

Transcription of Steve Gregson Interview 1(of 2)

[1st 6 minutes is talking about the set of tv programme Last of the Summer Wine]

Steve was a lorry driver for the textile industry for more than 30 years and gives an overview, as a very interested observer, of mills over a wide area including West Yorkshire and Lancashire, but also further South.

The quality of sound is good but there are some words that I could not recognise - indicated with a question-mark in a comment box

0:00:00

SG: Will it pick up on all this background noise?

LMI: Yeah.

SG: Oh, is it? Yeah, very good. I could kick you some.

LMI: At the end I'll let you listen to it.

SG: I'm not going to say anything. Because a lot of people don't like listening to their own voice, do they? Have you had that said?

LMI: I've had some training in listening and [being ok with] listening to myself back because of it. To be able to do it.

0:00:21

SG: Yeah, I get that.

SG: Yeah, we're just getting back to what I was saying, I'll just tell you before we start. We used to go out all over together. And I am a big fan, I think I mentioned it on the phone, of the Last Of The Summer Wine. And with him being a photographer, we used to go around together and look for locations where they did it, not just the cafe that everybody knows and Nora Batty's house, the unusual ones. And you wouldn't believe... my motto in life is 'It's nice to be nice.' You wouldn't believe the places we have been. Have you seen the programme?

0:00:57

LMI: I've seen snippets, I haven't seen the full thing.

SG: Right well some of the houses that they use in places they're out of bounds, they're up private little lanes with 'Private. Keep Out.' And I've put photographs on a couple of Summer Wine sites, and I've had people comment, 'How have you managed to get outside the door and actually talk...?' Because it's how you speak to people. I've been to Norman Clegg's and Compo's, I've been to the chap that owns the house that was used as Auntie Wainwright's

antique shop, I've been to Seymour's house and did a sketch at the door. The woman was over the moon. She says 'You've made my day, Steve, doing that.' But what it was with that one... It's up a private road through a field, and the house is at the top. Now I remember when it were used for filming, it was just a set, they just did it up and now it's, well it's lovely now. And we went one day to have a look, and there's a telephone.... which says 'Private. Keep Out.' And there's a telephone and I thought well they must have a business. So I rang them up when I got home, and this lady answered, I said 'Excuse me, but I hope you don't mind me ringing,' I said 'if it's not possible I understand, but we're fans of The Last of the Summer Wine, [and] I was wondering if there'd be any chance of coming up to your house and just taking some photographs by the door where Seymour went.' She says, 'You can,' she says 'Seeing as you've done it the right way, and rung up and asked,' she says 'We get people in the summer walking past the 'No Entry, Keep Out,' It's someone's private residence. Chinese mainly.

0:02:32

LMI: It's just the different... We run our businesses from home, and so we have team members that come into our house. And I'm used to that because I've had it since I was seven years old. But sometimes when I'm poorly, or if I'm up... our office is downstairs on the ground floor, and I sometimes I'd come out of the shower, and I'll be going to my bedroom on the first, second floor, and there'd be like a team member that's come up to find us! And I just think like, 'How can that be?' It's someone's home. It's all about boundaries isn't it?

SG: That's right, course it is. And what happened was... It made that lady's day, so if I give her a smile that's all that matters. So we went up, and as it happened the sketch was... I'll tell you briefly, Seymour was an inventor, and they went up... and that was supposed to be his house. He said 'Look, in the future people won't have keys for the house, it'll be a voice recognition box on the door.' And there were a box on the door, and there's Compo and Clegg and Peter Sallis and they're round, and they said 'Well what's the password?' And he sort of looked round, he went 'It's CODFANGLERS.' So anyway all the way through the program he keeps going back to this door, when they try to get him, and he's going 'CODFANGLERS! CODFANGLERS!' door won't open. And this is all the way through, and in the end as the credits are going up there's a little lamb comes past the door and it goes BAAA and the door springs open. Now luckily, they had a post box right at side of the door. and when we went up, I rang her to say we're on us way. And I'm stood at the door, at this post box, and I'm going 'CODFANGLERS, CODFANGLERS, CODFANGLERS.' Well, that woman came out in hysterics. She says 'You know, you've made my day, Steve.' She says 'Do you know,' she says 'it's been brilliant talking to you about all this filming!' She says 'I'm going to have a stone above the door with the name Codfangers on...'

