

## Lawrence Meer - Transcription

*Audio Quality: Good. Slight echo at times.*

**0:00:00**

**LMI:** Hi, I'm speaking to Lawrence here. Lawrence, would you like to introduce yourself to the microphone.

**LM:** Yeah, hi, my name's Lawrence Meer. I'm 72 years old and now live in West Sussex on the south of England.

**LMI:** Where do you come from, Lawrence?

**LM:** I originate[d] in Bradford, born and bred in Bradford.

**LMI:** And what are you here to tell us about?

**LM:** Just my experience, albeit short, my experience in the mill when I left school.

**LMI:** When was that? What year?

**LM:** I left school, actually I was 14, not 15. I was ruled with a rod of iron by my mum, and I should have gone back to school in September, but my birthday is late September and she said, 'You're not going back to school for 3 weeks, I need you working.' And she said ' You'll start at work on Monday at Bulmers.' And I was still 14. So that was quite an experience.

**0:00:54**

**LMI:** And tell me about Bulmers.

**LM:** Okay, I worked at Bulmer and Lumb. I believe they had several mills actually. I think there was one at Woodside, and so I think they had two or three mills. But I was at Bankfoot, top of Bankfoot Hill in Bradford. And it was pretty scary. It was scary.

**LMI:** Tell me about the mill. How big was it?

**LM:** Well, it had a... it didn't have a combing section that I know of, but we definitely had spinning, twisting and winding. And then a warehouse where the wool came in and went out.

**0:01:28**

**LMI:** So for the people that don't know anything about mills can you explain what those are?

**LM:** Okay, the spinning, it goes on to little bobbins - I don't know what they're called - but the smaller bobbins for spinning. I used to collect it from the spinning and bring it to my section, which was the twisting. And then the two bobbins were put onto a machine at the

top. The wool were collected together and then went onto a jumbo, and they were twisted certain turns per inch. So the machine would be set up to spin at a certain pace to twist the wool accordingly.

**LMI:** So make it thicker basically?

**LM:** Thicker or thinner depending on what the set up was. And then from the spinning I would take it up two floors in skeps with a sack truck to the winding. And it used to end up there.

**LMI:** And they wound it?

**0:02:18**

**LM:** Onto cones, I think. Yeah, it was all nice and clean up there. The girls always looked nice up in the winding. There wasn't as much wool flying around. It was nice to go up to the winding.

**LMI:** And then what happened to it after that?

**LM:** I don't know. I genuinely don't know.

**LMI:** Would it have been sent off to a mill to be woven?

**LM:** Probably, yeah. In fact, more than likely. It certainly wasn't woven at Bulmers, to my knowledge. I don't remember weaving there.

**LMI:** How many people worked there? A guess.

**0:02:45**

**LM:** Ooh, 80, 100? Yeah, something like that. Yeah, I should think. Because there's guys in the warehouse as well, that moved it. They... ladies on... they used to run I think two machines each, which was four sides, what they called 'four sides'. But they all used to help each other, because they were all on piecework, what they call piecework. So when a doff was on - which means when the the wool from the spinning was running out, and that meant that was finished, the jumbo was full - they'd shout, 'Oh [up?], doff!' And so two or three of them would go, and they'd all help each other get the bobbins off, and so on. It was really quite good to watch them. They were incredibly quick, these women, incredibly quick, and worked hard, blooming hard.

**LMI:** So, you said it was scary?

**0:03:30**

**LM:** Oh yeah, the noise was horrendous. And that wasn't the worst...the spinning wasn't too bad. But the room I was in was spinning and twisting together. Half the room was spinning, and half the room was twisting. So I could just go to this section on the left, and get the wool

from the spinning, get the bobbins, put them at the end of the machines, for the women, and the ones that they'd finished I would then take away up to the up to the end, you know, the winding at the end.

**LMI:** So you were like a labourer were you?

**LM:** I was an apprentice, theoretically, going to college to learn about the textile industry, but not much more than a labourer. I didn't actually work in the warehouse and move heavy wool and sweep and clean and oil the machines. I used to have to take notes of what the women had done, and what wool I'd taken away from there so that they got paid.

**LMI:** Oh right.

**LM:** So I had to weigh it and know what they what they produced that day so they got paid accordingly.

**LMI:** That sounds quite responsible for a 14 year old.

**LM:** It was in a way. In a way, it was, but it wasn't complicated. I did have an overlooker. There was an overlooker in the spinning section. And one in the twisting section... in the spinning and one in the twisting, as well. So I did have a guy that I could, you know, he was supposed to be mentoring me, if you like, but yeah. So I did have to do their weights and make sure that they got paid for what they've done.

