.

LMI: I think you did a very good job. I don't think you got away with anything. Thank you very much.

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JG: Well, thank you very much. It's been pleasant to talk to you. And it's nice to bring... it comes back when you start to talk about it.

LMI: Yes.

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JG: All comes back. Times have gone that will never come back. You know, the war men. And the names of things, the names of the procedure and everything. People used to say, "Top making? What does that mean? And what is...?" You know, all the different names. But people have written books. A lot of people have written books about the trade. So that's interesting.

LMI: It's nice to have oral stories, though. It's different, isn't it? When you actually hear somebody, you know, how they're talking about the excitement, or the sadness, and...

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JG: Yeah, it's just so different. I'm glad I've been around in it. I can't remember it all, of course, but it was all good.

LMI: Thank you very much.

JG: Thank you. Nice to meet you.

LMI: Likewise.