0:04:30

LMI: Oh, yes.

SG: And now it's used for wedding receptions. Yeah, you can go and have a wedding reception. Initially, when she showed us round inside, the three bedrooms upstairs, they were going to be like guest rooms for when tourists are visiting. Anyway it's for weddings, you can hire it out for weddings. But how nice. That guy that owns Auntie Wainwrights, he came out and said 'I'll put kettle on and make you'... He brought a photograph of them out like that, 'Look at this,' Oh my word. He said 'I'll take this to the grave with me.' There were photographs of the cast and the crew, he said 'I got that friendly with Compo and all them.' He said 'I was bringing them cups of tea out and talking to them like I'm talking to you.'

0:05:18

SG: Oh, I said I wish I'd have been there. But how nice is it that people want to spend time? I've never had a refusal. You know.

LMI: It's like people like you wanting to spend the time telling us about your story... because I mean, the guy I rang today, he let me ring on his lunch break. That's so generous to spend half an hour on this meeting because it's so much bigger than our company, like this is a legacy project, and to take the time to contribute to it, it is just fascinating. So I'm really excited. I am recording, I am.

SG: Is it on now?

LMI: We're on. I'm nodding a lot and not chatting a lot, it's just so I'm not interrupting you. But I don't know what to...

0:06:03

SG: Right, oh.

LMI: So, I don't know if there's anywhere in particular that you want to start. I usually just ask at the beginning to explain where you're from, and from what period you worked in the mills, and to kind of open all of that.

SG: Right.

LMI: So, I'll let you start. I see, you've made some notes

SG: Yeah I mean I've got it all up here, but you forget things as you get older, your memory's not same.

[Waiter comes

Oh lovely, thank you. Thanks very much.

That's yours, isn't it?

Yeah, that's lovely, thank you.

No problem.

Thanks very much.

Thank you I'll keep that for you too.

Thank you Thank you. Lovely. Thank you.

0:07:00

SG: I'll just have a swig of this before we start.]

LMI: There's no pressure to be word perfect, just how we've been talking is incredible. I'm going to transcribe it.

SG: Right. Thank you.

Sorry, I've got so many things on the table.

LMI: Can I pour you some more?

SG: Please, thank you. Do I start like other people who have done it saying 'Hi I'm Steve.'

LMI: You can do, absolutely.

0:07:36

SG: Believe it or not this is the first time I've done this. I can talk to people out in the street like I'm talking to you, or in a cafe like I'm talking to you.

LMI: That's exactly I want it to be. Right. So, thank you so much for your time. Do you want to just start by saying who you are, and how you are involved in the mills, how they were involved in your life?

SG: Hi, I'm Steve. It all started when I lived in Brighouse, I'm from Brighouse. And there was an advert... I was a commercial vehicle apprentice at the time, and there was an advert in the Brighouse Echo advertising for a lorry driver at the Brookfoot Divert [Dye Works?] (BDA?) in Brighouse. And being interested in vehicles... I've always wanted to drive them, and mess about with them, which I did, so I went for this job driving for this dye works. I was taken on a test drive, and I passed. And that was me start into the textile world.

0:08:27

LMI: And how old were you then?

SG: I'd be 20, 21. And from there, I got involved. It was a massive dye works. And my job at the time entailed going round just Bradford, at the time to all the mills and the factories that were around there. Collecting wool, collecting rolls of cloth from various places, taking them back to the dye works and to be processed through all the stages, and then delivering the finished goods. Now, we'd been working for them so long, I was actually taken round the mill to see how all the different processes were done. And it were really interesting even though I wasn't involved with it. I was involved with the transport, but it was interesting to see how it's done from the raw material right through to the finished product. It was brilliant. And I did that for quite a few years. And then the depot transferred, the mill shut down and I got transferred to Thornton Road in Bradford, which was another BDA depot, and from there I carried on doing Bradford, which were beneficial because I were in Bradford. And I've done... over the years, I've done every mill in Bradford, delivering, collecting - I was quite passionate about this. In fact, back in the '70s and '80s I'd have gone to work for nothing, I enjoyed it that much, I really would, I'm quite passionate and I miss those times, big style.

