

## Roger Davy -Transcription

*Audio Quality – Very good throughout. Some slight background noise approx. at 17 mins and 39-40mins*

**0:00:00**

**LMI:** Right, here we are. We are recording. Now, Roger, would you like to introduce yourself and say a bit about yourself, and what your background is?

**RD:** Yes, I'm Roger Davy, I'm now 85, I was born in Ilkley in 1938. I went to a local school, and then I went to Woodhouse Grove School at Apperley Bridge, for 10 years, and then I left. And then I went to the textile department at Leeds University, which in my day (that was 1957) they ran the textile department there. And they ran a technical college course, and I did a diploma in textile industries. My father didn't want me to do a degree course. He said 'That's useless.' He said 'Do a diploma course where you'll do *everything*, from the sheep to the wool and spinning and weaving and everything.' And he said, 'That's a lot better background'. So I did that, and then I left there in 1961. And went to work in the family business, which I had worked in during the holidays since I was an early teenager.

**LMI:** And this was a very old family business, wasn't it?

**RD:** Yes, the family business was created in 1895, by three brothers. One was my grandfather, and two great-uncles. And they'd grown up in Sutton. Well, actually they were born in Kildwick, near the parish church in Kildwick. And their father was a village cobbler and shoemaker and clog maker. And then when they got to be 14 themselves, they worked at T & M Bairdstow mill in Sutton-in-Craven. And by the time they were in their late 20s... no, their early 20s, they were all either weaving overlookers or spinning overlookers at the mill. And then, we're not absolutely sure why, but they found enough money... we think John, one of the brothers, (it was John and Stephen and Francis; Francis was my grandfather) but John, we think, possibly had speculated in gold in South Africa.

**0:02:11**

**LMI:** Oh I read that in your book.

**RD:** We do know he went to South Africa. But they found they had enough money, and they decided to leave T & M Mill, where they had good steady jobs, and took the big risk. And they decided they would move into Bradford, and two of them would become waste merchants. Those would be chaps who went round the mills, buying this material called waste in textiles, which is really the byproduct of the spinning and weaving process. And two of them John and Stephen became waste merchants. And my grandfather, Francis, became the processor.

**LMI:** So, when you say it's a waste, is it the stuff that kind of falls by the side [of the machines]?

**RD:** It was, it was. Nowadays it's a lot more controlled, of course. But in those days, this material waste, it's spun threads, mostly. Particularly in Bradford, it would be spun threads, in the West Riding. But there would be some clip from weaving. But it was just thrown together, and then sent to various companies that the waste merchants would go around to the mills and buy this material called waste. And they would take it back to their little warehouses, and they would sort it and take out any contrary material and bobbins and all sorts of things. And when they had enough of one blend - enough material to recycle... (because recycling textiles is a long job. It's been going for 200 years probably), they would send it to somebody to recycle it. And it would come to a firm... (Just to say that Francis became the processor. The two merchant brothers bought separate warehouses, near the bottom of... one of them, in Fawcett Court, near the bottom of the old Manchester Road. And they also bought, between themselves, a shed, (Anchor Shed up at Dudley Hill), part of which had been an old Salvation Army hostel. And they put in there a couple of preparing machines, to reduce the waste down to a semi-fibrous form. They would then put it through a scouring set, which would relax a lot of the twists in the thread. Then they would put it on a Garnett machine. The Garnett process is... a Garnett machine is similar to a carding machine, but it has a lot more working points over it. And it is covered with like a sawtooth wire, and the material is fed through the Garnett machine. (The name Garnett actually comes from a firm called P&C Garnetts, at Cleckheaton, who developed this machine probably in the 1850s.) And, depending on the amount of twist in the threads that dictated the number of working points, or working sections, you would have in a Garnett machine.

**0:05:18**

**RD:** Some were just two swifts. And we had them up to five swifts for doing the very fine white botany thread waste.) Anyway, when I left the textile department in Leeds, I came back to work in the family business. My father was still there. He had been working there since 1919 when he came out of the Navy. And my eldest brother (but he was 10 years older than me), he was running the place as well. Then we had an elderly chap running the... as work manager. And another elderly chap working the office...office manager. So, in a way they didn't know what to do with me. And so I took the decision. I said, 'I'll work in the mill'. And it was the best education I ever had. I did everything that the chaps were doing. I would work in hot and dirty areas. And I did anything that anybody wanted me to do.

**LMI:** Can I just clarify, what comes out at the end of this? Is it like a... Ah...Wow. That's...So I'm holding in my hand something that you would think was a washed and cleaned and combed fleece.

**0:06:44**

**RD:** That's really half the raw material. That's in the half open state.

**LMI:** And this is?

**RD:** That's the thread waste.

**LMI:** Another piece I'm holding here is the waste that's still waiting to be refinished.

**RD:** That's right. It's going from that stage into that stage. The Garnett machine would reduce *that* thready material down to a fully fibrous form.

**LMI:** I'll take pictures of these before I leave so that people who are listening to this can get an idea.

**RD:** And that's just an example of Garnett wire. That's what the material... that's what the rollers on the Garnett are covered with.

**LMI:** So it looks like a hacksaw really, it's a hacksaw blade.

**RD:** And it comes in different densities, with different...

**LMI:** And this is for really, you draw that through this?

**RD:** You have a very large swift, running very quickly. And over the top, eight or ten working rollers, and this... as the material goes through the machine the threads get caught, in a way, between the swifts and the working rollers, and there's a reduction. But you've got to be careful. What we're trying to do all the time is to retain the fibre length without...