**LMI:** And how were you treated by the women?

**0:04:58**

**LM:** Um not very well, not very well. I was very young, so they they they'd sort of bully you. They'd send you off on fool's errands and mess you around. They used to ask me to make the wool a bit heavier and say, you know, that they'd doffed 400 bobbins not 380, because it was more money for them. And I used to sort of... when I had my pen, because [they?] all wore little pinnies, short sleeve pinnies and stuff, and I'd be stood at the side of them, and maybe I'd have my pen to write their weights down, and when they said, 'Oh put me down for more.' Which I couldn't, I couldn't do that, it was re-weighed by someone else. I used to write on, you know, just do that on their arm with the pen, just, you know. Anyway, one lunchtime, I remember, I sat at the side of a machine, all the machines were off at lunchtime, but no one went home for lunch, they just sat there eating their sandwiches. And suddenly these four women came up, got me in a corner, stripped me naked, absolutely naked, Alan, I kid you not. And they... I won't say where the pens went, but I was well written on, absolutely well written on. I was locked in a skep. They put the lid down on these big basket skeps. And I was in there for an hour. Naked. Written on... you know, whatever they'd written - silly things - naughts and crosses... where the naughts went it's not mentionable! And it was just, you know, but they were intimidating. They were they were a force to be reckoned with.

**LMI:** You must have been terrified!

**LM:** I was terrified! Absolutely! Even though I was brought up in a quite a large family. They were a force, the women. I *was* scared of the women. I never used to walk down the sides of the machines when they called me.

**0:06:29**

**LMI:** So did they do that for a reason?

**LM:** Well, because I'd written on them with the pen on their arm. So they suddenly decided that they'd get revenge. But it was a bit extreme, I think. But, you know, they were ok.

**LMI:** I don't think it would happen today, do you?

**LM:** No, probably not, probably not, but...

**LMI:** Probably be all over social media if they did. Oh, and they'd take photographs as well now!

**LM:** Well, yeah, of course it would, absolutely. Areas in all its glory, but they did... absolutely naked, it wasn't, you know... They were just unbelievable. But hard-working women. I mean, you know, I reflect back and look at what they did in a day's work. It was horrendous what they did for their money. No wonder they asked for the extra bit they could get on their weight.

**0:07:16**

**LMI:** How long were the shifts?

**LM:** Well, I used to start, I think it was 7. It could have been 7.30. I think it was 7 we started, and we finished at 5. And I think they got something like, did we get... I've got a feeling it was half hour for lunch. But all the machines did go off at that time, which they didn't like.

**0:07:40**

**LM:** They didn't want their machines to go off. Because when the machine went off, all the yarn went slack. So when they fired it up again half of them would break, so they'd have to go down and set them up again. So that, you know, they didn't like their machines to go off. Because... occasionally, when I was putting the baskets, or the skeps, as they call them, at the side of the machine, with their new bobbins, if you banged the machine guard, it would cut out, as though somebody had opened the guard door. So their machine stopped and they used to go absolutely haywire. So I used to have to drop the skeps two or three inches away, and then try and push it in a bit, you know, to make the aisle a bit clear.

**0:08:21**

**LM:** But if you touched the machine, with... particularly something that heavy, it would stop the machine. They'd go mad, 'Oh you bugger!' But yeah they were nice, but they weren't... you know, I was young.

**LMI:** How did you get on with them after they stripped you naked?

**LM:** Well, you know, they just let me out, you know, and I what else could I do? All I could do is get dressed and carry on with my job. I mean, my overlooker was looking round for me. I think he thought I'd gone off to the toilet for a cigarette! And I was in this bloody skip at the end, in the corner of a room. It was funny. I reflect on it and it's funny. At the time it wasn't, it was quite scary!

**LMI:** I'm sure it was. I'm sure it was. But presumably you didn't...you weren't an apprentice for that long.

**LM:** No, I decided it wasn't for me. The mill was scary. The guys were quite scary. They were [a] forced to be reckoned with when you went into the warehouse, and...you know, you were moving around the mill to move my bobbins to the winding. It was a different floor. They were all quite tough guys. I was not a big lad at 14. I'm not a big guy now. So my mate was in engineering. He said, 'Oh you want to come here and get an apprenticeship engineering.' Which I did. So I went into the engineering, worked in a big engineering factory.

**0:09:32**

**LMI:** In Bradford?

**LM:** In Bradford, yeah. Universal Metallics. And that was a big engineering factory, about 2,000 employees. That was enormous.

**LMI:** Because there was a lot of engineering in Bradford, and in Keighley, wasn't there?

**LM:** Yeah, I don't know about Keighley, but Bradford was. Universal was a massive, massive one.

**LMI:** Did they make, were they connected to the textile industry?

**LM:** Not to my knowledge, no, no.

**LMI:** Were they making machine parts?

**LM:** Machine parts and stuff, yeah, some for the military. We did some spiggot heads for tanks and things there, which were quite involved. So we made some quite big stuff. And it had its own foundry. The engineering had... it had a special foundry, which you got paid extra at working at. And it wasn't a metal, it was a material called Diva. And it was like a self-lubricating... a bit like slate, when you touch slate and it goes shiny? And they made brushes that went into wiper blade motors.

**LMI:** Oh. Ok.

**LM:** So when the wiper's going, it sort of self-lubricated. So it was like a little sleeve – a collet. that you put in there. But you got extra money for that. I didn't want to work on it

because everybody was black and shiny. And they'd go out of an evening, and they'd shower and look nice, and by 11 o'clock they'd gone black again. Honestly, if you sweated you went black.

**LMI:** It's like graphite then?

**LM:** It's like graphite in there. Absolutely like graphite. But it was called Diva this material, but it was like a separate factory until they joined. They still segregated but it was the same building.

