

Michael Stoney - Transcription

Audio Quality: Good.

Very detailed interview of working in mills as a salesman focussing on job roles, management and redundancy/mill closures

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LMI: So I'm sat here with Michael Stoney up here on Leeshaw Reservoir looking out over what should be a wonderful view, but actually it's not, because it's really misty on October the 23rd. Michael, would you like to just introduce yourself and tell us roughly the kind of work that you did in the mills, and when?

MS: Yeah. Well, I was born in 1947, so I'm 76 now. I went to Grange Boys Grammar School in Bradford. And I left when I was 16. And I started in the textile trade straight away from school. The first... would you like to know the firms I worked at?

LMI: Oh yes, all of those kinds of things.

MS: I dug out some of my old history. So, my first job was at a textile merchants, an old established textile merchants in Little Germany, in Bradford, called Slingsby and Herschel. It was a family firm, and I joined as a prospective trainee manager, that was my title, but at 16 it was more or less a general dog's body. I got to do everything in the company gradually. I worked through different departments.

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MS: So initially I worked in the pattern room, and then making up samples to ship out and to send to customers. I worked in the warehouse, did some perching, which was inspection of cloth, and packing in the warehouse to...they shipped out to South America, and all over the world, really. So, it was quite a good grounding and quite a good experience.

LMI: So that was in, when did you start doing that?

MS: 1963, 1963 and I was there two years. At the same time, they wanted me to do a City and Guild's Weaving and Designing course, which I started and I completed. And when I look back it's amazing really to think. So, it was a five year course - and that was five years, three nights a week. So that was quite a commitment really, at 16.

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MS: So I did that and completed that, and I suppose it stood me in good stead. It was good experience.

LMI: And where did you do that?

MS: Bradford Technical College.

LMI: Which became Bradford College?

MS: Yes, yeah, that's right. Yeah, there was a big textile department, because of course it was the biggest industry in the city at the time So, yeah, after a couple... the idea was that I would shadow the sons in the business, and then eventually take over, or work with them. But I realized that maybe it wouldn't get that far. That it was a family firm, and they would keep everything to themselves. So I started casting around for other jobs after a couple of years.

LMI: That sounds quite ambitious for a 16, 17, 18 year old.

MS: I suppose I was, you know. I was maybe a bit cocky and...unsure of things but...

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LMI: Can I just ask you, did you come from a textile family?

MS: No, not at all. My father was an insurance agent for the Co-op insurance company.

LMI: So, when you went into it, did you go, 'Oh, I...' [Was] it the work that you liked, and you wanted to stay in it immediately? Did you go, 'This is the life for me?'

MS: Well, I thought it was interesting, because I got to do so many varied things. One of the other things we did was to correspond with the foreign agents and got to write letters in different languages to them. Mostly copying by rote. But you know, it's quite varied and I liked working with the other guys in the warehouse, and the pattern room and things. We had a laugh.

LMI: So, you really did everything, didn't you?

MS: Yeah, I had a go at most things, yeah.

LMI: Did you operate the machinery as well?

MS: Well not... things like, you know, in the cloth...the rolling and perching.

LMI: I've done perching.

MS: You know, on a long table you'd have a machine that rolled the fabric up. And cuttling. Have you seen those?

LMI: Yeah, I have operated a cuttling machine. Those are the two things I've done in my life. I went over the hill in Wilsden from here.

MS: Oh, did you?

LMI: Yeah, when I was a student.

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MS: Oh, that's interesting, yeah. What else? Oh, and of course a lot of the cloth was sent out in bales, so they had to... bales had to be made. So there was a press that compressed the cloth. And the hessian, you know, was put round and you sewed it up and you made a bale. Or it was in packing cases, so you made up the packing cases to be shipped abroad. So yeah, those were the sort of things I did there.

LMI: And then you decided to move on?

MS: I did. And I got a job which turned out to be really good for me, really good experience. And it was a mill that's sadly long since gone. Mountain Mills, at Queensbury, I don't know if you've ever heard of it?

LMI: I have.

MS: So Mountain Mills was a smallish mill, but it was run by Sir Ernest Hall as he became, but then he was Ernest Hall, quite a young...what would he be in '65? He'd be in his 30s, I would think, yeah. And also, he took on as a manager Tony Clegg, who became a magnate. Do you know him, Tony?

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LMI: Yes, I've heard of him.

MS: So that was a terrific experience because these guys were...they were powerhouses, you know, you could tell straight away they were going places. And what a place to work. I mean, they ran it really, it was a tight ship really. I was Internal Sales Administration and Production Planning - that was my job. But there again, with it being a fairly tight ship, I got to do all sorts of things, you know. So I manned the phones, and when sales inquiries came in I answered those. I made patterns, that if people wanted samples to be sent out, I arranged for the deliveries from the warehouse, and then did any chasing that needed to be done. If people were chasing up their orders, then I, you know, followed them through the mill.