0:10:14

SG: Now in Little Germany especially, which is apartments now, I go from time to time and I stand and look at the buildings, these apartments, and reminisce to how it was when I used to go delivering. And the people that ran these, they were Jewish, and they were very wealthy people that had these businesses. And as long ago as it is, from time to time I go back to Bradford, and in particular Little Germany, and I stand and look at these buildings and reminisce as to how things were, and actually go on inside and see them as working businesses. And if I'm honest I miss it all so much, I really do. Now, as the years progressed then, we started going over to Lancashire, which was known as the dark side to us, all in banter. And that was going to weaving sheds in places like Bury, Berrington, Rochdale Oldham. I've done most of the mills over the years. And the thing I'll take with me to the grave is... and you don't see it now... is going to a weaving shed where there was between 100 and 150 looms going at full rack, standing at the little door - I wasn't allowed to go in-stand at the door and watching this... the noise, the smell, the atmosphere from the smell of the lanolin, the women dashing about from one room to another, is something I'll never forget. It was awesome. Now the downside to that was, when the sun was out, which is very rare in this country, but when the sun was out, and the rays of sunshine were coming through the window, you could see the dust in the air. And they didn't have protective masks on, they didn't wear ear protectors and they were breathing all this dust into... well, they were breathing it in. And I'd just stand there, I could see it coming through. And they passed away with... I can't remember the disease now, they get on the lungs, but I know people that have passed away that worked in the mills through this. I also did what they call 'burling and mending' places. That was, and a lot of those places, in particular in Bradford, there were houses that the bedrooms were converted into burling and mending shops. And what this

entailed was, in the rooms, they would have what I can only describe as a big table, like a dining table, with a big glass sheet in the middle, with a light underneath. And the women used to put the cloth over the top of this table, switch the light on, and any faults within the cloth they would pick them out and repair them. And it was called burling and mending. Now I've got a bit of an anecdote to this.

0:13:16

SG: I can remember the lady's name, Amy Dodson, on St Stephen's Road down Manchester Road. And as I got out of the lorry, she says to me one day, 'Steve, would you do me a big favour?' I said, 'What Amy?' 'Would you mind, to save the women carrying these, would you mind carrying these rolls of cloth up the steps into the bedroom for them to put over?' She says, 'I'll see you right.' 'Oh,' I said 'right.' So I took them in, and I was going she said 'Right here you are, get yourself a cup of tea as you're going back to the depot.' It was a sixpence. Which today is worth roughly two and a half pence. I've never forgotten that.

LMI: Yeah.

SG: Sixpence, two and a half pence. But we're going back a long time. And I used to go to various of these various houses where they had these burling and mending things set up, and I've taken cloth up. I didn't get sixpence at them all. But you know... another one I remember was Black Dyke Mills at Queensbury. Now even when you pass on the road now, when you pass the mill, if you look up to roof level you can see some big glass windows in the roof. And at one time there were women stood at these burling and mending tables all the way along, doing this burling and mending. There must have been, I think, there's about ten or a dozen windows, and each one had a table, and women were doing this. I've taken tons of cloth there. Another anecdote is, I used to take, I'm going out of sequence here, but I used to take tons of lorry loads of cloth to a place in, I think it was Hare Hills in Leeds. It was Montague Burton's, massive factory. Now that place, it was like a city within a city. It was huge. They had their own road system. The tons of cloth I took there were to be made into suits, to then go to Montague Burton's shops in various towns and cities that are no longer here. Now, as textiles declined those same lorry loads of cloth that I took there I ended up taking down to Derby, to be transhipped off my lorry into a container, to go all the way to Portugal, to be made into suits, to bring all the way back to England, to be sold in shops. Because we couldn't produce a suit for the price that they could. I find it all quite sad really.