**0:11:11**

**LMI:** So do you think people moved in and out of the textile industry quite a lot?

**LM:** Yeah.

**LMI:** Those people that you worked with, had they been there for years?

**LM:** Yes. Some of the women had. Yeah, there was a little lady called Molly, she'd worked in the mill all her life. A tiny little frail lady, quite old. She shouldn't have been even working. I think she was past retirement age. But she just ran one machine, and it was special small orders that she used to run that. But she worked like a Trojan. She was a frail little old lady, she really was. I don't know how old she was, to me she looked old. But she was old. She wasn't your 50-year-old woman that was the standard 40/50 year old in the mill. She was old.

**LMI:** And so were there more women than men in the mill?

**0:11:56**

**LM:** Absolutely. Yeah. All the machines were women. They were quicker than men; more dexterous.

**LMI:** Somebody told me there was a lot of women from Italy came and worked.

**LM:** I don't remember that. Don't remember any Italians. They were all local people that lived on the council estate nearby, you know, from Wibsey, Buttershaw, Little Horton...

**LMI:** What were the wages like?

**LM:** Well, I can remember my first week's wages: three pounds six and eightpence.

**LMI:** In...?

**LM:** In old Lsd.

**LMI:** In what year?

**LM:** That would be 1965.

**LMI:** Three pound six and eightpence.

**LM:** Yeah, I can remember it exactly.

**LMI:** And did you have to pay board on that as well?

**LM:** Right, well I tell you... I told you, my mum ruled me with a rod of iron. I wasn't allowed to open my wage. And I had no money to get the bus home to Little Horton from... so I walked home with my wage intact.

**LMI:** On your first wage?

**LM:** Yeah, and I had to give my first wage to mum. And I gave all my wages to mum till I was 18. Daren't open it. Had to give it to mum on a Friday.

**0:12:54**

**LMI:** And did she give you any back?

**LM:** Yeah, a little bit. Yeah. I think eventually when it got over a fiver, I think I got 10 bob back, which is 50p now.

**LMI:** Yeah. Did that keep you going?

**0:13:12**

**LM:** It did actually, because we didn't, you know, we didn't have, no one had a car in the family. Certainly not back then. In fact, mum never had a car. Dad never had a car. Because mum and dad split up when I was young. So dad was never on the phone. So when I moved to the south in... 1969/70... I couldn't ring dad, I used to have to write to him. And when mum split up with dad, I couldn't ring him to say 'I'm coming on Sunday to visit you.' We just turned up and hoped dad would be in. You know, so it was quite a varied childhood. Split home, split family, split three ways.

**LMI:** Was that... three ways?

**LM:** Yeah. Mum left dad. Two girls, two boys. The eldest one, Kath, was about 17, and she just went... I think she got a flat and lived on her own.

**0:13:59**

**LM:** Dad got the eldest girl then, Pauline. So Pauline lived with dad. And mum took the two boys. So Kath was there, Pauline was there, and Paul and I were with mum, and the new guy.

**LMI:** All over Bradford?

**LM:** Well, Thornton. We moved to, right up hilltop Thornton, miles away. And dad was in Buttershaw, Buttershaw Drive.

**LMI:** That's a trek.

**LM:** That is a trek, and I went when I was seven, on my own, to see dad - because she left when I was five - and I just said two years later, 'Mum, where's dad?' She said, 'Well he's still at Buttershaw if you want to go see him.' So I got on a bus at Thornton, I walked down hilltop to the main road in Thornton, got the bus into town, across town to Terrell Street and got the 26 bus up to Buttershaw, and went and saw dad. Knocked on the door and he was in. Thank goodness!

**LMI:** And you say, you left school at 14, and that was for...?

**LM:** Financial reasons.

**0:14:59**

**LMI:** Financial reasons. Did you want to leave school?

**LM:** I didn't have a say. I never even thought about it. And I didn't have an occupation in mind. You know, you get the, they used to get the school people come along, you know, about occupation.

**LMI:** Careers officers.

**LM:** Yeah, careers officers. And it was like... one girl would say 'I'd like to work in Woolworths on the till' really. No one had ambition that I recall. I don't recall anyone saying, 'I'm going to college and I'm going to go to university.' At all. No, you know, I went to All Saints School, you know, down opposite St Luke's Hospital in Little Horton Lane.

**LMI:** Yeah, I know All Saints.

**LM:** And it wasn't a brilliant school. It wasn't a brilliant school by any stretch of the imagination, and I ended up at Buttershaw School, which was a great school but a big school.

**LMI:** It was huge.

**0:15:44**

**LM:** I was in 3 Alpha, so I wasn't down with the dunces, I was sort of okay. Because they had gradings at that school, because it was so big. But it was a lovely school, it had lots of theatre, swimming pool. Quite lucky really. Buttershaw School, it's lovely. But left at 14. Only by three weeks, I was 15 three weeks later. So it didn't seem that bad really.