LMI: Was it a very specific kind of fabric you were producing up there?

MS: It was worsted fabrics. At the time one of the main things, if you remember terylene and worsted, which was really polyester, but that was a staple, 55% Terylene 45% Worsted. Things used for the, you know, general trousers, cheaper trousers, but a good cloth really. Things like worsted, baratheas and gabardines for the fashion trade. Some technical cloths for the forces like... everybody used to wear gabardines, do you remember the...

LMI: Harold Wilson wore one, didn't he?

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MS: Well yeah, he was a Gannex man, wasn't he? But no, like worsted or cotton gabardine. The police great coats used to be them, you know.

LMI: Yeah.

MS: They used to use them in the military and the Navy. So, they had some contracts like that. But I can't stress how exciting it was to work there, because you got roped in for everything. One of the things I did was, they had workers from Queensbury and Denholm, it was between Queensbury and Denholm. And they had an old bus, a '50s single-decker bus. And I got...at 18 with no previous experience of driving buses, I got to drive the workers, the menders, home to Denholm, or into Queensbury. Fantastic really. If things needed delivering and the driver was out somewhere, then I got roped in to drive the van to do deliveries. Or if urgent samples needed to be taken somewhere, I'd take one of the firm's cars. And I got to drive... Ernest Hall had a 3.5 Rover, you remember the V8?

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LMI: Definitely I remember them.

MS: An automatic Rover. And Tony Clegg had a 3.8 Jag, you know, the old lovely swoopy Jag. So I got to be able to drive those things. And that was fantastic, you know, to be let loose on these fabulous cars. I've been a lifelong motorcyclist, I used to get to the mill on my 650 BSA motorcycle in all weathers, up to Mountain. And some days, in the winter, the drifts up there were up over the top of the road. They used a snow blower to clear the roads, because it's the highest...one of the highest villages in England at Mountain there. So yeah, I really got a good grounding in sales, as well, because my immediate boss was a chap called Brian Wall. We'll probably come to him later because he founded his own mill later on. And he took me under his wing, and I learned a lot from him, you know. His telephone manner was fantastic and he was a great salesman, and a real character. So I really took to him, and he sort of took to me, really.

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LMI: So was it like a family business? Did you feel that you were looked after?

MS: Yeah. I was really left to my own devices. It was great. But I had a keen work ethic. I wanted to learn, and I chipped in wherever I could really. But it was an unusual set-up, because at the time... I suppose it was about '64, '65-ish...Hall and Clegg, they were really going places. I mean, they'd come in in the morning, they'd look at the mail and everything, and then they'd be off somewhere, and they were starting buying up property and mills, even at that time.

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MS: And then they'd come back at night, and you'd have a little bit of debriefing. You never got to find out too much of what they were doing. But I knew in hindsight, they'd started buying up mills. After two years at Mountain Mills, they'd bought Lee Mills at Standingley. You know Lee Mills? And the Lee Mills estate there is now called Owlcoats, and that's where there's a big Asda and Marks and Spencer. So this was the start of the property boom for Hall and Clegg really, you know. And so, the Mountain Mills closed down then... that would be about '64 to '65. And the production was moved to Lee Mills at Standingley. And I worked there for about a year. And I got itchy feet again. I wanted to be out on the road, I wanted, I always wanted to be a salesman, you know. So, I got my boss, you know, who I mentioned, Brian Wall, he inspired me to be a salesman, really. So, I wanted the firm's car and everything that went with it, and travelling, you know. So, I applied for a job at a firm in Pudsey, called Henry Lister & Sons. And this was a little village, Troydale at Pudsey, I don't know if you know that.

LMI: No, I don't.

MS: A little hamlet just outside Pudsey. And Henry Lister's was a vertical woollen manufacturer. So they did everything, you know, they started from raw material - either raw wool or shoddy - and produced it right through to the finished article. The job was for a salesman, and I was 21 then.

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MS: And I sort of blagged the job really, because I told them in the interview, I had been a salesman. Well, I had, but it was internal, and... I didn't lie, I [just] didn't say I'd never been on the road. And to the interview... I had an old banger then, an old split screen 54 Morris Minor, that was my car. And I borrowed my dad's brand-new Cortina GT he had at the time. 1600 Cortina GT. And he reluctantly lent me the car, and I went to the interview and [I] parked it outside the office. And when the boss came outside, immediately - he set me on, my boss. And we shook hands. And he saw me get in the car. He said, 'Well I'm sorry Michael,' he said 'I can't give you as good a car as this.' I said 'Well I'm not too bothered, I'm keen to work.' And it was a Triumph Herald, was my first firm's car, which of course I was grateful for really. So that was the start at Henry Lister's...