0:15:43

SG: Can you edit all these stops out? Oh, that's good. I'm going to just put my glasses on.

LMI: Don't think you can't have a drink and a pause. I can edit this out.

SG: Right, because I'm going out of sequence. I'm just going to look at my notes. Do you know what I mean?

LMI: I can't believe you've never done this before, you're an absolute natural.

SG: Do you think so?

LMI: Absolutely.

SG: Even though it's out of sequence, can you sort of edit it? Right. Right.

0:16:20

LMI: What will happen is like certain anecdotes we'll capture, as like a separate segment that remains within bigger pieces with other people. So I really appreciate you making notes and everything.

SG: Well, if I don't, I'll forget. And when I go out, I'll say 'Oh, I didn't mention that.'

LMI: We can always book another day out and we'll get two other men.

SG: That's fine, that's fine. Right, I'm going to say a bit more now. Is it on?

LMI: It's all on, it's just going to run straight through.

0:17:02

SG: Alright. Now getting back to the mills and little factories, we also had a run that went down what we call the valley, which was starting in Halifax and going down to Hebden Bridge, then Todmorden, up to Bacup from Todmorden, and into Rawtenstall in Lancashire. There were various textile places in those little villages, and in particular, they made trousers, they were trouser makers – Spencer's - which is still going after all these years. And it's in a village just as you come outside of Halifax to go to Hebden Bridge, called Friendly. And it's Spencers trousers -and it's still going. And we'd pick up cloth at these mills on the way, and then go up the big hill over to Bacup in Lancashire, and then through to Rawtenstall and then down into Blackburn, Bury, Bolton, Oldham, Rochdale. And collect and deliver round there to the mills, which are no longer there. They'd been pulled down, by one of my heroes Fred Dibner Have you seen Fred?

0:18:07

LMI: No.

SG: I once met the guy, he was absolutely superb. He used to climb up mill chimneys and demolish the chimneys brick by brick with a sledgehammer. Seen them come down and they've all gone. Quite sad. Now we also started going over to Manchester which was known as Cottonopolis. That's because they were involved with cotton, there were cotton mills. And at one point I was going over to the docks there to Manchester Ship Canal picking bales of cotton up and bringing them back to early Jennings Diverts at Yeadon and they were

processing it and doing what they had to do. And then I would deliver the finished goods to various places - and my mind has just gone blank, my mind has just gone blank. I hope you are good at editing.

0:19:11

SG: I mentioned the Fuggles as well. We also had a contract with a mill at Gomersal near Cleckheaton, which was Thomas Burnley's, the yarn spinners. And I worked out of there seven years with the lorry, delivering all their finished goods down to the Midlands. Derby, Nottingham, Leicester, which was renowned for Horseshoes, socks, jumpers, scarves. Burton on Trent, Stoke on Trent, been to most of them as well. I miss Leicester, even though I'm from Yorkshire, I miss Leicester. And I want to go back at some point and have a look at the mills and factories, which I have since been told 'you'll be lucky to find one'. They have all gone. They've all gone abroad to China and it is quite sad. I have met a lot of friends through this that I absolutely miss a lot. But that's life. Let's have a look. Now, just as an aside to this when people are walking round they never think to look up at the old buildings and things like that, they always look down as though they are looking for a five pound note.

0:20:32

SG: Now if people look up at a lot of these buildings the stonework in the top of the buildings is absolutely amazing. Now also at the top of a lot of buildings you will see like a wooden box that sticks out from the roof over the pavement about pavement's width. Now when you look up and see this, that is where you can usually tell there have been some connection with textiles, usually wool, because that was the crane that they lowered down with a rope and they hooked the bales on and took them up to one of the floors to be done what they had to do with it. And when you're walking round and you look at these places, that's how you can usually tell that they've been involved with wool, because there's a box sticks out. They're all over. Yeah.

LMI: While you're talking about the outsides of buildings will you tell us again about the Dalton mill, the door?

SG: Yeah, yeah. I could have written that down, but I'd forgotten about that. Right, am I alright to carry on?