**LMI:** And now you technically have to be in training until you're 18, don't you? One way or another.

**LM:** Yeah, yeah.

**LMI:** That'd be four more years on top of what you...



**LM:** Yeah.

**0:16:22**

**LMI:** Interesting. So, you said you only did it for about a year in the mill?

**LM:** Yeah, it was frightening. The engineering wasn't as frightening as the mill.

**LMI:** So did you kind of say to yourself, 'I'm not going to do this anymore?'

**LM:** I spoke to my friend about it, a very good friend from school, we were quite close. And he said the engineering was lovely. I went up there one day and saw what he did. And they let me walk round his factory and he was just filing some bits and he was on a central lathe. And I thought about the stuff that I had to do at the mill, and there was no comparison. And the wage was slightly better as an apprentice engineer, funnily enough, as it was as an apprentice in the mill.

**LMI:** So, if you'd stayed in textiles how long would you have been an apprentice for?

**LM:** I think it was three years apprenticeship. I don't know where you went from there, because you couldn't possibly be an overlooker at 18. You couldn't possibly be an overlooker. So I don't know what the middle step would have been.

**LMI:** We have got one memory from someone who said that they were an apprentice and the overlooker left, or died, or something, and so they made him the overlooker.

**LM:** I wouldn't be surprised.

**LMI:** Even though he's an apprentice.

**LM:** I wouldn't be surprised, because the responsibilities that I had quite quickly in the mill was incredible. Without any experience.

**0:17:41**

**LM:** I mean one guy showed me how to fit a new tape to a machine, and after that it was my job. But really, it was horrendous. I mean, [I was] frightened to death. I was absolutely scared witless putting this tape on a machine.

**LMI:** Really?

**LM:** Yeah.

**LMI:** Worried that you would do it wrong or...?

**LM:** No, that you'd lose your arms.

**LMI:** Because it was still running?

**LM:** It was still running, you couldn't turn it off.

**LMI:** When you say a tape, do you mean like a belt?

**0:18:10**

**LM:** A belt that goes from one side to the other. One machine was two sides. So you'd have a guy come along, he was the tape seller. He carried a little sewing machine around with him, and a roll of tape. And when they were losing four bobbins, the women used to say, 'Get over here!' Because as soon as he put a tape on, they've got four more bobbins running. So more money. More money. And he used to just put the tape on, and then he tied a bow in it and leave it hanging. And then she'd catch me and say, 'Come and fit this on.' But you couldn't turn the machine off.

**LMI:** So you had to put it on while it was still running?

**0:18:44**

**LM:** While it was still running.

**LMI:** So it could take your hand off, I presume?

**LM:** Well, I don't think it could take your hand off. I suppose it could, because it ran on a big cylinder underneath, which was... so the tape's coming around from two bobbins from one... and I'm pointing to you, which sort of gives you a bit of an idea. But there's two bobbins on the other side. The tape comes around there. But then it went over this big two-foot cylinder. I'm guessing two-foot. Might have been a bit bigger. But two foot's a fair guesstimation.

**0:19:12**

**LM:** And it came round, and then it went onto a pulley to differentiate so it could come back and spin the same way on this side. And my job was, I had a big six-foot rod. And I used to have to get this, while the machine's going up and down, for the bobbins to take the spool, I used to put my arms in when the lifter went up. And then it would come down. The pokers would go down underneath and come back up and lift it up. So when it went up again I'd do a little twiddle, and when it come down I'd let it rest on my arms. The poker's down, the thing's still resting on my arms. And then I used to get this this tape... I had to pull it with this six-foot thing. I'd grab it then, throw this six-foot rod on the floor. And then I'd let the lifter come down again, which would rest here, and then when it went up, I had to flick the tape onto the pulley. And it always caught your thumb. Always burned your thumb. And then you sort of went like that, and then you laid still a minute, then the lifter went down. When it went up you pulled your arms out.

**LMI:** So that tape was sort of running all the time?

**LM:** All the time. Yeah. Once you put it on that pulley, it's away. Till you put it on then it was just spinning on this big cylinder. But you know, you could feel it moving, But it was your job to hold it until you put it on this pulley, which sort of flexed. [Bangs]

**LMI:** That sounds quite dangerous!

**0:20:30**

**LM:** It was horrendous, honestly! I mean, the things that the women did when they were getting, and flicking, and stuff like that, and taking bobbins off, that'd just catch your fingers, and your knuckles and things. But this thing was horrendous! Absolutely. I wouldn't do it now. I've more sense now. I would not do it now. I only got shown once. But I just did as I was told. Everybody was your superior. Everyone was your superior. You just did it. And I was used to that because of mum.

**LMI:** So did you make any friends?

**0:21:03**

**LM:** Not particularly, no. The guys were scary. They were scary, they were tough. There was fights on all the time. In the warehouse. You know, guys would fight over absolutely bugger all. I didn't get involved. I was a little 14-year-old. I wasn't even a big lad, you know. It was scary. I was glad to leave.

**LMI:** It sounds very tough.

**LM:** There was fun times. There was fun times. Because you're young, and the women were funny. They were scary, because they get you down the side of the machine say, 'Oh look at that!' And then they handed me... you know, they were coarse, were the women. They were coarse, Alan, I do remember that. But they were funny. And they were protective as well, towards me, you know. They were nice. They were nice in a horrible way. If that makes [sense]. I can't explain it, sorry.

**LMI:** Okay I can completely understand that.

**0:22:04**

**LM:** So I was there, I think about, 8 months, not a year. Because I then qualified for an apprenticeship at the engineering, which I did and finished and completed. And then moved south.