LMI: So, tell me, when you talk about sales, what does that actually mean?

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MS: Well, actually going out on the road and selling the product, selling the cloth, you know, to clothiers and people.

LMI: People who actually make clothes from the cloth?

MS: Yeah, yeah.

LMI: So, like M&S?

MS: Yeah, Burton's, Debenhams, you know, and a lot of smaller people as well, you know. So I had a whole country to go at really. Like Hebden Bridge, I mean, you could spend the whole day visiting customers in Hebden Bridge, there were so many clothiers at one time. Well, of course, there were mills as well, weren't there?

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MS: It was a big centre for the...they call it the fustian trade, things like moleskins and climbing-bridge tweed and corduroy, and that sort of thing. But they were one or two who made wool and cloth up. In fact, Craghoppers started there, you know the firm, outdoor firm Craghoppers?

LMI: I do, yeah.

MS: They started there. And I remember going and knocking on the door of Rohan, they were in a little tiny terrace house in Skipton when they started. And they're massive now, aren't they?

LMI: They are, and they've still got a little shop up in the Dales.

MS: Yeah, yeah, absolutely. Got one in Hebden Bridge now, strangely enough.

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MS: But yeah, so yeah, that was exciting times for me. So, I got to start to go to London, and I got to see the clothiers in Carnaby Street, and the swinging '60s, you know.

LMI: Oh, that must have been fascinating.

MS: Absolutely brilliant, yeah. And I used to be able to get cut price clothing, you know, samples and that sort of thing, so I'd come home with a big flared jeans and, you know, flashy jackets and things. It was...it was great times.

LMI: It was a good time for you, was it?

MS: Yeah, yeah, really enjoyed it.

LMI: And were the wages good as well?

MS: No. We haven't mentioned wages, have we? I started at Slingsby & Herschel £5 a week. Probably got £8 when I went to Mountain Mills. Maybe got up to £15. And then I hit the big time at Henry Lister's. It was £21 and a company car.

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LMI: So that was in... what year was that?

MS: When did I start at Lister's? Be... '65. Oh no, sorry, '68. So that was a reasonable wage for me at 21. I could do everything I wanted to do.

LMI: £20 a week?

MS: £21.

LMI: £21 a week? Wouldn't go very far now, would it?

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MS: Crazy, isn't it? And when you think back... I used to travel and stay overnight, maybe two or three days in London or some of the bigger cities. But sometimes, if it was a specific appointment, I'd get up at 5 in the morning, drive to London, see two or three of the big customers, Marks & Spencers, Burton's, people like that, and then drive back home at night and schlep up the motorway, and get back home at 9 or 10 at night.

LMI: And you thought nothing of doing that?

MS: No, and to think of that now, it's incredible, isn't it?

LMI: Where were you living? Were you living in Bradford?

MS: Yeah, I lived in Bradford until we got married.

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MS: My family home was in Bradford. My parents moved to Hull for my dad to start a business when I was about 18. And so I had lived in various places, sort of student-type flats and things, you know, until I got married. Shared a house with a pal of mine and... we shared a little house. And then when I got married, we moved to Haworth. And I've been in the Haworth/Oxenhope area ever since, really.

LMI: So, I mean I am interested in what... I know it's not just about the mills... but you know - social life in Bradford in the '60s - what was that like?

MS: Well, you know, we hear a lot about the 'swinging sixties', don't we? But it sort of passed us by, you know, the drug culture and everything. But, yeah, I mean, you know, it was great because... there are a lot of good pubs around Bradford area. And, you know... I wouldn't say drinking culture, but everybody drank really. And a lot of the life centred round pubs, and all the curry houses in Bradford. We were really lucky with all... you know. So you go out with your pals and have a few drinks and then have a curry at the end of the night. Yeah, it's brilliant.

LMI: So, you're a young man, you've been doing sales, you just got married.

MS: Yeah.

LMI: You've still got a whole lifetime of career left in you. What happened after that?

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MS: Well, I was at Lister's for about five years, and my old boss, Brian Wall, we'd kept in touch, and we were good friends. We'd go out for drinks, and he kept saying, 'Come on Mick', he said, 'Come and work for me.' He'd started his own business then, called Nixon and Wall. He started off in partnership with a company called B.V. Nixon. And they had a tiny mill, a weaving shed, at Peel Street at the bottom of Leeds Road in Bradford. It's gone now. You know as you came down Leeds Road, on the left-hand side, it was a tiny old mill there. It's been demolished now as part of a big dual carriageway. And he kept pestering me to join him and I wasn't sure. I had a good job at Lister's by that time. I was sales manager. I wasn't quite sure, because he was a great guy, but he wasn't very well organised. I wasn't sure whether it was right. Anyway, I did. I went to work for him.