SG: Yes, so now I'm retired I go out and about all over the place even though I've seen it all for free when I was lorry driving. I'm go out to look around now. Now, I used to do a delivery to Dalton Mills which is in Keighley. Not long ago unfortunately, there was a massive fire, and it destroyed the main part of the building. Now, as I was travelling past, the first part of the building that you approach wasn't burnt down, it escaped the fire. Now, there is two big doors, two big green or brown doors on the front of the building, at the side of the pavement, which hadn't been touched. I remember, going back to the '80s, actually pulling up at that door with a lorry and backing up and getting unloaded at that door. And to pass

and see that they are still there, it was summat special to me, it really was. So yeah, that's just a bit of an anecdote about that. Let's put my glasses on.

SG: And going in amongst these mills... I mean, I wasn't really supposed to go in, but I went to them that often, I sort of got friendly with the manager and said 'Is there any chance of just popping in?' 'Well come on but you'll have to be quick.' And I watched women on the weaving looms, [I] stood at the side for a little while and watched them in amazement at doing what they do. The noise... you had to see it and hear it to believe it, it's unbelievable, the racket with all those looms. Now a lady was telling me that due to health and safety, well they didn't have health and safety, but to save time, they were on piecework, these women, and to save time what they would do, when the shuttle was going backwards and forwards in the loom, the loom was actually supposed to stop before they took the bobbin out... the shuttle out, and replace it and put it back in. But they didn't. What they used to do, as it was coming to a stop, they would actually grab the shuttle and take it out and do it and put it back in and set it off. It was to save time because they were on piecework. And I watched the lady actually doing this, and it was quite mesmerising to watch at times, because the speed of them shuttles are going. And I've actually watched a gentleman... I've forgotten what the actual technical term is, but he used to put the thread in the actual weft from a big... not a bobbin... a reel that they used to put on, threading all these needles, (there were thousands of these needles), and I watched it. It could be a day's job threading all this up, ready for the next thing to be woven. And it was like threading a needle a thousand times for all these different warps and wefts going through.

LMI: That sounds like my idea of hell!.

SG: Yeah, and that was job permanent.

0:24:26

SG: Now, in Steeton, in Silsden, that's near Keighley, there were a couple of mills, and when I used to go there to collect rolls of cloth, what used to happen was, I'd back into the loading bay. And as you backed in, the loader wouldn't shoot. And the floor opened, and the loader wouldn't shoot down and level with the back of the lorry. What I had to do at the time was when I was ready I'd shout up to the floor, 'Right!' And a guy would send a roll of cloth down which then I'd put on my shoulder, carry to the front of the lorry and I'd walk back, 'Right!', and then they'd send another down. Now if you had 200 rolls of cloth to pick up you could be there some time. And sometimes, for a bit of a joke they'd send two down at once. And if you let one go clearly, you know, um... Yeah, I could be there two, two and a half hours easy in place.

LMI: It's a tough day. [?] When did you start work? What was your day-to-day activity?'