**LMI:** Apart from being stripped naked, have you got any other memorable moments?

**LM:** There were some nasty moments for other people. One guy got his tie, I don't know why he was wearing a tie, because it wasn't allowed. He had some sort of neckerchief on, and he got it caught in one of the rollers. And it was pulling him into the machine, and it's round his neck, so it's got nowhere to go. It's not like it would release. And someone hit the end of the machine, and it stopped, and they cut it off.

**0:22:46**

**LM:** So that was quite scary. Women had sometimes get their hair caught in the machine. So they used to have their hair back and wear like... mop cap... I don't know what they wore, I think it was just a scarf that they had a way of tying it on. A bit like that woman in Coronation Street that used to clean the pub, whatever she was called, Hilda Ogden type thing. So they always wore short sleeved pinnies, no cuffs.

**LMI:** Because they'd catch?

**LM:** Because these rollers would just take your cuff in, and you couldn't stop those machines, they were enormous. You couldn't stop them.

**LMI:** Did you work there over the winter? You must have done.

**LM:** Yes.

**LMI:** And what was that like?

**LM:** Cold going to work. Because I lived at Thornton. We lived at Bronte Old Road in Thornton then. And I used to go to Bankfoot on a push bike. But it wasn't so much a man's push-bike it was a boy's cycle, because it was my bike. So that was a bit of a trek to get to work on time.

**LMI:** I bet coming back was even more of a trek, wasn't it?

**LM:** Yeah, yeah. Because you worked... I did work my day. I had to move these big heavy skips and move the bobbins up and down the mill. And collect and... you know. So it wasn't light work.

**0:23:55**

**LMI:** Was it cold in the mill?

**LM:** No, no. The opposite.

**LMI:** Warm from the machinery?

**LM:** Yeah. The opposite, yeah. Yeah, it was quite warm in there. Wool flying around, which was fine.

**LMI:** But dust?

**LM:** Yeah, wool and dust. And the women used to get extra money for clean wool. So, when the two spinning bobbins were empty, and the jumbos were full, that was 'a side out'. They would doff that. I would take what they'd twisted away.

**0:24:23**

**LM:** Then they would get all empty bobbins...sorry, they would get full bobbins, put them on and put the empty bobbins on the bottom of the machine. They'd get the two ends... really, really quick. They'd put it through...they'd get the two ends really quickly, through a little eye and then they had a flip that they did with their hand, because it went round a roller, and they just did that, and it sort of went on. They were incredible, these women. And they'd go 'tick tick tick toosh.'

**LMI:** Onto the bobbin?

**LM:** No, not quite, on to another one. And then there was a tiny little C-shaped thing, when [where] I used to have to wax, melt wax and stick these little plastic C-shaped things in, bakelite. And then the wool would run through that, so it didn't break, because it was nice and smooth. And then they'd just flick it at the bottom, and the speed would pick it up. But they'd go, 'tick tick tick toosh.' And they'd do that right the way down the machine and have to do the other side too. But usually their mate was helping them do the other side. And they had a slider, like a basket, that slid along for them to put bobbins on and take stuff away. But they were amazingly quick, they really were.

**LMI:** I'd like to see that; I wonder if we can find a film of it.

**0:25:33**

**LM:** I don't know, but you had to see how... I mean, I learned how to do it, but not like... because I always wanted to know, and it would help them if I did a couple starting at the other end. But the speed they could do it at. But the wool that was left, on some of the spinning bobbins - not much - they had one of the... like a little razor blade that you'd have in a stanley knife, but it had a smooth edge on the back, it's like another piece of metal folded over. And they had that, and they used to cut this wool off, they were only little bits, and put it in their pocket. And they got extra money for 'clean wool'. But I mean they'd only have a bag of it at the end of the week.

**0:26:10**

**LMI:** So what would happen to that?

**LM:** I don't know, no idea.

**LMI:** Did it get recycled or something?

**LM:** It must have done somehow, I don't know. But they got money for that. And the bobbins were nice and clean then to go back to the spinning, or to go back to wherever they went to get to the spinning.

**LMI:** Oh, I see. So, nobody would have to take that off?

**LM:** Take that wool off because they did it and got money for that. It wasn't a lot of money, but they got money for it. But it was called 'clean wool'. It wasn't wool that had been through another process. It was a bit... you know but it was all a bit [above me].

**LMI:** And it's all one part of a little... one small part of a process from the sheep to the finished cloth really.

**LM:** Yeah.

**LMI:** Just that part.

**LM:** Yeah, a small part. Because it starts in the combing, doesn't it? Or the scouring first, actually. It's washed first, and then it's combed. And that's where my father worked, my true father, not my stepfather. And that was horrendous. Now I was frightened when I went there.

**LMI:** Where was that?

**LM:** He worked at Buttershaw Mill. Because he lived in Buttershaw. And I went one day, whatever day it was, I wasn't working. And I thought, 'I'll go and see my dad.'

**0:27:18**

**LM:** Sissy said, 'Oh, he works at Buttershaw Mill.' So I walked up to Buttershaw Mill, and I just said to a guy, 'Oh, can I see Jack Meer?' He went, 'Oh, he's down in the combing.' And I walked into this room. Alan, it was horrendous! It's like being stood at the side of a jumbo jet. You could *not* hear yourself think. I had to cover my ears up. He ran three big machines in the combing, by himself.

