

Matloob Hussain

Interviewed for LMGM on the 17th of August 2023

By Nabeela Ahmed

I came to England on the 21st of January 1968. I was thirteen years old. I went to Tyrsel School for three or four months, then to Barkerend Immigration Centre, yes they had them in those days. I finally went to Eccleshill Upper School for two years and did my equivalent of GCSEs.

1970 Dee Mills, Oldham – Jobber About two months

My job was to pack the boxes, take them up and deliver them to the store. Majority of the staff were English women. There was only me doing this particular role.

I only worked there about eight to ten weeks. I had gone to Lancashire, as they gave you a full wage even if you were under 25, whereas in Yorkshire they got you to do the full work, but paid you half. My dad didn't let me stay though. He said they were more skinheads in Lancashire and had heard of attacks on Asians. I knew that. We always went out in twos or threes, preferably in a group. In Bradford there were more Asians and he felt that I would be safer here.

1970 W Carter, BD3 – Jobber approximately two years

My role here was to oil all the wheels. They were Victorian old machines and this prevented them from getting too hot. I worked from 8-5pm. Majority of the staff here was men, Asian men. Some of my cousins worked there.

Then I worked as a ring spinner. I was there for about 18 months to two years.

In 1972 I went to Pakistan, stayed for one year and got married in 1973.

First salary

My first salary £10 and I gave it to my dad.

1973 – 1974 Ripley Mills, BD3 – Ring spinner and machine minder

I began doing nightshifts now that I was married. My shifts were 9pm to 7am. In the day shift there was a lot of English ladies, but in the night shift it was majority Asian men, with just 1 or 2 White blokes.

Managers

The overlookers were all English. It was a mix bag. Some were fine, others were racist and bossed you about with, 'do this and do that!'

1974 W J Whitehead, Newhome, BD4 – Ring spinner and jobber

My shifts here were:

Week 1: 6-2

Week 2: 2-10

Week 3: 10-6

I got used to sleeping at all times. In 1976 I went to Pakistan and when I returned in 1977 I returned to work at Whitehead's. I asked them to increase my time or salary as I had a family now, but they refused so I left.

May 1977 – 1988 Thomas Burnley – Ring spinner and jobber, night shifts

My job here was to change the wheels for the size of the yarn and supply material. I became assistant overlocker and my pay got slightly better, but I went back to being an ordinary spinner as the salary wasn't enough and I tried to do the odd job during the day to top up my income. I got £150 plus overtime.

I got made redundant from here and for one year worked as a milkman. I gave that up as the 3am starts got to me.

1992 – 1994 Thomas Burnley

The remaining departments of the factory got a new contract to make material for firemen's uniforms and they needed someone who knew the machines inside out. They called me back and I went. That lasted another two years till they had to close completely. They invited me to join their factory in Wakefield, but it was too far and not worth the hassle, plus I had managed to get another job. My salary then was £200

1994 – 2006 Rieter Automotive Carpets, Heckmondwike

We made interior of the cars, the wheel arch for the car industry and the underlayer made of out of bottles and plastic.

I worked nights and if I worked seven days a week would bring home £400. It was a physically demanding job so there were mostly men and majority of them were white. Then that closed down too. Volvo went to Poland and Toyota went to the Midlands.

Unions

I was a member both at Whithead and at Thomas Burnley. At W J Whitehead they would not give us an Eid holiday. There was six or seven of us in that room and we then spoke to other departments too and decided to join a union, until all the night staff were members. When they still refused to give us a day off, we refused to go. There were one or two black sheep that did turn up, but they couldn't get the production complete and finally negotiated and agreed to give us one day off for each Eid. We were more than happy to work overtime to cover the time, they were just being unkind. Those two holidays then stayed on.

At Thomas Burnley I became shop steward. They were always conflicts to deal with.

Lunches

In Lancashire the canteens were good. I usually had egg and toast for breakfast.

Most mills had a canteen, but at nights we took chapatti and curry. The machines had a very strong bulb with a mirror that reflected the threads, so we knew which one was broken to fix it. It was very hot too, so we placed our tiffin's near the bulb and within half an hour the food would be hot and ready to eat.

Memories

In those days men helped each other. They weren't selfish. If one person began making chapattis they made them for everyone, sometimes even at the cost of running late for their shift. We made time to talk to each other. If you had relatives, even in Derby, you made it a point to visit each other at least once a month. Now we live next door and no one cares. We would financially help each other, now we only offer that courtesy to close relatives. There was more trust. Debts were given and paid with dignity.

We had more fun in those days. In the mills we would play hide and seek. We would make a hook from the equipment and hook someone's clothes. There was humour and people were tolerant.

In those days people didn't have worries of getting a job. Now you need an education. The wages were lower, but things were cheaper too. People weren't as greedy then. They were content with what they had and were happier.