0:25:32

SG: So when I started, going back to Brighthouse to the Bradford Dyers, we started at... that was a late start for me, 7 o'clock, 7am. And the first port of call, there were three drivers, and we'd say, 'Right are we meeting at us usual place?' And we had a little code. There was a little metal door in the wall where they used to deliver coal, which they didn't do at that time. And when we'd gone, when we'd left the yard we'd leave a chalk mark to say we'd ticked to say we'd gone, and that meant we were going up to the Shooter's cafe at Wyke, and we'd all meet there. And if there wasn't a tick on the show, we knew we hadn't set off yet. But if there were three ticks, we were lucky because we knew all the drivers would be there. Now we actually got caught with this, because we used to go every morning and have us breakfast at this café. And one day we were called to office, when we walked back, and the guy in charge said 'Oh,' he said 'I just want you to know that you shouldn't be having an hour and twenty minutes at the cafe on a morning.' And one of the drivers said 'Well how do you know?' 'Why?' he said 'Because my house is just across the road and I can see you all parked up!' Oh my word! So, the answer to that was we found another cafe away from there. So yeah. And then from there then I would trundle off into Bradford, down Manchester Road, as it was, (not like it is now, a dual carriageway), the old Manchester Road, and start my work going round. I'd have a list of where I had to call and pick up. And I'd go round to these burling and mending places, and picking bales of wool from the various mills that have long gone, that have burnt down, or the ones that are left have been made into apartments. I'd go to all of them, and have a natter with the loading staff, and if I could, with the women that were doing the looms, have a bit of a chat with them and see if I could see owt else working. And then I'd go from there to the next one. And it would take it to about four o'clock, quarter past 4. And then I would set off back to Brighthouse, back to the dye works, and the cloth that I had picked up at the various places, I would go round and unload at the, 'round the dam' as they called it. Because each mill had their own dam, which was for water for the mill, they were all built near a dam. I don't know if you're familiar with that, but they all had a dam for the water. And then we would pack up and that were my day done. But it was a full day going round Bradford, there were that many places. We also had a lorry that did the Huddersfield area. Now Huddersfield was renowned for worsted cloth, which were made into suits. and it were full day for that driver there. I mean I once did that run, and if you didn't know... there's that many villages around Huddersfield... it was a lovely run because we were out in countryside... there were that many little villages and mills in places where you wouldn't think there were mills. They were lovely. I found it hard to get around at the beginning because I didn't know my way around.

LMI: In a big lorry as well, that won't have been easy.

SG: Well, yeah. And this guy used to do this run every day, so he knew them all. And there were many particular caravans at Milnbridge which I'm going to have a look at sometime. It's apartments again. It was actually featured on an episode of Last of the Summer Wine, it was featured.

0:28:55

SG: I was over the moon. So yeah, I am quite, I've said it once but I'll say it again, I'm quite passionate about all this. It's been and gone and I'm really passionate. I still go out on my retirement days and go to museums of all the textiles. I go around and look at the mills that I used to deliver to. And if my daughter's with me I get told off, because I'm told as we're approaching, 'Dad don't tell us again that you used to back your lorry into there, that's now the office window. You tell us every time we come.' But it were my living and I just love it. I love it

LMI: Did you stay in... like the lorry driving and the textile industry for your whole career then?

0:29:36

SG: No. What happened was, in the decline of the textile, I think it was, would it be the late 20s, something like that, I ended up going over Derbyshire, there were some mills in Derbyshire, that were a nice run out there. So, you'll be familiar with the name of Jaeger clothes, that make clothes. I used to pick finished goods up for Jaeger, from a mill in Jaeger. It was lovely out there. Now, getting back to the decline of the textile, when it declined the haulage company I worked for, they had to diversify to carrying anything and everything to keep going. So, from textiles we went to carrying, you name it, I've carried it. We did steel, garments for shops...you name it, I've delivered more or less everything now. Another...what's the word, we used to do steel mills, which have shut down since. There was one at Stocksbridge near Sheffield, and that place was massive. And I had the pleasure of being shown the foundry where molten liquid were being poured out of ladles. You've probably seen it in TV programmes, huge vats coming out on the railway truck, and they tip up, and the sparks come showering all over. I had to stand behind the screen, obviously. But to see that, and I think myself, looking over the years as a driver, I've been able to see places that people will never be able to go in.

0:31:16

LMI: You've seen the behind the scenes?

SG: Behind the scenes. I've been in cooling towers, stood at the bottom looking up. I've been in... I used to deliver to Derby, to Bombardier, who make railway carriages. I used to take parts down there. I've been in a massive shed that people weren't supposed to go in. I got permission to go in and have a look. When there's been a railway accident, they take the carriages and the locomotive there to be examined. And they had a chap said, 'You can come in but you'll have to be quick, Steve.' And there were carriages in that had been in accidents and they investigate what's gone off. I've been in boiler house at the mills when they used coal fired boilers. I've also used to go and ask if I could just stand and have a look. Because don't forget, going back to them times, a lot of the mills were run by steam on what they