**0:27:41**

**LMI:** And that was combing the wool?

**LM:** Combing the wool, big clapper things that just did that. The dust and the wool was..., dirty wool... was everywhere in the air. And this noise was... I thought the twisting and the spinning was noisy. Not even a comparison. I couldn't work there all day.

**LMI:** Did they wear masks?

**0:28:01**

**LM:** Nothing. No ear defenders, no masks. Dad died at 61, with collapsed lungs.

**LMI:** And now you've got a good idea of why.

**LM:** Yeah. I mean, he smoked, they all did, but it was down to that. He never had a, what I call a lovely job, Dad. He always worked in the lesser jobs.

**LMI:** Was it physically hard as well?

**LM:** I don't know. I didn't stay long enough to find out what he actually did. I genuinely couldn't stand the noise in there.

**LMI:** What was his reaction when he saw you?

**LM:** Well, he was shocked. And obviously he wanted to... I felt he wanted to slightly impress that - Oh he could come out if he wanted to, and just talk to me- but I couldn't stay in there. I mean, he could lip read and things, as could his mates. But I just couldn't stand the noise, honestly. You couldn't describe it, it's just too....

**LMI:** So did the women in...

**LM:** I didn't see women in there.

**LMI:** No, in the mill you worked in, did they lip read?

**LM:** Er, some of them, to each other. They have a way of communicating with each other. It's a bit like sign language where you've got family sign. It's not true sign language. It's just family sign that you recognize when you're teaching your daughter, or whatever it is.

**LMI:** So different from...?

**LM:** Yeah. I don't know if it was true lip reading like deaf people would use, but they certainly knew what each other was saying, because you couldn't hear. They'd shout across to Florrie - which was quite a common name in the mill, funnily enough - and they'd know that they were wanted, you know. It wasn't just 'Come here.' It was, 'I've got a side out in a minute.' And they could lip read that, or whatever, you know. Whatever more....they'd use their hand as well, but it wasn't sign language or real words.

**LMI:** So, were there any kind of industrial disputes of any sort? Was there a trade union?

**0:29:53**

**LM:** I don't know. There was in the engineering. But I don't know about... I wasn't there long enough. There was no disputes when... The foreman, the overlooker, *was* the man. I mean, if he said 'Jump.' They all just said, 'How high?' If he said, 'This is your next job,' and it was a really quick spin, or twist, I mean, they could be doffing every half an hour if it was a fast one. That's hard work. That is blooming hard. Particularly if you're running four sides. It was incredible. But these women are just saying, 'Not again! I get the fast one!' And their mate will say, 'It'll be alright, I'll help you.' Because she got a slower one. So she'd be doffing five times.

**LMI:** So, when you say a fast one, that would be a faster machine? Or faster job?

**LM:** No, same machine, just set up. We had to put the cogs on at the end, to set the time of the machine depending what the next job was, how many twists.

0:30:46

**LMI:** Make it go faster?

**LM:** Yes.

**LMI:** Oh, right.

**LM:** And you went into the far end of the machine, where the big cogs were, and you put a different... So we had a calculation. If this product had to spin 42 times a minute, or whatever it was, 42 twists an inch, then I would have a thing there that would say, 'You need a cog 48 and a cog 72.' So I'd take the cogs off, put the 78 on, the 42 on, and the machine would be going like that. So it would take the wool twice as quick. So she's doffing every half hour. Hard work. Mate, hard work.

0:31:09

**LMI:** So obviously it lived with you and...

**LM:** Yeah, because my family carried on working in the mill. My sister still worked in the mill, even when she got married. My brother left, he went to work in a shop, electrical shop. Mr White Collar, my brother - which was impressive for the family- that Paul had a white-collar job. Worked at some balances in town in Bradford. It opened up in a in a shopping mall which was just sort of starting then...

**LMI:** Kirklees, one of those? [?]

**LM:** Down in Mosley... Bradford St. John's [central?] And he used to go to work in a white shirt, my brother. Really. Impressive.

**LMI:** Fancy.

**LM:** Yeah. Yuppie!

**LMI:** So, were you aware of kind of like everybody losing their jobs in the mills?

**LM:** No.

**LMI:** Or had you left by then?

**LM:** I'd left by then. And I'd actually left Bradford by the time industry itself... and I mean, you know, generally people are not manufacturing what they used to do. Big engineering shops like Universal didn't survive much longer after I left. You know, my mate was out of a job not long after I left... 1970, I suppose. I went down to the Isle of Wight for the Pop Festival and stayed.



**0:32:36**

**LMI:** Is that what happened to you?

**LM:** And stayed.

**LMI:** You went to [the] Isle of Wight for the Pop Festival and stayed?

**LM:** I never came back.

**LMI:** Is that true? You literally said, 'I'm staying down here'?

**LM:** Yeah.

**LMI:** Did you have long hair at the time?

**LM:** Eventually. You couldn't have it in the mill or the engineering. But eventually, yeah. Because you're living with... you're in an area now of holidaymakers and, you know, shorts and t-shirt people. I never wore shorts in Bradford.