**LMI:** Without having to break...?

**RD:** ...disabling it, So that it's suitable for re-spinning - re-carding and re-spinning.

**0:08:04**

**LMI:** Ah, well I just must say this piece of what I would have thought was just like fleece straight from a sheep's back that had been cleaned and washed, is really soft.

**RD:** Yes, it is. That's pukka stuff is that.

**LMI:** So, and then you would sell this on to a spinner?

**RD:** Well, we didn't. We were commissioned processors. We worked a little bit like dry cleaners. The merchants and the manufacturers would send material to us for processing. We would charge so much a pound originally, and so much a kilo for doing the job. And it would go... We never bought or sold any of the material that we processed.

**LMI:** Oh, that's interesting.

**RD:** We were commissioned processors. but we processed, in my day, wool. All types of wool -crossbred wool, botany wool, fine wools, mohair, alpaca, camel hair, cashmere, silk, angora.

**LMI:** And all of these would need a different approach?

**RD:** They would need a different approach and a different process.

**LMI:** So, what it sounds to me like, you know, when you talk about people who work with waste, you kind of have this vision of it being quite a manual process, but this sounds very skilful.

**0:09:22**

**RD:** It was. It was a very, very specialised job. And each blend, when it came into us, it might... Each blend which came in from a spinner, or a manufacturer or a merchant, it was an amalgam of different types.

**LMI:** Would it be dyed already?

**RD:** Some was dyed, but we tended to do white material. We had two competitors in Bradford, (City Waste Pulling and AS Whitehead), and they tend to do all the colours. It was a gentleman's agreement. Our business, the Bradford Waste Pulling Company (a lovely name), tended to do all the white material, because there was always this problem of contamination.

**LMI:** Oh, okay, yes.

**RD:** We worked on commission for people as far apart as Brora, which is about 80 miles north of Inverness - an alpaca manufacturer, T&M Hunter. And then Johnson's of Elgin. And then the textile towns of Galashiels and Peebles and around there...and down there Galashiels and Selkirk. What's the other one? I can't remember. There's three of them.

**0:10:44**

**RD:** And then we worked for spinners and weavers in the West Riding, and Halifax and Huddersfield. Never went over the hill into Lancashire. We never did cotton. Cotton was a different set-up altogether. And then we were working for the hosiery people down in Leicester. Whitney blankets, getting down into [the] Cotswolds. Places in Stroud, in Gloucestershire. And I think our furthest west, we did for Buckfast Spinning Company in Buckfastley, in Devon. And then a lot of the material that we did, particularly the fine white botany thread waste, which we reduced down to a fibrous form. Because it was a tightly spun, a bit like your worsted cloth for a suit, it was ideal for worsted suitings, but when you came to recycle it, it was very tight. And so we had to use quite a little... a bit more energy, and longer machines to reduce that down to a fibrous form. But the result, because all this extra work we had to do, it wasn't particularly good for spinning. The fibre length wasn't particularly long, it was quite short. So it wasn't very good for spinning. But it was ideal for felt manufacture. And we worked for a firm, or merchants... and we worked for them indirectly as a middleman... for a firm called E.V. Nash at Wilton near Salisbury, who made chiropodist felts and surgical felts. But particularly they made all the felts for Beckstein and Steinway pianos. And at least for 80 years we were supplying that particular..

**LMI:** Those were the felts that would dampen the string, is that right?

**0:12:41**

**RD:** It was the hammer, the hammer which... not...I'll show you one before you go home, I've got one. And then we also worked for a firm, William Plains in Minchinghampton, near Stroud, in a very old mill. It'd been there 250 years. With a river going through which comes down from Princess Anne's land. But they wove all the tennis ball cloth for Dunlop and Schlesinger.

**LMI:** Oh, I read that in your book!

**RD:** And every...well, virtually every Monday morning, a 40-foot articulated wagon would come up with their waste that they created. Huge amounts of waste. And we would recycle it into a form they could use, as a proportion of a new blend. It would never go back as a 100% blend. They would put it in as a proportion. And it was wool and nylon and a bit of viscose, and they would put it in. And every Wimbledon tennis ball for 80 years, had a proportion of our recycled material in it.

**LMI:** Claim to fame!

**RD:** So same with the pianos as well.

**0:13:50**

**LMI:** Oh, that's really interesting. Because I think some of the... when people talk about Bradford, and the textile industry they often think about worsted and that kind of thing, but the textile industry produced the materials for all kinds of things. I've talked to someone who worked in a factory that made funeral gloves.

**RD:** Yes.

**LMI:** And the fabric for that was woven in Bradford.

**RD:** Yes, that's right.

**LMI:** And so on. And the flock for flock wallpaper was made in Baildon!

**RD:** Yes, yes it was. It was just fibre, but it was cut with a very fine cutting machine.

**LMI:** And so, back to your story, so you started working in the mill, when?

**RD:** I worked in 1961.

**LMI:** '61. So just before the period that we're kind of thinking about here, in terms of our project.

**RD:** When things were beginning to wind down in Bradford.

**LMI:** And you kind of learnt your trade on the shop floor.

**RD:** I did.

**LMI:** How was it working with... being the boss's son [rather than on the shop floor]?

**0:15:00**

**RD:** Well, I think the biggest advantage was, later on, when I got more seniority (my father eventually was persuaded to retire at 76 - only because he lost some fingers in the machine - that was the only reason he went), I never asked anyone to do a job I hadn't done myself. And that was a great advantage. And I think it generated some respect, really. The thing I would do every morning, from almost the beginning, I would go around saying 'Good morning' to everybody.