called 'line shafting.' Now, if you go to the Bradford Industrial Museum, they have a set up and they have line shafting... what is the length of the room they had a long shaft with pulleys on, and they had leather belts that went over these pulleys all the way down the mill, and these pulleys used to run looms and machinery, and they were run by steam. This coal used to go into the boiler which produced steam that ran these pulleys that ran the looms. Everything was run by these machines. This pulley system called line shafting. And the museum at Bradford has a floor with working line shafts on it. It's amazing, it really is. Do you know, when I stand and look at these things... and there was a gentleman called a Tattler, now his job was, these belts, if they came off, which they did, they were stapled together, they were pretty dangerous if you were stood here you know, when they came off. And his job was to put a knack on them and get them going. They were supposed to stop the machine and put it on. But they had a knack, it was a stick, and they could put it over one and the foot sticking and flip it onto the wheel as it were going round. There were no health and safety then, and I've seen them do it. They were supposed to actually stop it, disconnect it and put the new one over.

0:33:27

SG: The one up there and the one down on the machine and set it off. But they had a knack. If it snapped they would pull it over and then set it going and flick it on with a long wooden stick to get it going, to save time.

LMI: So when it came to... because obviously you'll have been paid on an hourly basis rather than piecework with the stuff you were doing, how did your payment things work? Like how did you get paid? How often? Was it a good wage, the sort of stuff you were doing?

SG: Well, it seemed to be some wage at the time, yeah for what we actually did it. It were quite, well I'm saying quite easy work, you weren't pushed, you know, you did what you could do, and if you couldn't get around to doing it - getting back to loading 200 rolls of cloth at any one time - you can't do them many of them in a day, so it'd be left till next day. But no, it were alright. And then on a Friday, a gentleman would come round with a long wooden box on his arm, and everybody's wage packet in the whole mill and the drivers were in a wooden box, and he'd come round and he'd look for your name, they were all in alphabetical order, and he'd look for your name, and he'd pull your wage packet out, and it was in a brown envelope. And I once found one on the floor that hadn't been opened. A full wage packet. And I said to my mate, 'I've found a full wage packet!' and he says, 'You're lucky.' 'Lucky?' I says, '[]I had to get it right.

0:34:54

LMI: Obviously unions were a bit of a controversial topic.

SG: Yeah.

LMI: What were your thoughts on the union and were you a part of any who worked with the mills?

SG: I joined, I was advised to join what they call the Transport and General Workers Union. And...

LMI: Do you remember when about's that was?

SG: Do you know, I can't offhand. I bet it was the late '70s I joined. And I'm with them now. I can't remember what year it was, but we had a... there was a lorry driver's strike, and I can't remember what year it was, and they had pickets on the entrances to all the mills that we used to deliver to. People weren't allowed to go in. And we had to picket, the silly thing was they had us, they wanted us to picket outside where we were working from, and I said, 'No it doesn't look good.' So they transferred us to Dewsbury... to Carrington... does the name Carrington Vyella mean anything? Right, well they were like a dye works, and we stood on gates there to stop the lorries going in and out. I can't remember what year that was... no I can't remember, I'm not right up on dates, but if you google it, it'll be on. So yeah, we got us wages in a brown paper wage packet. And then it had more or less gone as soon as I to it, it were all spoken for. But no, people said, 'I bet you get a good wage on lorries, don't you Steve?'

0:36:26

SG: You did if you were prepared to do the overtime. The overtime made your wage. I mean, there were long days on lorries, you know, in the later years. I missed out on my two children growing up as tots, because they were in bed on a morning when I went to work. They were in bed on a night when I got home. Sometimes in the latter years I didn't get home at all, I were away two and three days. And I missed out on my children, and I regretted that for a long time. And as they were older I sat them down and said to them that I felt guilty for not being there as a dad, and they turned round and said 'Dad you were keeping the roof over us head, and when you've burst a pair and everything else, you've got to do what you've got to do.' And that were a relief to me, you know, and this is why I dote so much on my granddaughter. I only have one grandchild and I dote on that girl.