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MS: They soon shut the mill down at Peel Street, and they bought a mill out in Baildon. I don't know if you... Do you know Baildon?

LMI: Yes, I know.

MS: Cliff Avenue, it's called Sandals Mill. So, if you came up the bank at Baildon, and turn left on Cliff Avenue.

LMI: I know it.

MS: There's a school, and then it's a little low building there, stone building there.

LMI: Is it still there?

MS: It's still there yeah, it's not a mill anymore but it was a weaving shed really. You know, that was the weaving department. It was called H. Armstrong and Sons. And he took that over with the mill and moved the production into there. And I was there for about three years, on sales again. But because he was the kind of guy he was... the relationship, it got worse, really.

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MS: It wasn't the friendly... you know, he was the boss. He was paying me wages. We had arguments. I was on a fairly low basic wage, with a 1% commission on sales, and I kept getting knocked back on the commission, you know. And he'd say, 'I can't afford this, Mick it'll have to be half a percent.' I'd say, 'Oh...' And it got too much really, and the relationship deteriorated a little bit, because I didn't think he was being fair to me.

LMI: So, you obviously knew quite a lot of mill owners when you were really young.

MS: Yeah, that's right.

LMI: That must have been quite an experience.

MS: Well, it was. Particularly the Hall and Clegg experience, because they were such power houses even then, you know. I mean, the place was fizzing with energy, you know. Because they went... you know the history after that?

LMI: He bought Dean Clough.

MS: He bought... well, he... before he bought Dean Clough, he went into partnership with Jonathan Silver. And they started buying mills up and he bought C.J. Hurst in Huddersfield, a big woollen mill, to develop the property. And then as partners they bought Dean Clough, and then they split. And Jonathan Silver went to found the empire at Salt's Mill, and then they sold the Dean Clough thing. And I mean the size of that place, I mean...

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LMI: It's huge, isn't it?

MS: Absolutely tremendous. Well, both places. They had such foresight, and they were so brave. And Tony Clegg, the other partner at Mountain Mills and Lee Mills, he founded the... what was it called? The... oh I'm sorry, I've forgotten the name of it... Mount Lee Estates. Yeah, so he branched off from Ernest Hall. And eventually he was doing multi... like 50, 60-million-pound deals. He was a property magnate.

LMI: So was he building residential property or industrial?

MS: All sorts, all sorts. He was buying up sites, you know, like the Lee Mills estate, and selling it to every... And they were massive deals, 50, 60-million-pound deals. The stuff I learned from them it was amazing, really.

LMI: So even though the industry was sort of beginning to decline... did you have a sense of the industry declining at that point?

MS: Well, I did, because at Nixon and Wall I was made redundant then, that was my first redundancy. So my wife was just pregnant at the time, and it was a bit of a worrying time. And I went for a job interview. Henry Listers, who I mentioned previously, they were part of Courtaulds.

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MS: It's unusual to have a woollen division in Courtaulds, really. And they were part of a woollen division of four different mills. And the boss at Listers was called Bruce Murgatroyd. And he was an ex-Duke of Wellington's tank regiment, lieutenant colonel, he was a real character, ex-military man. And I always got on well with him, and he was always fair to me. And I went for a job at one of the sister companies of Lister's, in this woollen division called William Pearson at Bramley, which is now gone. And I didn't get the job, but the day of the interview, as part of his round that he did, Murgatroyd called in, and he saw me in the

waiting room. And he said, 'Hello Mike, I haven't seen you for five years, what are you doing?' I said, 'Well, I've come for this job, I don't think it's going very well.' He said, 'Don't worry about it,' he said, 'you can have your old job back at Lister's, if you'd like.' I said, 'Oh, yes please.' So they took me back with open arms, and that was brilliant for... you know, I was secure again. You know, the baby was due, and because at Nixon [&] Wall they'd taken... as we got towards the end of the relationship, they took the firm's car from me, and I was back to running an old Morris Minor again.

LMI: Obviously he wasn't running the business very well then.

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MS: Well, he was for himself, you know. And this was the thing, you know. So I won't be too harsh on him, you know. In hindsight, you know, I could... perhaps it had to be done, he had to cut corners and he had to cut costs, and I was one of them. So I can be a bit magnanimous about that really and look at it in hindsight. At the time it was rough, it was a rough time, you know.

LMI: So you went back to...