**LMI:** Oh, nice.

**0:15:31**

**RD:** And it was, we were a family business, you know. And the chaps and the ladies who worked for us, they all lived within half a mile or a mile of the mill.

**LMI:** Up in Dudley Hill?

**RD:** In Dudley Hill. And they were good and faithful people. And cheerful. And we weren't asking to do a very... it wasn't like a weaving shed where there was a lot of skill and all the rest of it. Basically we were asking our chaps to put material in one end of a machine and wait for it to come out the other. And then we'd bag it up. But we provided... and this isn't being snobby, but that was the job. And so most of the chaps reached their potential within a fortnight of getting there. But they were contented. And they were happy to do that. And...

**0:16:16**

**LMI:** Did people tend to stay with you for quite a long time?

**RD:** 40 years, often. And fathers and sons. Fathers and sons. And we'd have... Oh, many chaps worked for 30 years or more. The only reason they... and as I say they lived very close to the mill. And in Dudley Hill in those days there was a cinema, there were two churches, there was a Co-op, bakeries, and all the rest of it. They had no reason to go down to Bradford. The only reason they would go down to Bradford was virtually once a year, to go to see Norman Evans at the Bradford Alhambra. You know, for the pantomime. Betty Dumell and Nat Jackley and all that crowd. And it's the only time my father would take half a day off. We used to go to Brown Muff's store and have lunch there. I always had sausage and mash, and then we'd go to Bradford Alhambra.

**0:17:11**

**LMI:** And did you celebrate Christmas? Did you have parties for the staff at all?

**RD:** The ladies who worked... we had a sideline in the business where we were cutting up fine white botany tops from Patons and Baldwin's. And so we had some cutting machines where the ladies worked. And they would decorate the cutting department. But Christmas holidays weren't very long. We would finish about 3 o'clock on Christmas Eve, and we'd have Christmas Day and Boxing Day, and be back the following day. And we didn't stop for New Year's Eve or New Year's Day. Nowadays it's fortnight off, basically. And there was none of that. But that wasn't just us, that was Bradford. That's the way it worked.

**0:17:57**

**LMI:** And how long was the working day?

**RD:** The working day officially was from 8 o'clock till 5. I have, and I think I've mentioned in the book, I've got a photograph of it - a wages book in the middle, for 1912. And in those days the chaps were working 70 or 75 hours a week. And on Fridays they would start at 8 o'clock in the morning, on a Friday, and work right through Friday through Friday night and not finish until 12 o'clock on Saturday lunchtime.

**LMI:** 36 hours?

**RD:** No, yes, they would work all the way through. We were never busier than when the war was on, during the First World War and the Second World War. Because everything was recycled.

**LMI:** So, did you have night shifts working as well?

**RD:** Yes, we did later. And that is that is one thing I could... nowadays and I don't know why we didn't do it then... be heavily criticized for, because we used to have two chaps who worked 30 years on nights, George and Tommy. But they weren't always working in the same room. But they were very useful for where a job was needed, and they would go and run [those] particular machines. But we wouldn't get away with that now. And I don't know why I allowed it to happen then.

**0:19:26**

**LMI:** In what way?

**RD:** For safety.

**LMI:** They were working on their own?

**RD:** Oh, they were working on their own.

**LMI:** Oh, I see.

**RD:** They were working on their own in different parts of the mill. Quite often I would go back, or stay on and wait till they started working, or go back in the evening to see how they were. And they didn't talk to each other. They didn't like each other! But they...you'd go in

the mill ... everything would be working, but you couldn't find them! And they'd suddenly appear out of the shadows. 'Machines are running'. And touch... well, it's too late to touch wood, because both are long gone. But they were very faithful. But they didn't like each other. They hardly ever spoke to each other.

**LMI:** And how many people did you employ? Sort of in the '60s and '70s

**0:20:17**

**RD:** On a busy time, when we were... I suppose there would be...best part of 30, probably all together.

**LMI:** So it was quite a small...

**RD:** Men and women. Oh yes, it was, yes.

**LMI:** And so that's how you managed to know everybody.

**RD:** Exactly.

**LMI:** And in your book, which I've got a copy of here – it's called Waste Matters –

**RD:** Yes.

**LMI:** You talk a lot about the people that you worked with over those periods.

**RD:** Well, a lot of them were characters, you know. They were the salt of the earth, most of them, I would think. There were one or two exceptions. But most of them were salt of the earth.

**LMI:** And so, are there any particular characters that spring to mind?

**0:21:06**

**RD:** Well, there was one chap who ran the scouring for us, Joe Fisher. And he lived in a back-to-back house down Prince Street, just near the mill, and about 100 yards away from the mill. But no indoor facilities, and an outside loo and all the rest of it as they were. And particularly on Friday nights -he was in charge of the wool scouring - and he would, about 3 o'clock on a Friday afternoon, he would drop the bowls - empty the bowls of all the mucky water. We'd have done it several times during the week, but on a Friday they would be cleaned out, ready for Monday morning. And then he would refill them. And there were two big tanks, big scouring bowls, one to do the initial washing, and the second one was a rinse. In proper wool scouring you perhaps had six or eight of these bowls, to get from the greasy wool to the clean fleece. But we just had the two, just to relax the twist in the threads, basically, so we weren't smashing the fibres apart when it got to [the] scouring [machine]. But Joe... I would walk through just about when everybody else was gone, and I would hear singing coming from the scouring. And I knew that was a bit of a warning from Joe because he will have stripped off, taken all his clothes off, and he'll have got into the settling tank at



the side of the scouring bowl. Which was, you know, it was warm water, [he'd have] soap flakes and a bit of alkaline, and he'd have his weekly bath in there! That was it. Nobody ever thought anything about it, you know.