**LMI:** So what did you do when you went to the Isle of Wight?

**0:33:10**

**LM:** I was slightly lucky. Mum's second husband, Jim, my stepfather; he had two children when she married him. One of them, his daughter, married, can I say this? A London villain. And he got prison, Parkhurst, that's how serious his crime was, on the Isle of Wight. So my stepsister moved to the Isle of Wight, for visiting. Because he got five years, which is quite a long time in Parkhurst. Anyway, so she visited. So I went to live with her. So I had a place to stay. So I stayed. And then I got a job, and you know, and stayed on the Isle of Wight, where I met my wife. Married an Isle of Wight girl and lived on the island for about four to five years on the Isle of Wight. And then moved to Sussex.

**LMI:** Do you miss Bradford?

**LM:** Not at all. I come back, I come back quite frequently because all my family are here.

**0:34:08**

**LM:** I have no family in the South at all. So, all my sisters, siblings, my nephews, my nieces who I love dearly, love to see them. I abscond them. I drive up here regularly. None of them will drive down to me because it's a five and a bit hour drive. So, I drive up here, pick my niece up and her daughter, take them down to mine, give them a lovely holiday on the South Coast, bring them back, get my sister, take her back. She stays a week, I come back. So I see thousands of miles to get my sister back here, and my family.

**0:34:42**

**LM:** I'm staying with my niece Vicky at the moment. But I've got my camper van this time. I brought my sister back in my camper van. And I'm gonna do 10 days now, for myself, in the Lake District, so it's quite nice. I do come up and down a lot. But I don't like Bradford, I don't go into Bradford. Don't go into town centre.

**LMI:** Because?

**LM:** I don't like Bradford at all.

**LMI:** Did you not like it before, or is it because it's poorer?

**LM:** Well, it was always poor when I...we lived in a back-to-back house, six of us. So, you know, Mum and Jim, had their two, because Mum had two more children to Jim.

**0:35:19**

**LM:** So her and the two, Jim and the two kids slept on the first floor. My brother and I slept in the roof, which wasn't an attic, it was the roof.

**LMI:** Oh right. It was just the...

**LM:** The lath and plaster you could see, and you could see through the tiles. So we had sky before it was invented! You know, we were quite lucky really. We were quite lucky. But yeah so, the back-to-back was quite rough, you know. Bath once a week, which was, when you think of the jobs we were doing, to bath once a week it was... but everybody was like that. I suddenly moved down south - to a beautiful flat. I rented a flat, just off the seafront in Ryde. And you know, it had running water, hot water; hot water - not a cold tap coming out to a sink, at the top of a cellar head. So it was a different life. There's no way I was coming back to Bradford, no way.

**LMI:** You see, it's interesting isn't it? Because people... what you've just described to me, people would associate with 50 years before, but you're talking about 1970.

**LM:** Yeah.

**LMI:** And that was my experience as well when I came to Bingley to be a student. The first couple of places I rented were back-to-backs.

**0:36:28**

**LM:** Well, you know exactly what they were like, Alan. You opened the kitchen door, which was a cellar head. There was the cooker, a stone sink and a cold tap. If you stepped back from the sink, you fell down the cellar steps. Mum's draining board was on the door to the kitchen. And it would come down and you'd wash up. The plates went into the top of the cooker, and anything else went into the lounge in a cupboard that was built in at the side of the fireplace. Stone steps upstairs to the one bedroom; stairs up to the roof.

**0:37:03**

**LM:** That was it, six of us. But my neighbours were the same, so you didn't know any different. It was the norm.

**LMI:** It's interesting isn't it, because I was talking to somebody yesterday, who'd come over from Pakistan. He was talking about how they were all men and they were all sharing a house and they'd all pile in.

**LM:** Yes.

**LMI:** It's very similar in a way, you know.

**LM:** How old was he, Alan?

**LMI:** How old was he? He was he was probably about 65, 70.

**LM:** Okay, similar time then.

**LMI:** Yeah, yeah.

**LM:** And I remember that at school because All Saints School, we had an England versus Pakistani cricket match and we had to borrow two white lads to make our cricket team. No disrespect to the Asians, most of my school friends, my great mates were Ibad Mozer, Parag Lad, Hassan Ayatollah, you know, they were my mates, so prejudice doesn't come into it. My elder brother's wife is absolutely black as the ace of spades.

**0:38:04**

**LM:** His children are absolutely stunning. Black bound coffee cream. You know, lovely. But my friends were all Indian or Pakistani. But we knew as kids that there were lots of them living in houses. And six of them would work days, and six of them would work nights. And one would come in and one would go in their bed, and he'd get out.

**LMI:** Yeah, because that area of the bottom of Great Horton Road as well, was where the first Asian families lived, or Asian men, really.

**LM:** Well [my] sister lives in Great Horton, Copthorne Street in Great Horton. Copthorne Road. Back-to-back houses again.

**LMI:** All around where the ice rink is now, that was all back to backs as well.

**LM:** Ice rink? Bottom of Little Horton Lane?

**LMI:** Yeah.

**LM:** Right, ok. Yeah, well all the way up there by St Luke's, All Saints School. ...St Luke's on the left, All Saints School on the right, bit further up was Brigella Mill, not much further up. Clydesdale Street, Percy Street, Spicer Street. We were on Spicer Street.