MS: I went back to Lister's, the woollens firm. And eventually, after another four years there, the Courtauld's woollen division started to shrink a bit. Three of the mills went. And they concentrated all the production. It moved to Huddersfield, to a woollen mill called Smith & Calverley, at Lindley in Huddersfield. So Lister's... the building was sold off. And it's now been demolished sadly, and it's a housing estate down there.

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MS: So yeah, I moved to yet another mill at Lindley, part of the Courtauld's... it became called Courtauld's Woollens... and I was sales manager there, and sort of developed the trade. They were mainly ladies' fashion there, but I'd always had a background in menswear, and things like school wear. Listers, they used to produce, do you remember the old school blazers, Melton blazers? We used to make the cloth for that, so that was a big trade. Donkey jackets, do you remember the donkey jackets?

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LMI: Oh, I do. I remember the donkey jackets.

MS: With the PVC collar. Well, donkey jacketing, that was a hell of a cloth. 30 ounces a square yard, really heavy... Melton, made from shoddy, you know, reclaimed fiber. Duffel coat cloth, you know, that was another big thing. So I'd had a background in that. And in men's fashion, I was keen on, so I developed that trade for the Courtaulds Woollens at Huddersfield. And I got in with some big firms like the Marks and Spencer's again and Debenhams and Burtons and people like that.

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MS: So yeah that was quite good. I didn't like being part of Courtaulds particularly. A lot of bullshit meetings, you know, and courses. Oh, they were the bane of my life, going on courses. I hated them. But, yeah, it was all part of the thing, really. And then eventually, after about three years, Courtaulds Woollens was wound down, and Drummonds of Bradford bought over the Courtaulds Woollens.

LMI: The very famous Drummonds Mill.

MS: Drummonds Mill, yeah. And Stephen Simmons was the boss there. And the writing was on the wall for most of the people in the mill. They all got their marching orders.

LMI: Can you just give me the year here, roughly?

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MS: Yeah, when did we move to...? So I went to the Smith and Calverley mill, Courtaulds, Woollens at Lindley in '79... Well, I went to Lister's and then further on. So in 1992 it was when Drummonds took over the mill at Lindley. And the production was moved down to John Crowther's at Millands Bridge in Huddersfield, I don't know if you've heard of it. It was a big old woollen mill by the canal at Millands Bridge. And because I was in charge of really that part of the sales, they wanted to keep me on. And I'd heard shocking stories about Drummonds, and, you know, people said 'You want to be careful. If you go with them they'll pick your brains, get the business and then you'll be out on your ear.' Everybody else at the mill, just about, apart from three or four people at Lindley, Courtaulds Woollens, they got made redundant. They got redundancy. But they wanted me so I couldn't get, you know, if I wanted a job I had to move. And I had two miserable years there, that was really bad for me because they weren't nice people to work for. I had a bad time. I had to try and save the business that I'd taken there for them, and it was very, very stressful. I had to get it all in production at another mill and keep the customers happy at the same time.

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MS: And lo and behold, after two years, they made me redundant. And they got the business established that I'd taken down, and then I was going to be out on my ear. So I was really, really upset and at rock bottom there.

LMI: And [as I said], did you get a sense here of the whole industry beginning to contract?

MS: Yeah, well that's... you know, three or four mills had gone under me and been sold off and developed as property. So yeah, the market was declining. People stopped wearing, you know, who wears... well, maybe there's a bit of a trend now for Harris tweed... but sort of wool and worsted suits, people don't wear suits anymore, do they? And they don't wear sports jackets anymore, do they?

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LMI: Not on a day-to-day basis.

MS: They don't wear duffel coats and donkey jackets and school blazers. They're all out.

LMI: Did you get a sense of competition from abroad taking the business?

MS: Absolutely. One of the biggest competitors was Prato in Italy. That was a big competitor for the woollen trade. And they could make things much cheaper, and... beautiful cloths really, you had to hand it to them. But they had a lot of the market sewn up really. But yeah, I think it was a decline just in the wearing of woollen and worsted cloth really, it didn't help. Yeah, eventually Crowther's's, when I was made redundant - I did take them to an industrial tribunal and I got awarded unfair dismissal, so that was quite good.

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MS: So really that was my exit from the woollen and worsted trade then. I went into partnership with a friend of mine in a... we had a small print and design company. And I had ten good years making, you know, making a reasonable amount of money out of that really. In a completely different trade.

LMI: So, you went from textiles to print?

MS: Yeah.

LMI: That's quite interesting actually, because the Industrial Museum up in Bradford has got a lot of textile stuff and it's got a big print section.

MS: It has, it's interesting, it's a good museum, that.

