

Peter Shepherdson - Transcript

Audio Quality: Good, clear. Bit of coughing at times.

0:00:00

LMI: Right, I'm here with Pete Shepherdson. Pete, tell me about yourself.

PS: Right, well, I left school when I was 16. I wasn't happy about that because I wanted to leave at 15. I had to put that extra year on, so I didn't do very well. I left school, I went and worked as an optical mechanic. That was my first job, what I wanted. Then I went on the pop wagons. After that I worked in the mills. I worked in the mill at Bingley, Black Dyke Mills. And [I] didn't really feel right about Black Dyke Mills because we were taking the machinery out, putting it on wagons and sending it to India.

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LMI: Just tell me about that then. So, it was closing down then, was it?

PS: Yeah. I was, uh...

LMI: Give me a year here.

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PS: Ooh, now then. A year, it would have been... Let me see... About '74, '75. Somewhere around there. And, uh... I remember walking up there in the snow, because there weren't any buses. I were living at Buttershaw. So I had to walk up to the mill and walk back again. And uh... And we were... basically massive, massive sheds of machinery for the wool and twine and all that sort of stuff. And we had to dismantle them, pack them all up and put them on giant wagons. And this went on for months and months.

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PS: So I had a job there for months and months. Previous to that, my dad were a chimney sweep, and we used to go to Black Dyke Mills to clean the boilers, when the school holidays and that were on. So we used to clean the boilers and...

LMI: So you knew the mill quite well.

PS: I knew it quite well, yeah. We had the place to ourselves when the holidays were on. And we had to clean out all these little tubes inside the boilers, with brushes and that.

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LMI: So did you go up there in Wakes Weeks?

PS: Yeah, yeah, this is it. Every year we used to go up and do that. For a few years anyway, because my dad had got the job. And also we had to clean out the filters. That were filtering

all the bits out of the air, you know, when wool and things going through. So, and the filters were absolutely manky. They were filthy. And we had to clean them as well. And that was just...

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LMI: Did you wear masks?

PS: Not then, no. No, no, no, no, no. No masks. You can't work with a mask on! And I didn't even wear a hat. My dad wore a hat.

LMI: So how old were you when you were doing that?

PS: Ooh... that was probably... I shouldn't have been working then, but I think I was about 14 or 13.

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PS: Because I worked with my dad since I was about six-year-old, carrying his soot bags and stuff. And we used to go around all these houses. Street after street after street. Around here. All around Bradford. All [the] mill workers with their one-up, one-down. And a passageway. And a toilet. And a coal house. And a tin bin hanging there. All of them were like that. And cobbled streets, and all that stuff. So that was a regular thing. So we used to get to meet a lot of people. Every year they'd have to have their chimney swept, and the amount of muck that come out of them were something else. And that was when Bradford was black. The buildings were black, with soot. And so that's the sort of thing we used to do. I remember working at other mills but...

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LMI: Can we just go back to Black Dyke, because I'm interested in that. So that was like when the mills were beginning to close there?

PS: They were closing down, yeah.

LMI: And what did that feel like?

PS: Well, I needed the money, for one thing, so that felt good. But it didn't feel right. It just... you know, it's like... This stuff was built to last hundreds of years. Forever basically. And it's all gone. Chucked on the back of a wagon. Sent abroad. And we ended up with just empty buildings. There used to be basically a right racket in there. And they used to sort of use sign language talking to each other.

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PS: And... because we did go up there to price the job when it was all running. And we'd go through all the mill. And there's all these women in there. And men, but mainly women,

working on the machines. And, yeah, well, you couldn't hear yourself speak, it was that bad. But er...and then when we went back a couple of weeks later, silence.

LMI: It had closed?

PS: For the cleaning.

LMI: For the summer holidays?

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PS: Yeah.

LMI: Oh right.