**LMI:** Lots of people have talked about Brigella Mill.

**LM:** Yeah. Well, my sister worked there for years.

**LMI:** Yeah, I must find out more about it.

**LM:** In Little Horton Lane, yeah. Yeah but Clowd Street. Yeah, Dad worked at Buttershaw Mill. Paul worked at Thornton mill for a while, and I was at Bulmer's.

**LMI:** So anyway, at school, when you were at school did most people think when they left school they'd go and work in the mill? Was that what... is that what people assumed?

**LM:** Yeah. Because yeah, most of their families did so it was... I only did as I was told. Through choice I wouldn't have gone in the mill. I don't know what... I didn't... I never felt I had a choice anyway. But I expected to go to school. I expected to go back to school in September and mum said 'No, Monday you start at Bulmer's'. I mean, that was... and I just went 'Oh ok.' Because you did, you know, you just did. And I think my mates were the same. Their parents just ruled... You did as your parents told you back then. None of this 'I'm gonna take a year out.' 'Year out?! For goodness sake! What? A year out?! I couldn't take a day off work! A year out! It's ridiculous. The kids today!' And it sounds like I'm really old-fashioned 'The kids today.' I mean, my two children were spoilt to high heaven, you know, absolutely... They've absolutely no idea. You know, 'I'm going to take a year out dad, I'm going to travel.' Travel? Get on a bus. Travel. It's ridiculous but you know, it's the way it was, mate.

**0:40:28**

**LMI:** It is.

**LM:** And it's not... you know, there are people still... not working in mills... but still ruled by their parents. I mean in school holidays I remember mum saying at 8 o'clock in the morning, 'Get out from under my feet, come back at 6.'

**LMI:** Yes.

**0:40:50**

**LM:** No lunch. There was no mention of lunch! And food. You know, my kids, you know, if they go out and they want money for food, you know. Or you take them, and then you say 'What time you think..?' And I go and pick... I was a taxi driver for my children for ten years. Guitar lessons, singing lessons, snooker. My mum would... we'd get, 'Come back at 6 o'clock tonight, not later, not earlier, 6 o'clock.' But not, 'What am I going to do for lunch, Mum?'

**LMI:** So, what did you do for lunch?

**LM:** We didn't have lunch. There was no such a thing as lunch. You just ate when you got in, whatever Mum had cooked. Which probably wasn't brilliant, but at least we got...

**0:41:30**

**LM:** We were never hungry. We weren't hungry. We ate, but I don't think it was quality food by any stretch. Because she didn't know. Mum didn't know. She fed us with what she had. Jim wasn't on a brilliant wage. He wasn't on a brilliant wage. You know, he was like dad, he was way down there on the treadmill, if you like, the ladder. So, there was never any money indoors. Mum always '£2 [knocks table] Ellen, at the end of the week.' Or 'Go and pay...' But you know, 'Go around to Frank and tell him we want a loaf of bread; put it on tick.' Not asking, tell him... You know, you go around and say, 'Could I have a large loaf of bread?' He'd give it to you, and I'd say, 'Mum says put it on tick.' And leave the shop. Because Mum said! I assumed it was okay with him! Because Mum said! You know, I used to go in the shop say 'Oh, loaf of bread and some of that.' and I'd say, 'Mum says 'Put it on tick.' as I'm leaving. She... you know, amazing. That's how life was.

**0:42:28**

**LMI:** People don't assume it's in living memory, that kind of thing, do they?

**LM:** All my family still, my older sister, not my *oldest* sister, but Pauline, my *older* sister, she's still alive. She worked in Brighella for years, and she tells me stories. That when I was a nipper, that happened, where Mum used to say, 'Go to your granny's.' And I had to walk four miles to go to my granny's. I was only four, you know. I knew where it was, I had to walk down to Braffett and Harbour to my granny's when we lived at Buttershaw Drive. I was four. My first day at school, no one took me to school, on my first day at Reveal school. 'It's down there around the corner, and there's a school, there by the field.' And off I went to school. Nobody took me. And my kids, I used to have to wait outside for them in the car.

**LMI:** I know. They're lined up, aren't they?

**LM:** It's just a different... they don't believe me, my kids.

**0:43:25**

**LMI:** No I bet they don't, actually.

**LM:** You know, and then when Sissy comes down the stairs and she reiterates that it was true, they take stock then. They take stock then. But you know, she's worked all over in various jobs. Baird TV, she worked there for years.

**LMI:** That's another story.

**LM:** That's another story.

**LMI:** Beginning of television. I'm going to turn this off now.

**LM:** Are you flat? Is it flat now?

**LMI:** No, no, no, it won't be.

0:43:54

**LM:** I only had the real two stories about the mill, Alan.

**LMI:** No, but they were great. And you've told me much more than that, and thanks very much.

**LM:** But life as a kid in Bradford back then, anyone will tell you, you know... if you came here in the '70s... but I'm sure people were only talking about what happened in the '60s, 10 year prior.

**LMI:** Yeah, yeah.

**LM:** So you know so you've probably sort of seen heard it first-hand yourself and...

**LMI:** Oh, it was '67 I came. Ok, so I'm gonna turn it off now, and then we can carry on.

**LM:** Thank you.

**LMI:** Thank you