LMI: So when did you actually leave the textile industry then, do you think? What year was that?

MS: Er, '93.

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LMI: And by that point did you think the writing was on the wall for textiles in Bradford?

MS: Absolutely, yeah. By that time a lot of the mills had gone, hadn't they? Everywhere really, wherever you looked, Huddersfield...

LMI: So people you'd worked with were all leaving the industry?

MS: Yeah, they'd been made redundant and had to find other jobs. It was sad really. Obviously, it was sad. You didn't like to see that decline. But it had been carrying on quite a

long time, hadn't it? And yeah, it was just sort of crystallized about that time. I'm just trying to think of some of the other mills in Bradford that are going now. I can't think of any. I can't... In in my sort of trade, the woollen trade, there's one famous one still going. You'll have seen their cloths around. They're called Abraham Moon - Moon at Guiseley.

LMI: Yes.

MS: That's one of their cloths.

LMI: I've got some of theirs.

MS: They make fabulous woollen... They were big competitors of mine. Arch competitors, you know, in the... the men's jacketing trade, particularly Marks and Spencer's, you know, daggers drawn because we were trying to sell the same sort of product there, you know. But they're beautiful cloths. And they've developed well, haven't they? Wherever you go, National Trust shops, you'll see their fabrics in there. You know, they've gone on to, they've got a shop in York.

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LMI: Have they?

MS: They've got their own shop, yeah. Selling some of the fabrics and garments, you know, made from them, caps and jackets and throws. The very popular rugs, that sort of thing. So yeah, they're still going, but I can't think of many more in the British woollen industry.

LMI: There's Prospect Mills in Keighley, but I'm not quite sure what they make. Can I... Prospect Mills or something like that?

MS: Yeah, not sure. I mean just down the valley from here, you can't see it today, but the stream goes down past the mill and it's called, it was called Dunkirk Mill. And obviously water powered at one time, because there's an old conduit and a big old, there's a big old reservoir just in front of it. It's now housing and that's just like 400 yards from me [here]. And then there was another mill called Tankards just down the lane there, and that's a big... it's been converted into housing. So at least some of the mill properties are being saved, aren't they?

LMI: Exactly.

MS: They're being converted.

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LMI: I think the smaller ones particularly are a bit more suitable for conversion, aren't they?

MS: Yeah, yeah that's right and Hebden Bridge of course, it's been a godsend, hasn't it? They used to call it Hemmed In Bridge when I first went. And I mean, it was grim at one time. All

the buildings were black and sooty. And you know, it was a poor area, and it's now been gentrified, hasn't it? It's amazing the transformation.

LMI: So have you got any particular... I mean we're always interested in people's kind of particular stories... any incidents that you remember from your time of working in the mills? Things that happened, funny, amusing, difficult, whatever.

MS: Well, like I mentioned, one of the things at Mountain Mills was this driving the bus and being able to do that without any previous experience. I mean can you imagine it today with health and safety and everything?! Being let loose on a massive 28-seater old petrol engine bus and the boss's cars! That was brilliant. I'll just have a little break and see if I can think of anything else.

0:33:12

MS: I always used to like, if I was chasing different fabrics up, find out where the customers' orders were. I'd go round the mill and see what stage they were at. And I always used to like going into the mending department. You know, the burlers and menders, because the ladies were there, all different ages. And what characters. So, you know, there's a young lad there, you know, it was really good fun because there'd always be this ribald language. And they'd be whistling at you, wolf whistles. And you used to be able to flirt with them, and have a good old laugh, yeah. Yeah, I always used to love that. It was brilliant.

LMI: Was there a sense of community in the mills?

MS: Yeah, yeah there was. I think people had to get on, didn't they, working closely together. And there had to be a lot of co-operation really. Yeah, I think it was really good humoured, in general.

0:34:07

MS: People... I suppose were grateful for their jobs as well, weren't they? Especially as time went on and jobs were getting scarce. They were glad to be in a job. I don't think it was particularly well paid, was it, the textile industry? Compared to others. Printing was always a lot more – I had some friends in printing. And they had big money compared to ours. But no, I think I was always reasonably well paid. I thought so anyway, you know. Enough to be able to have a reasonable lifestyle.

LMI: So I think probably one thing... let's talk a bit about the bosses a bit more. Because not many people that we've interviewed have had much to do with senior management.

MS: Yeah.

LMI: So, what were they like as people?

MS: Well, such characters. I go back to Hall and Clegg. Well, you can imagine, I mean, that you know, they had to... I mean Ernest Hall was a pianist, a concert pianist. I mean [he had]

so many strings to his bow. And [they were] so energetic, you know. And Tony Clegg. I mean he was a younger man. He was a bit younger than Ernest Hall, and he was up-and-coming. And their energy was amazing really. I can't stress how much I sort of learned from them; you know, work ethic really. And like I said before, Brian Wall...