**LMI:** Fabulous story.

**0:22:27**

**RD:** Yes. And that's what he did. And he did it week in week out.

**LMI:** And as the boss you didn't warn him that it was...?

**RD:** No, no, never thought anything about it. But there were characters like that. And there was Frankie Jackson, who was the only chap I ever met who had actually seen Bradford City win the Cup Final. So that was about 1980, he was quite old when he came to it. But they stayed on. They didn't want to retire when they got to 60. A lot of them stayed on until they were 70, doing perhaps more menial jobs. But Frankie was, in his latter days, he was very good for packing bales.

**0:23:08**

**RD:** We had this cutting department where we cut fleeces, and all sorts of things. And I went in the cutting department on one occasion -the material dropped from one floor down to the next. And I went into where the bale was being filled with the material coming down the chute. And it had all piled up, and it was all spilling onto the floor. I said 'Where's Frank? He must have gone for a smoke or somewhere.' So I went up on the steps, and passing down, and blow me, Frank was inside. He'd fainted inside. It was a hot summer afternoon and he'd fainted in the bale. And I got him out... He was alright. He apologized. He was more apologetic than I was!

**LMI:** He was completely covered in all the waste?

**RD:** Completely covered in waste, yes, he was. People like that. And then we had people like Jimmy Gould, who was an excellent worker, he was never late. He was never late. He lived down Knowles Lane, but he had a prodigious thirst. And unfortunately, we had a pub next door to us, the Lacey pub at the top of Prince Street. I think it's been pulled down now. But he would go in there with his wage on a Friday night, and he would stay there till about 7 or 8 o'clock. And it got pretty bad because... he was never drunk when he came to the mill, but I was always worried. And I used to have to sub him by Tuesday, because he'd run out of all his money, and drunk it all. He was never drunk at the mill. But that sort of chap. And we had one chap with one arm, who'd lost it in another Garnett machine before he came to work for us. And he was Polish, and he was a meticulous worker. Bronnie Siddlecky he was called, and another chap called Jimmy the Pole, who was actually an Estonian... These chaps have ended up in Bradford, you know, at the end of the war. But Ronnie, Ronnie Sidlecki, he had come from Poland. And when the Russians... and he was still there in his village when when

the war started. And the Germans came and took him into France where he worked on a farm, with two other chaps from Poland.

**LMI:** Forced labour.

**0:25:51**

**RD:** Forced labour. And they decided that after being there a few months they didn't like this business, 'We're going to try and get out of it.' And so they decide to leave. And they left this farm where they were working, somewhere in the middle of France. And walked during the night and hid up during the day, down to the Spanish border. They got over the Pyrenees, they walked over the Pyrenees and somehow got down to Gibraltar. And they were repatriated to England on... somehow... I don't know how they did it. And they wanted to go back to Poland, but they discovered that the villages, particularly Bronnie's village, where he'd come from, had been erased. There was nobody there. And so he stayed. He was going to go to Canada, but he came to Bradford. And he worked in Bradford the rest of his life, and stayed there, and married a Polish girl. He was a great chap as well.

**LMI:** So there was a big Eastern European population in Bradford?

**RD:** Yes, oh there was...

**LMI:** And a lot of them worked in the mills.

**RD:** Estonian, Latvian. Yes. I remember when I was at Woodhouse Grove at Apperley Bridge, there was a hostel up there for people who'd come from those countries. They lived there.

**0:27:00**

**LMI:** So tell me a bit about what happened when the textile industry began to falter in the late '60s, early '70s.

**RD:** Well, it was a bit of a panicked time. We found that the... if the waste merchants had been buying from the large manufacturers, a lot of the manufacturers were going out of business. People like W & J Whitehead at Laisterdyke, they were a very big company, they were spinners. And all that work stopped. And so it got it got more difficult to to get work. And eventually we ran out of customers, you know.

**LMI:** What year would this be?

**RD:** This would be... well into the '70s. We had a bad recession in the middle '70s. And another one... well, two in the '80s. And the worst one was about 1988, '89 when there was no work coming in at all. And we had a workforce... we had.... [it was a] terrible time for me because I was having to make chaps redundant. Chaps that had been there for years. And there was no option. But we knew they had got families and mortgages and all the rest of it.

And in a way it got me down in a big way, and I got to the point where I couldn't go, because there was no work coming in.

**0:28:34**

**RD:** The bank manager, our bank manager used to ring me virtually every morning and say, 'Have you got any cheques in yet? Has it got any money?' I said 'No.' And he said, 'Well what are you going to do?' I said, 'Well I can't do anything.' I said, 'My customers aren't getting any work. They know nothing to sell me. If they owe me money they can't pay.' And so, um...

**LMI:** Were you thinking you might have to close the business?

**RD:** We came very close to it, very close to it. But one of the things that my father had always done, he never turned away any sort of job that could be done. You know, people would come with the most peculiar fibres. We did reindeer hair.

**0:29:19**

**RD:** Reindeer hair. For a manufacturer who was working for Marks and Spencer's, and putting cut reindeer hair into an effect fibre for ladies skirtings. Reindeer has got a hollow fibre and that's how a reindeer keeps warm, because it's sort of automatically insulated. And, um... What was I saying?