PS: Total silence. And then when I went over there and worked to shift the machinery out, again, it was just silence. It wasn't... it didn't feel right, in that respect. It should have been noisy. And this was up at Queensbury, of course. And most of the workers there were from Queensbury, just across the road, sort of thing. Street after street, again. Most of them have been knocked down, I think. And yeah, it was a shame to see these things that were made by Victorians -solid - would never wear out, and now in another country.

LMI: And so the machinery you took out was really old, was it?

PS: Yeah, it was like Victorian. It was... really old stuff.

LMI: About 70 years old?

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PS: Solid chunks and metal, you know. Iron and steel, and all that. And all these things stuck up in the air with threads going across them, and all that. And so that was Black Dyke Mills, I'm afraid. That's what happened there. Now...

LMI: So you went on to work in other mills?

PS: Before that I worked in mills, I worked in a mill at Bingley. That's where I was doing the...well, I call it bobby-ligging, and they did. But my job was to run along and take the bobbins off, that were full. And then put the empty ones on.

LMI: Was that a spinning mill, then?

PS: Yeah. Opposite the biscuit factory in Bingley. Because I used to get me dinner from the biscuit factory. And [I] worked there for about... £17 a week, I got there. Bloody good money - from 12. [£]

LMI: What year was that?

PS: That would be... let me think. I think I was 19 then... so about '69, 1969. Something like that. It was after I'd been on the pop wagons. So I were there for a while. But that was just my job. And I'd get screamed at if I didn't fill the bobbins up quick enough. I had bloody long rows of them. And then sometimes [I] used to rake fluff from underneath machines and put it in bags. I had these big baskets, with two wheels on the side and a wheel at each side. And full of empty bobbins, as we speak. We go rushing in, and take all the bobbins off, put them on, fill up, fill up, put on, put on. And that's what we're doing all the time.

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PS: And then there was a woollen factory down at Greengates. I forget the name of it now. The job there was warehouse. But my grandmother worked there. And they used to roll up balls of wool. And she used to buy some of that wool and make woollen blankets, as well as work there. And then my uncles were working there. So it was a family thing there.

LMI: Was that wool for knitting or wool for...?

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PS: Knitting. Yeah. All types of knitting wool. Again, [the] machinery in there, noisy. I had to be careful there, because I was a warehouse man, I'd have to go upstairs where the women were. And at Christmas time they'd be waiting for you... I'm not kidding. I'm going through with a little trolley basket thing. And I just felt something funny going on.

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PS: And then they started coming out behind me. I seen them back of my glasses. Because I can see, you know, from reflection. Because it's quite dark in there. And I saw them coming, I looked round, I looked back. So I jumped down the chute to get away from them. The guys were waiting downstairs, thinking that they'd caught me. But they didn't. I just jumped down that chute. And then a bit later on another guy went up. He come down and they'd greased his balls. Captured him. Christmas. Greased his balls. Sent him down. This is the women. And sometimes I've sat down, having a cup of tea, or something like that. They come over and start rubbing their fingers through my hair, because I had long red hair, back then, you know, [I was] a bit of a hippie.

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PS: And they used to go, 'Oh, that's lovely hair, that. Oh, lovely!' And they'd all come along and do it. And I'm, 'Get off!' I used to get that. These are the women. Oof. They were bad. They'd catch you. So yeah, I was lucky on that one, I can tell you. And I worked in a mill down at Bradford, right in the centre of Bradford, which was owned by the... Jews that owned that one. And I used to roll cloth for a big rolling machine like this. All this black cloth that they used to make funeral gloves with. I think they were for Muslim funerals, being made by a Jewish factory.

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PS: And I used to have to roll this cloth. And that's what I did all day. I used to go in there, roll the cloth. I learned pretty quick, because of the static on the machines, to take both my hands off at the same time. If I didn't, I'd get a shock right from my butt. And my hair would stand up. You know, from the static. It was amazing. So I did that. And I worked there for quite a while. It was a good job. I used to work there, and go to the pub, and work there, and go to the pub. That's what I did back then.