LMI: Did you socialize with them at all?

0:35:37

MS: No.

LMI: You were an employee?

MS: Absolutely, yeah. But I mean, you know, they had amusing... Yeah, there were... Ernest Hall, he was a character, you know. He was a raconteur, you know. If you did get him in the mood, yeah, he could tell a tale. Tony Clegg was a bit more aloof.

LMI: What's the difference between a good boss and a bad boss?

0:36:03

MS: I think somebody who [has] empathy with his workforce, and who looks out for them. And not just selfishly gets the maximum out of them. When I had my own business, I hope I was a good boss, you know. I tried to be fair to my workers and have a good relationship with them. And be considerate, because a lot of bosses weren't, you know.

LMI: I suppose when times got tough as well it got more difficult?

MS: Yeah, yeah, it did. Drummonds weren't a good firm to work for. They were particularly ruthless with culling people, you know.

LMI: And this was in the '90s?

MS: Yeah, yeah.

LMI: That was a time of kind of when we were supposed to be becoming more efficient and stripping everything back to...

MS: Yeah, yeah. They were just run by accountants really. I mean when Drummonds came to the mill at Lindley... I mean that they had a guy in there for about six months, and they just took the, you know, everything was costed down to the last thread. They were just ruthless the way they treated people, I thought.

0:37:19

LMI: Did that make the workforce unhappy?

MS: Oh, yeah, yeah. Well, they knew the writing was on the wall. And there was a sense of unease because they knew people were in... and probably the history of Drummonds, you know, they'd closed down a lot of mills, and they knew it was coming, really.

LMI: So you would have been working in the mills during the kind of the three-day week in the 1970s when the power was...

MS: Yeah.

LMI: What was that like when things...when there were lots of industrial disputes then weren't there?

MS: Yeah, to be honest, in my particular job it didn't make a lot of difference. I could carry on really. So yeah, obviously in production terms it was awkward. But I could still carry on and travel and see people and try and keep the sales going. So it didn't really affect me personally.

0:38:15

LMI: So, just one last question really, and that is, for you, a young man growing up in Bradford, you suddenly saw a lot more of the world, what was that like for you?

MS: Well, it was exciting, yeah. It was brilliant.

LMI: I think it was quite interesting you going to Carnaby Street and all of those places.

MS: Yeah. Well, another thing, and I forgot to say really - Jonathan Silver, before he started getting into the bit of property magnate, he was part of a family firm in Bradford. His father had a small textile firm. And Jonathan...

LMI: He had a clothes shop as well.

0:38:51

MS: Absolutely. He had a spin... He started on his own then. He'd be very early 20s, Jonathan Silver. And he started a chain of shops, called Jonathan Silver.

LMI: I had a friend who worked in one of the shops.

MS: Yeah, I think he got to about 12 or 14 shops. And I sold to him, so I knew him, really, before he started on the property business. So, you know, I would... Do you remember the fashion for worsted gabardine suits, you know.....they'd be in colours like beige, fawn and black and navy blue and aubergine. Do you remember aubergine?

0:39:01

LMI: I do.

MS: I had an aubergine crimplene suit at one time. Oh God, when I think of it! Yeah. But so, I'd started selling to him with his clothing firms really, so I got to know him a little bit before his days. And then I remember one day when I was at Lister's at Troydale, this is when Hall and Silver had teamed up. They came to the mill to look at the mill when it was due to be sold or to move. And they were dressed in boiler suits. And they were so scruffy that, you know, this is Hall, Sir Ernest Hall (I don't think he was Sir then), but you know, and Johnathan Silver. And because I knew them, I knew them. But anybody looking at them, they looked like removal men or something. And they'd come to buy the mill!

0:40:11

LMI: Why were they in boiler suits?

MS: I don't know, they'd been working somewhere, you know, or been checking out another place. I don't know.

LMI: Interesting. You know, when you're doing sales and all that stuff, did you have to kind of keep an eye on what fashion trends were?

MS: Oh yeah, absolutely, yeah. You had to keep abreast of it really. And speak to designers, you know, the clothing designers, and develop cloths with them, really. So, you know, you got an idea what they were looking for. And they'd ask for you to produce the samples. So you get the production department to make samples, and then send sample lengths which were made into garments. And then if they were happy then you'd get the order. So it was a process like that really, working closely with them. Not easy working with people like Marks & Spencer's. You know, buying committees and... that was a bit stressful really.

0:41:07

LMI: But presumably if you did sell to Marks & Spencer's it was...