**LMI:** Well, I don't know. You are the first person I've met who's been an expert on reindeer hair.

**RD:** Yeah, well...

**LMI:** So it's quite... You were talking about you never turned a job away...

**0:29:53**

**RD:** No, no, no. My father never... One of the things he had done in the late 1930s, early '40s, when nylon first came on the market, (merchants were buying this waste nylon), and we were the first people I think, virtually the first people to recycle nylon. We did viscose as well. Viscose in its raw state... viscose fibre is made from the... it's a cellulose fibre made from spruce trees. But it's highly inflammable, particularly in its raw state, this innocent looking fibre. And you only need a spark and the whole lot would go up. We had a very good sprinkler system. We needed it. But we... so Dad... we used to process... did a lot of viscose. And I think it went into, well certainly nylon did, and viscose a certain amount, went into car tyre manufacturing. That sort of thing. So we had a...

**LMI:** You were taking any work you could get?

**0:31:10**

**RD:** Virtually any work that would come. And one interesting job, we were rung up one day by the people that made Tampax. And they said, 'We have all this waste, can you do anything

for us?' And so, we would put it through our big La Roche , french-built preparing machine, because they wanted to recover the fibre which was in the Tampax. It's cotton I think, it's cotton fibre. But we weren't very good at it. And we did it for a certain amount of time. We did glass fibre, which is a terrible fibre.

**LMI:** Oh my God.

**0:31:53**

**RD:** Glass fibre was dreadful because it would stick in your hands all the time. You know, it's like putting it down in the loft and that sort of thing. And so we didn't do that for very long. But we needed to do virtually everything. And then, towards the end of my time when I finished, in the sort of middle 1990s, the natural fibre trade was dying completely. Because the work wasn't there in Bradford. But we did go into exotic synthetics, and that's what we're still doing now at Dudley Hill. My nephew's a razor. Well, there was Nomex and Teflon, which you know as a coating for a frying pan.

**0:32:33**

**RD:** That's a fibre as well. And particularly Kevlar. Kevlar, which looks a very innocent yellow fibre. But if you weave it into something not much thicker than a car seat belt, it will stop a bullet. It's what the police use for their bulletproof vests. It will give you a bit of a thump, mind you.

**LMI:** I'm sure.

**RD:** But we started doing that and my nephews and great-nephews are processing that now. When we first started to do Kevlar - it's such a tough fibre - we used to... Because these wastes always come to us in large, huge masses, you have to reduce this overall state to... so we could put it on such an opening machine, pre-opening machine. And we have these big guillotine cutting machines where the blade would come down and smash up and down. Which is okay for natural fibre, [and] for some synthetics. But when the blade first came down on Kevlar, the blade shattered into pieces. So we had to find a way of reducing its overall bulk. And with a Belgian company called Piret, we developed a machine which [is] a bit like a rotary lawnmower, where there's more of a slicing action. And the blades still get blunt but at least we can reduce it doing it that way. And I don't think my nephews now are doing any natural fibers at all. It's all gone. Which is a great, great sadness really.

**0:34:14**

**LMI:** So when you think of the sort of the textile community of Bradford, is it a sadness to you to see?

**RD:** It is because we were... I think I've still got my telephone pad upstairs somewhere, which probably has 215 names on. Not just Bradford, but Huddersfield, Halifax, all over the country. And they've all gone. And in Bradford particularly, in the area we were doing...

**LMI:** All companies?

**RD:** All different companies, but [with] the folk we were dealing with, on the waste side, there were scores of one-man, two-man businesses buying waste, sorting it, sending it to us for processing. And there were scores in Bradford, these little businesses where there'd be one or two chaps working, and they would be sorting, and they would have a small warehouse. There was one firm up Listerhills... Just to say, that when the waste came into us, particularly the natural fiber waste, particularly the wool waste, it all had some spinning oil on it, which had to be removed. Which *was* removed in the scouring.

**0:35:27**

**RD:** And so many or several of our customers didn't like this. We put an oil on after the dryer, just to give it a little bit more body in subsequent processing, and again to prevent fibre breakage. But we would put perhaps 2% of oil on, after the scouring, after the drying, for subsequent processing. But some of the waste that came into us had 5 or 6%, sometimes 10% when you did the carpet waste, had a lot of spinning oil on it. And our customers didn't like the fact that when we did our scouring, we scoured it down to about 1% or less of oil content. So they thought we were packing a bale and [of] spare... You know, they weren't getting back the same weight they were sending in to us.

**0:36:24**

**LMI:** Oh, I see.

**RD:** And some of them didn't like that. They thought we were packing bales up. Oh, I've often being accused of that. I said, 'No we don't.' So I used to test it. I used to test the waste when it came in to tell us, so I could tell them, or we'd give them a certificate to say what percentage of spinning oil was on it. So that way they couldn't accuse us of putting a bale away.

**LMI:** You must have had huge water bills.

**RD:** We did, but not like the proper wool scourers. [They] had a huge one. They would come round from the Water Board every now and again and take samples out to see what it was like. They would come with a jam jar and a piece of string. And they were put into the scouring machines, and they would take this away and analyse it and see what it was like.

**0:37:02**

**LMI:** So did you, um?

**RD:** What I was going to say though, Alan, this one one particular customer at Listerhills. He's long gone now, and the firm's long gone. When when he got the material back from us, and it was often the white botany thread waste, that he... this lovely stuff. And he was supplying this chap down in Wilton for his surgical felts, and the piano hammer felts. He would take everything that we put into a bale, and put it over a scree on the floor, under which was a very large tank of water. And he would leave it there for perhaps a fortnight,

and the wool would absorb some of the water out of this tank underneath. And so he would increase his weight.

**0:38:02**

**LMI:** Oh that's naughty.

**RD:** Oh it was very naughty. And eventually this customer down south got aware of this sort of thing. And so we had to send everything through the conditioning house on Canal Road and get one of their certificates to make sure that what we were sending...