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LMI: Did they just make gloves and nothing else?

PS: They had other types of cloth there. But the main thing was the funeral gloves. They used to send them all over the world. This is down there where Bradford Bus offices used to be. Right in the centre of Bradford. Not far from...

LMI: Not Chester Street?

PS: No, it's the one going in from... The road now goes... let me see... where the train station is, there's a road opposite, I forget the name of it now.

LMI: Which one, Foster Square or the other one?

PS: Going towards Foster Square.

LMI: Yeah.

PS: Well, past Foster Square.

LMI: The bottom of Little Germany? Around there?

PS: Yeah, around that area, yeah. And it's a big building. It's still there. And... because I used to go up to the pub for the pie and peas. Proper pie and peas, back then and all, you know.

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PS: And then I'd get changed at the... I remember when the electric went off... And it went off about six o'clock or something like that. So I worked over till six o'clock, got changed in the toilet, went to the pub. And in the pub, there was candles lit.

LMI: So was this in the three-day week?

PS: Yeah.

LMI: So it was 1974, wasn't it?

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PS: Yeah, yeah. Something like that, yeah. And so then I'd be in the pub all night, meet up with my mates later on, because the pub didn't open until six. And they had the fires lit, they had the candles lit, and you could still get beer. Because it were hand pumps. All of them were. And I used to go around all the pubs in Bradford every week. And this went on for a few years. Until I got married. And then that were the end of that. And I worked at other mills. Usually ended up in warehousing. But the main job I did do was that bobbin-ligging.

LMI: So you moved from mill to mill doing that?

PS: I did all sorts, whatever. I was like yosser yous, me. 'Give me a job. I can do it.' And this went on till.... let's see... When I was 24, I decided to go up to Aberdeen to be on oil rigs. And I was filling all the forms in. And they didn't want to know me because I worked in a mill.

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LMI: Really?

PS: Yeah, a mill worker, you know. They wanted an oil worker. So I had to lie to them in the end, and tell them that I'd worked in the Gulf of Oman and places like that. And I got away with it. And got a job. And I ended up, first time in my life being on an airplane, a helicopter, all that sort of stuff. Quite a big surprise. When I came back, I did occasionally get jobs in the mill in between working on rigs. So I must have worked in about a dozen mills in total.

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LMI: And so that was all the way through the periods of mill closure as well?

PS: Yep, yep. From, let's see, 16, 17, 17 and a half... I worked in the mill from when I was 18 up until I was 24. So a good six years I spent in and out of them. I mean, I did work at Cross Gear Works for a while. That was a good job.

LMI: So did you like the kind of... the atmosphere of working in the mill?

PS: Yeah, yeah.

LMI: Apart from being harassed by...

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PS: It went alright, you know. I mean, I did end up getting thrown in the swimming... in the fountain in the summertime. Stuff like that. These women, I tell you, they were bad.

LMI: What fountain?

PS: They had a fountain in the middle of the turnaround area of the mill. And I was sat on the edge of there, having a cigarette and a pie and peas, I think it were. And when I finished, these women just grabbed me and threw me in. Splash.

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LMI: Which mill was that?

PS: That was the one down at Green Gates. Something Wools, I can't remember the name of it... Can't remember the full name now. But yeah, it was a good job. I mean, the people were good. You know, everybody was helpful. But I got sacked from there eventually, because I didn't go to church.

LMI: Really?

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PS: Yeah. Well what happened was, I think it was Easter, they said, 'Right, if you go to church you can have afternoon off.' So we all...me and my mates went to church, and went straight to the pub. Of course, the boss walked in. And he said, 'You, you, you and you. You're fired.'

LMI: Because you hadn't gone to church?

PS: Because I hadn't gone to church.

LMI: And was that Good Friday I guess, was it?