MS: Big volume then. Yeah, yeah. And they're very exacting with it, you know, if you remember, well they probably still are, they're quality controlled. You know, they'd send inspectors to the mill, and they'd see the cloth being made. It was rigorously tested, you know, strength and abrasion, all that sort of thing. So they were hard taskmasters. But if you made the cloth, you made it right. Yeah, you got good orders. But nothing was ever 100% guaranteed. You had to work for every order. I sometimes think... when I go to, say a car showroom, I often think half of the car salesman's job is done for them, because people come in wanting to buy something. But I had to go out on the road and see customers from scratch. I had a bag of samples, and you'd talk to the buyer and see what they needed. And you had to make the sort of entry point yourself. You know, the connection. The old Yellow Pages before computers and everything. You know, get the local Yellow Pages and flick through clothing manufacturers, designers, or whatever.

0:42:15

LMI: So this really is my last question. You talked right at the beginning of this conversation - you talked about the jobs that you did. And you talked about some of the actual working on the machinery in cutting and perching. Would you like to just describe what you had to do for those particular parts of the textile business?

MS: Right, ok. So, the customer... particularly in the small merchants that I worked at, you would send samples out initially. And they'd go abroad or to wherever they were going. And you'd get the orders back. The cloth was then delivered to the merchant from the manufacturer, because they dealt with dozens and dozens of manufacturers from all over the country really. You got the cloth in, and then it had to be inspected. Because a lot of them... stuff was being shipped out abroad and it had to be right. So the initial perching was an important thing, once you got the cloth in. So that was the inspection of the... you had a north light usually, and the cloth came over the rollers. And you watched for any faults at all. And often you had a pair of tweezers, you know, the old burlers? You've seen people using them? And if there were any bits of vegetation that was still left in any of the fibers, you had to pick them out. Any knots or anything you had to try and just push them through and make sure they were... And then if there were any faults you put a string opposite the fault at the end of the cloth. So then when it was being inspected, it went into a sort of long barrow. And then it was moved. You either had to have it cuttled, which we mentioned before, which was being folded in half, and then folded in layers to make a square form of the cloth or rolled onto boards. So it went down a long table with a machine at the end with a motor, and usually a cardboard board on the machine. And the cloth was rolled then onto the board.

LMI: So, by that point it was ready to be shipped off somewhere?

MS: Yeah, ready to be packed up.

LMI: And sent to a clothing manufacturer?

MS: Well yes, at Nixon and Wall or Mountain Mills, yeah [to] clothing manufacturers then. But at the merchants it would then be packed up to be sent abroad really. So, as I said, into either bales with hessian on the outside, or packed into cases, packing cases.

LMI: Did you ever get to go abroad?

0:44:58

MS: Yeah, that's something I didn't mention. We used to go to exhibitions often in Paris. There was one big one every year called Premier Vision. I don't know if you've heard of that. But clothing manufacturers from all over the world used to exhibit there. And so you had a stand there, a trade stand. And you had samples of your fabric and you had four or five days usually in Paris. But I didn't travel abroad, it was purely in England. Except for Northern Ireland. Had a few customers in the school where I trade in Northern Ireland.

0:45:38

MS: And so, yeah, I'd have just a day or two over there, flying from Leeds/Bradford, and the old plane used to... you hadn't time to eat your breakfast by the time it was down in Belfast. And I went... I was travelling there during the Troubles as well. That was a bit weird, because, you know, if ever you were in a car over there, if you'd taken the car, you had people... you had soldiers stopping you and looking underneath with mirrors and checking for bombs and things. That was a bit a bit stressful at one time. But had some good customers in Northern Ireland, nice people.

LMI: You went there quite often, did you?

MS: Three or four times a year, yeah.

LMI: You must have spent a lot of time on the road.

0:46:18

MS: I did, yeah. But I always liked it, you know, I always liked traveling, I still like driving and you know, it's still... it's not as much of a pleasure on the motorways now, is it?

LMI: No.

MS: But yeah, it used to take a bit longer at one time.

LMI: Right, thanks very much Michael, that's been brilliant.

MS: Well, I hope you've got enough, you're never sure what to say, are you? Obviously, you miss a load of things.

LMI: Oh well, if you remember anything, write it down and send it to me.

MS: Yeah.

LMI: Ok, thanks very much.

LMI: Say what you just said to me.

MS: Yeah, I sometimes dream about the mills and the time in the mills and all the people I've worked with and it's quite good really, it's quite soothing, you know, and they're all good dreams, nice dreams. But one of the things that takes me back is the smells, and we were talking about salt smells. As soon as you go into the mill you smell that wool and the oil and the lanolin and everything. Absolutely brilliant, a nostalgia trip.