**0:38:24**

**LMI:** And is that what [a] conditioning house did?

**RD:** Yes, they would give... and the certificate that the conditioning house in Bradford would have... with a lovely big red seal on it... it would be their mark of guarantee. It was a guarantee that what they were getting was pukka.

**LMI:** Oh that's interesting. You know I think I probably thought conditioning house was something for conditioning the wool or something?

**RD:** No, not really. They were testing the condition of the material they got through. So they could... particularly when they were exporting stuff.

**LMI:** So a couple of things. One is... What I think is really interesting is that I think, today, I think I said to you earlier, young people are taught about Victorian mills rather than more modern mills at the end of the 20th century, rather than the end of the 19th century. And the other thing I think people don't realise is just how complex the interlocking bits of different businesses that all came together. People had this vision of, I don't know, a mill girl sat in front of looms, you know, and spinning or weaving wool, and as if that was the only job. But there are, there were...

**RD:** It's everything that goes on before that.

**LMI:** Everything that goes on before, and after to some extent.

**RD:** I used to go to Crombie's of Aberdeen, who made the most, well they still do, beautiful woollen cloth for overcoats, and all the rest of it. And suitings. And they were one of our customers. They didn't like me to say that they were one of our customers because they were on the Wool Mark. Everything would be guaranteed 100% natural wool, new wool. But they did send us some material for particular jobs, and we would recycle it. But I used to go to Aberdeen and see them. And I got permission a few times with their chap to go in the mill and see them. And they were sorting. You know, wool comes in various qualities, sixties qualities and anything up to a hundred quality. It was a degree of fineness, really. And I would go into their sorting shed where they had... there'd be one chap sitting on a high stool with a virtually empty bale in front of him, surrounded by three or four other bales of

Merino wool which had come in from Australia. And this chap was picking it out, out of different bales, a finger full at a time, and pulling it through his fingers, looking for hundreds quality wool. And he would sort it and he would put it into a specific bale. If it was a bit lower quality he'd put it into another bale. A very, very skilled job.

**0:41:23**

**LMI:** Done by hand?

**RD:** Done by hand.

**LMI:** Very slowly by the sounds...

**RD:** Very slowly. But there'd be a lot of chaps doing it.

**LMI:** Yes.

**RD:** But that's what he was doing, on the Wool Mark, and they were making sure that what they were sorting was...

**LMI:** So that kind of comes to my other question, really. And that was one of the things I've realized is there was a bit of a technology race going on in the textile industry from the '60s onwards, really. Of kind of computerization and kind of the higher spec machinery. Did you have any of that as well?

**RD:** Not really. We weren't really... I remember going to mills where they were doing textile design, and designing cloth and all the rest of it. And originally that was just done on point paper, graph paper.

**LMI:** I've interviewed someone who did it.

**0:42:10**

**RD:** But eventually that was all taken over by a computer. It was all done by a computer. And by flicking a switch, they could see a design for a cloth in ten different shades by just changing it. But, er... my great, well he wasn't a... he was a very close courtesy uncle, worked for the head chief designer of T&M Bairdstow at Sutton, where my grandfather started work. And he worked his way up, a chap called Arthur Bottomley, to be head designer.

**LMI:** You mentioned him in your book.

**RD:** And he had to create, I think twice a year, about 200 different designs. And he produced this in a lovely folder, he'd take it into the boss, and he'd say, 'Oh, then, that'll do Arthur, that'll do'. He didn't realise how much... But he did design some very beautiful grey woolen cloth for the Queen's trousseau in 1947.

**0:43:09**

**LMI:** I've read about that in your book. Do tell that story, because I think it's fascinating.

**RD:** Well, they were commissioned at T & M Bairdstow to create some dress cloth for the Queen when she was getting married to Prince Philip, in 1947, I think it was. Arthur, as head designer, did this. And my father used to say that he saw this cloth, and it was so fine - he wove it in with a very grey thread. But the wool thread was so fine that he had to twist it with some alginate, which is a seaweed derivative, to just give it a bit of strength during spinning and weaving. And then in the finishing process, the alginate would be washed out of the cloth.

**LMI:** So it was water soluble was it?

**RD:** It was soluble, and you were just left with the woollen cloth. And Dad said, he saw this cloth, he said it was so fine, you could hardly feel it when you touched it, but it was so opaque you couldn't see through it.

**0:44:23**

**LMI:** Because it had been woven so finely?

**RD:** And one of my father's cousins who was a weaver there, she said to Dad one day, she said, 'I wish that Arthur Bottomley would stay at home!' Because she'd have this job of weaving this cloth.

**LMI:** And it wasn't easy.

**RD:** No, no, no.

**LMI:** No faults allowed.

**RD:** No faults allowed.

**LMI:** And the other thing I was going to ask you is - so does a waste manufacturer have waste? Or did you just keep recycling waste?

**0:44:53**

**RD:** Well, I've talked about the... As the material goes through the machine, through the Garnett machine, yes, some dropped out. And you would push it up and put it back through again. But eventually it just ended up as dust. And this chap I was talking about, Bronnie Sidlecki, he ran our big worsted machines, and he was meticulous. He would get his broom, he had only had one arm, mind you, he'd lost an arm. And I can see him now with his broom, pulling the waste out from underneath the swifts, and that sort of thing, which were heavily guarded of course. But he got it out so that at the end all he would have was a little pile of dust basically.

**0:45:40**



**RD:** Everything else that he could possibly have put through the machine to be processed had gone through. So there was a bit of waste left at the end.