PS: Something like that. Yeah, yeah, yeah it was. It was. Because the church was opposite The Dog and Gun at Greengates.

LMI: Oh, I know The Dog and Gun.

PS: And we just sort of... like Beatles do, [doodle doodle do] we goes in there. And we all got caught.

LMI: There seems to be a lot of beer involved in your...

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PS: Oh, beer and everything, yeah. Yeah, yeah. I mean, back then, there was no marijuana or any type of drugs in Bradford. It was just beer and cigarettes. Then at some point, the marijuana came in, and I got into that, and I become a right hippy.

LAUGHTER

PS: But, yeah, it was... It was good, you know. I mean, back then I didn't really think about it. I just went to work. Did me work, went out partying till 3 in the morning. Back to work at 8. And I'd do that. I'd go out 6 nights a week, 'cos I was single then.

LMI: You must have had stamina.

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PS: Oh, you what? I did go in with hangovers sometimes, but I always took Sunday off. I didn't go out on Sunday, because it was boring anyway. So I used to go to all the pubs in Bradford. The Old Crown. I used to know some characters in there.

LMI: I remember the Old Crown. That was a bit of a place, wasn't it?

PS: That was a rough hole, that wasn't it? I mean, there was two rooms. That's where all the tough guys and the hard guys were. And the other room was normal sort of thing.

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PS: And that was the smoking room. You could smoke in there back then, yeah? You didn't have to go outside. And a couple of my old friends used to be in there. That's when I got to know them. But most people would avoid them.

LMI: Did you have to be tough to work in the mill?

PS: Yeah. Yeah, you had to be fit. I mean, you had to be very fit. Even the women. Because they were at it all day, you know. Up and down, moving about. I mean, it's always in a hurry, getting stuff done. Wagon's arrived, you've got to load it up. And you've got to load it up properly and quick.

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PS: Going and getting stuff off of the women, to put on the wagon, at the end of the line. Coming down the chute. All the packages that they made up.

LMI: Was it piecework?

PS: It was for them, yeah. And my ex-sister-in-law used to be... work at the mill, for years. And she was a picker. Whatever that meant, I don't really know.

LMI: You put it on the bobbins or something?

PS: Yeah, she was a picker and she got good money for that. They're a different section.

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LMI: So did women work mainly one kind of job and men work another kind of job?

PS: Yeah. Yeah, there was a few... They had the young men working with the women on the bobbins. Obviously to run around and change the bloody bobbins. And constantly doing that. I mean, you just get one row done and there's another one shouting at you. And you've got to

get down there and do that one. And then the next one. And so on and so on. And then you come up the other side. And there was two of us in there, one doing one side and one doing the other. And you're pulling them off like this, shove the basket along... like that. And then when you're putting the empties on, they're a lot easier, obviously, because you just slip them on like that. And if you miss one, you get right bollocking. So you make sure you get them all done all the way along. It was hard work. But it kept you fit.

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LMI: How many hours were the shifts?

PS: Let me think. I think there were three shifts, three eights. I never did night shift. I wasn't interested, obviously, because I was partying! But they would swap over. A bit like rigs in a lot of ways, I mean we used to do that out there - 12 on, 12 off, 12 on, 12 off. And night shift/day shift. The mills that I worked in... Well, when I was working at Black Dyke Mill, it was just daytime. There was no night shift because there was nothing working there anymore.

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PS: All the machines were shut down, and we were just ripping them apart and chucking them on wagons. And, er, it's like I say, it was a shame. And you used to get the Black Dyke Mills band practising up there.

LMI: When you were taking the machines out?

PS: Yeah, so I was working over it at weekend, you see.

LMI: Say that again, sorry.

PS: I worked over it at the weekend. And you could hear them practicing while we were dismantling stuff. Big giant spanners, and all lot. You know, some of them nuts and bolts I couldn't even get off. Had to get bigger guys in. And machinery, [doof doof doof] Took it off because it was solid.