**LMI:** Was it a dusty environment? Did people have to use face masks?

**RD:** Yes, well, I would encourage them to. Particularly when we were doing things like alpaca and camel hair. It was very dusty. And we did encourage them to put face masks on, which wasn't very nice, but they did it. And there was one chap in there, Ivan Zappi, he did an awful lot for us, and I'm sure he didn't think I was picking on him because he did it. He ran these alpaca machines, and he was very loath to wear a face mask, very loath. They didn't like it at all.

**LMI:** Probably wouldn't be allowed to do it now, would they without one?

**RD:** No, no, no, no, no. No.

**0:46:26**

**LMI:** It was a different world, different environment in those days.

**RD:** Absolutely. Well, you know, you needed the job, and that was it. But it wasn't... we had factory inspectors. Factory inspectors came round regularly. But touch wood, we always got through alright.

**LMI:** Another story which keeps cropping up is from people whose parents worked in mills. You know, people who are a bit younger than you, people in their 40's and 50's, and they would talk about going and sitting in the mill while their mum finished her shift.

**RD:** Could be, could be.

**LMI:** So did you have children coming into your..?

**RD:** Yes. Well, we wouldn't let them actually into, but some... You know, they're coming home from school, and mum and dad were working there. And they couldn't go home until mum and dad came... It all depends on their age.

**0:47:16**

**LMI:** They'd be sort of sitting on the outside.

**RD:** Sit in the canteen, you know, we had a canteen. With Margaret and Alice running the canteen. Yeah. But that was... It's all gone, sadly. It's all gone. That's why I felt I needed to write it down, because as I say, it's gone forever.

**LMI:** Now, you must tell me the story of the ghost.

**RD:** Yes.

**0:47:44**

**LMI:** You must tell me about the ghost.

**RD:** Well, I won't be swayed on this at all. Particularly on a Friday night, when everybody else had gone home, I would walk through the mill, making sure everything was neat. Even though they were going to work, some of them, on Saturday mornings, I would always go through, just to make sure the place was secure, from my point of view. I knew it would be, we had Dennis Walker who did all the locking up. But I just liked to go through and make sure. And on two or three occasions, at least, I walked through the bottom shed and everything was quiet. And I switched on lights and switched them off again as I walked through.

**0:48:31**

**RD:** And I turned right from the bottom shed into the scouring. And I put the lights on in the scouring, and I walked between the two scouring bowls to the end where there was a conveyor belt which took the waste, the scoured waste, up a ramp and then dropped it into the hopper for the dryer. And the first occasion I sensed that I wasn't on my own. And I don't know why, I just felt that. And I turned round and I looked back down this the scouring, down the wash house. And I'm absolutely convinced I saw a figure standing at the end in a large overcoat with a hat on. I don't know whether it was a trilby. I don't think it was a top hat, but some sort of hat. And as soon as I looked this figure disappeared. And this didn't happen once, it happened... maybe four times. Different times of the year. But normally when I was in the scouring on my own, with nobody else about. And I like to think it was probably my grandfather, my father's father, who it was. I rather hope it was.

**0:49:45**

**LMI:** But are you a superstitious person?

**RD:** Not at all, really. No. Even working in the theatre, because you get a lot of people who won't go up the stairs or wear the same knickers, or something like that. You know, they always wear the same clothes [to be in a play...] No, I'm not particularly. No, I'm quite a rational sort of chap. But I'm totally convinced about that.

**LMI:** You're absolutely certain?

**RD:** Absolutely certain.

**LMI:** Was your grandfather checking on you?

**RD:** I think he might have been.

**LMI:** It wasn't one of your workers having a bath?!...

**RD:** No. And he was always standing, always standing in the same place, Alan. And see, that was another thing that happened in the textile industry, the heavy woollen business which was in Dewsbury and Batley and around there. The car heater killed that trade. Because

in... I remember my father had a very long Crombie coat. You know, a heavy coat. And he would go on the train from Ilkley down to Bradford, and all his contemporaries, in the winter they would wear heavy overcoats down to their ankles nearly.

**0:50:45**

**RD:** But when they started putting heaters in cars, and chaps started travelling by car rather than on the train, it killed that trade. That's why you don't get them now, unless you ask [for them to be] specifically made.

**LMI:** Well, it might come back with electric cars.

**RD:** It might well do. It might well do.

**LMI:** I think we're getting to the end of the interview. I've got one last question. And it's really... What did it feel like after you finished? The next day after you'd retired, and you woke up?

**RD:** Well, I'll let you into a little bit of secret there, because we had one very bad... well, finally the worst recession we had... the one I mentioned just now about the bank manager ringing up. With no work coming in and I couldn't pay the bills, and all the rest of it. And after travelling every day for 30 odd years from Bradford down to Dudley Hill, I got to the point when I was so worried about the business continuing that I would get to the bottom of Wakefield Road in Bradford, and I felt 'I can't go up the hill. I can't go to the mill.' And I would turn round that roundabout at the bottom of Wakefield Road and come home again. And quite often I burst into tears. And I was having a bit of a nervous breakdown. And I'm not that sort of person. I didn't know what was happening. And this went on for about three months, I suppose, and I just got worse and worse. I couldn't answer the phone. I'd get to the mill sometimes,

**0:52:30**

**RD:** I'd open the bottom door, and couldn't go up [to] the mill. I couldn't go up the stairs. I couldn't answer the phone. And so, eventually my brother, eldest brother, who came in occasionally, but his two sons were working there, they said, 'Uncle Roger, go home.' And so I did. This would be the late '90s. And I didn't go back. I've only been back to the mill four or five times since then, because it's all changed, the people have changed, the places have changed. The companies have gone. And I just felt a sort of relief. And I did get some outside help, to help me get... Once I accepted that I needed some help I started to get better.

**LMI:** Did you feel it was your fault, or you'd failed, or something?

**RD:** I think I felt I'd failed. But I couldn't do anything about it. You know, nobody else... all our customers they were all disappearing as well. There was nobody there. And as I say, it happened a lot more quickly than we realised.

**0:53:38**

**RD:** Firms had been there for 150 years, more or less, they went overnight. I had three uncles, who worked... three or five uncles, who all worked in a small woollen mill, spinning mill, over in Silsden. And there were five families living out of this one comparatively small mill. And when the crunch came, they'd been there with their father -there were five brothers - with their father. Their father started the business probably about the same time, about 1890s. And they went out of business after well over 100 years, in six months. They ran out of customers. They'd nowhere to go. And one thing my father had done, he never borrowed any money to buy machines. He came from a strong non-conformist background, did my father. He never borrowed money. In fact, he never took his old-age pension because he thought, 'That's nothing to do with me.'

**LMI:** [I read that in your book.]

**RD:** He never took his pension. But this firm went... just disappeared. And five families were living out of it. And that that wasn't unusual. These happened so quickly in the late '80s and '90s. And it was the whole industry at that time...Bradford was decimated. And I still feel, wrongly perhaps, I still feel it's a city without a soul. It hasn't recovered. Nothing has replaced the textile industry. And it was so bustling. It was so busy. There were mills and department stores next door to each other; warehouses. And of course, they knocked down a lot of the buildings, lovely buildings in the 1960s. Like the Mechanics Institute and Swan Arcade. Absolutely, sacrilege.

**0:55:35**

**LMI:** Terrible.

**RD:** And they built things which are now being knocked down because they haven't lasted. It's really sad. It is. But that was my final experience.

**LMI:** So in a way you personally became a victim of the recession.

**RD:** I think I did. But we scraped through, because we started processing these more unusual fibres, artificial fibres. And they've gone on from strength to strength. They're very busy. They're very busy.

**LMI:** Oh, that's very good.

**RD:** We're one of the survivors of the Bradford trade. I think I say that [in the book]. So it's... I wouldn't have missed it for the world, mind.

**LMI:** It's your whole life's work.

**RD:** Absolutely, absolutely.

**LMI:** Have you done any other job?

**RD:** I've been a guide at Bolton Priory. I've been doing that since the middle 1990s, which I enjoyed. The lovely historical aspect of the place. I worked a lot down at the Ilkley Playhouse, stage manager, doing all that.

**LMI:** So you're doing the things you love doing.

**RD:** I do. I came to it. I didn't have time in a way before.

**LMI:** It sounds like you actually worked very long hours.

**RD:** I worked certainly five and a half days a week. I started Monday morning - I would leave here at seven o'clock in the morning and come home at half past six.

**0:57:03**

**LMI:** It's interesting isn't it, that you don't think of the...

**RD:** Well, I never thought anything about it. That was just the way it was.

**LMI:** ...the toll, you know, when you hear about recession... Obviously the people who lose their jobs are the people who are suffering the most. But you don't necessarily think about the people who are kind of, you know, honourable (to use a not often used word these days), to care about the fact that those people are being made redundant and feel personally responsible.

**RD:** I did, I did. And I think we were, as I said, there might be thirty chaps there, but I knew them all intimately, and they knew me. And I still have coffee... There was one chap there called John Knight, who worked in the scouring. He was a lovely man. A bachelor. He lived down Holmewood. And he'd got a very short temper. He was never very well dressed. He was in his element when we were eventually gave all of our chaps decent overalls to wear.

**0:58:08**

**RD:** But he, oh, long after I'd gone and he retired, (he got a gold watch after being with us for 30 years). But he rang me regularly. 'Hello Roger, John here.' I had a chat to him. And I had coffee only a few weeks ago with the son of our other chaps. This chap I actually worked with as well, one of the sons, Albert Day's son. And we had coffee in Ilkley together. And I'm in contact with quite a few of them actually, still. Because they contact me, and I contact them when I think it's appropriate.

**LMI:** Oh, that's a great thing to know actually.

**0:58:57**

**RD:** And, and, well it doesn't happen in a big... it can't happen I think in a big organisation. Well I suppose it can. But I chose to work in the mill. I think that was the best thing I ever did, Alan. Was to work in the mill. My brother, eldest brother, bless him, he's long gone, he died ten years ago. But I was working in the mill on one occasion. I was near our big Italian

carding machine. A chap was working, what was he called? Alfie, was it? Alf, Alfie was working. And I mentioned my brother, he said, 'I didn't know you had a brother.' Because he [Keith] never came in the mill. He never came in the mill. You know, he liked his executive lunches and all the rest of it. I didn't have time for that. But I would work till Saturday morning, Saturday lunchtime. And then I'd come home again. We've had four children. We've got a boy and three girls. They're all over 50 now, mind you.

**0:59:41**

**LMI:** Yeah, my daughters are both over 50.

**RD:** They're all over 50. Can't believe, can't believe.

**LMI:** How did that happen?

**RD:** I don't know how it happened. I don't know how it happened.

**LMI:** Listen, Roger, thank you so much for this interview. It's been great. I'm going to turn off the recording device now.

**1:00:05**

**RD:** Well, I've enjoyed talking to you.

**LMI:** I know, it's been great hearing everything you said. And we're just over an hour. 14, 15 seconds over the hour. Thanks very much.

**RD:** You're very welcome.