LMI: Did you come from a mill working family?

PS: No. I mean, my dad come from the... originally, they were the Tempests. They used to, used to own most of Yorkshire, back in 1066, when they nicked it.

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PS: It got to the point of time it got to me dad, there were nowt left. So over a, what is it, a thousand years, 900 years, I don't know, everything gone, gambled away. Because it's the gambler in the family all the way through. I think there's one building left in Skipton where I've got a relative that still owns it, but has to rent it out to make a living.

LMI: When you say the Tempest...?

PS: Tempests. They came over with William the Conqueror.

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LMI: Oh, right.

PS: And they were given from... I think around about Settle area, right over to... what is it, Kirkstall and Leeds.

LMI: Because there's a pub called The Tempest out near Skipton.

PS: Yeah.

LMI: A restaurant.

PS: Yeah. The Tempests... because me, me grandad Shepardson married Dorothy Tempest. Right? And he come from... basically the Viking side, and all that, you know, eventually, down there. And then he married the Tempest, my grandma. And she lost her inheritance when she married him. So she must have loved him, because she had to give up her inheritance. And then...

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LMI: What, because he wasn't good enough?

PS: He wasn't good enough. But apart from that, once you got married, you didn't get your inheritance. That was the rule.

LMI: Oh, right.

PS: So me other three aunts never got married. And they were going round in fur coats and everything. And we used to go up to Knaresborough, and all that. All that posh stuff. And always getting half a crown off of each one of them.

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PS: Of course, back then, half a crown was like 20 cigarettes, and change. And I used to go and get their Saturday shopping. It makes me laugh, because my Auntie Nellie always used to send me for a bloomer. I used to think, 'Auntie Nellie's bloomers!' And I'd have to go all around the village at Idle. I'd have to go to every shop. I'd even pick up bottles of whiskey, and all the lot. And I were only eight. I could have drunk that whiskey, you know. And I could have smoked the cigarettes. Everything. But you know, that's what I used to do. So they never... my aunties, great aunties never worked.

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PS: My grandma did. She used to work at Busby's. Because... she wanted to work. And my granddad worked for Bradford Buses, trolleybuses. And he used to work in offices.

LMI: Coming out of the tram shed up here, the trolleybuses

PS: Yeah. Yeah, well he used to be in an office in Bradford and run it from there. My dad was just basically a spoilt brat. He was an only child. And the first job he done was he worked at Tetley Brewery and became a cooper. So he trained up to become a cooper. And became an alcoholic doing it, because he used to get free beer all day. And he left school at 15. And he was an alcoholic by the time he was 16, doing that job. And so that's... then the gambling mixed with the alcohol, that were it.

LMI: You didn't stand a chance really.

PS: No, no.

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LMI: I think you've lived quite a sober life in comparison.

PS: In comparison, yeah, yeah. I mean, he did leave some money in his will to me... £1.50. That was the end of the Tempests. From all that to £1.50. That's what I got.

LMI: Oh, luxury. Peter, that's a great, great story. Many stories, in fact. Thanks very much.

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PS: I can't remember half of it.

LMI: Well, if you do remember anything you think I might be interested in, you've got my phone number now. So give me a call.

PS: Yeah, I'll let you know. Yeah, so one thing about it was, it's memories. Lots of good memories. Lots of... I mean, eventually, I got to 1976. I remember that long hot summer. And I was stupid enough to get a job at galvanizing, down at Canal Road.

LMI: Oh, golly.

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PS: It was an 800 degree pot full of liquid zinc. And we used to lower it in, the metal. It's all machinery now. Wouldn't be allowed that now. And it'd splash on you, and all sorts. And we had, '76 summer, all we had was a big barrel full of water to dip ourselves in now and again.

LMI: I remember it very vividly. I lived up in Bingley and...

PS: It was a hot job. But there you go.

LMI: Thank you very much.