LMI: [Unclear]

SG: She is, she is, you're not kidding. So yeah, and to be honest, people asked me when I'm talking about all this, they said, 'Do you miss the lorries?' I said 'No, but what I do miss are the people that I've met at the factories and mills. I'm a people person and I miss them a lot.'

0:37:28

LMI: Was it like a big range of people that worked... because obviously Bradford is a very multicultural city. What kind of people did you mainly work with? Because obviously you must have seen so many different people in different places.

SG: Oh, they were all nationalities, I mean, there were one place, they were all Jewish. They were very wealthy people. And do you know, they were all great to get on with, Romanians, I can picture the place now, Asians...it were multi-cultural. And everybody got on. It's a shame it's not like that today, but everybody got on, I used to class them as one big happy family wherever I went. Especially in the mills, because there were hundreds of them there, and it was just like having a family.

0:38:26

SG: You know, they all got on, I've never known any negativity in a mill. I might not have been there when they were, but I've never seen it. And I went to some that often, I was actually invited to what was called a fuddle. Now, this turned out to be, it were new to me, it was at Christmas, they used to have a bit of a do for want of a better term, and some of them, they'd bring drinks to the factory and mill, they'd have sandwiches and buns. And I were asked to join this with going on a regular basis as a driver. And it was nice that they asked me to go.

LMI: And they hosted that in the mill itself?

SG: Yeah, they used to have a canteen where it worked a bit like this, but not as posh. And they'd sit and they'd bring sandwiches, women would bring sandwiches, cakes, and they'd have tea and coffee.

0:39:04

LMI: Did you have a meal at that place?

SG: Well they had this at Naylor Jennings, I know that for a fact. I was invited to a lot of do's at Naylor Jennings.

LMI: Oh that is amazing.

SG: And at Christmas, Naylor Jennings...I must say that out of all the mills I have worked, Thomas Burnley's at Gomersal, the yarn spinners, and Naylor Jennings at Green Lane, the dye works, were me two favourites. It's gone, it's gone, one second, just bear with me. Oh, blimey.

LMI: What about the funnels?

SG: Well, I used to go to funnels, I had funnels there, and at Thomas Burley's. I went to social events, and I was only the driver, I didn't work actually in the mill. And I always thought 'Well that was nice of them to ask me.' And I was asked by the MD one year, 'Steve, we're

getting...’ At Christmas they bought everybody that worked in that mill a Christmas present and it was a turkey, a frozen turkey. And I had the job of going in the lorry to this frozen food place, I can't remember where, and loading up with loads of these boxes of frozen turkeys.

0:40:30

LMI: So you were Santa basically?

SG: I was Santa for the mill workers, and I'd take all these turkeys back, and they were given out, usually the next day, for everybody to take home as a present from the mill. And I did that for a few year on the trot. You know, I really miss it, I really do. And I tell people, and I can honestly say out of the 36 years I was driving lorries, the mill years were the best years of my working life. I can honestly, I really can.

LMI: I know you said that everyone got on really well, a big happy family. Were there any incidents? I know you were driving so you might not have seen them, but did you hear about any riots, or any fights or disagreements or any issues with managers or bosses?

SG: No, I can honestly say that in all the years that I've worked for them mills, that I've never seen any altercations regarding management, the workers or anything. And trust me, when anything happens in a mill, word gets round. It gets round like that. Everybody knows. I have a story that I could relate, concerning the mill.

0:41:43

SG: Am I alright to tell it?

LMI: You can tell it, but if you don't want it made public, we can take out.

SG: Right, well it's nowt awful, but there used to be a gentleman called Ernest, and he was like in charge of a loading team, the three lads. And I'd gone up to the staff canteen, you used to get your meals cheap at these mill cafes, these mill canteens, which were a bonus. And I was once up there one morning having a breakfast, and Ernie, I'd got a phone call - each department had their own internal phone - and I got a phone call in the canteen, and the lady in the canteen says, 'Steve, Ernie's phoned, and says, 'Can you move your lorry, it's in way of another lorry coming in. Can you get down.' So I went down and when I got down there, there wasn't actually a lorry there. I said 'Well where is it?' He says 'No I just want you to get down and get your lorry.' I said, 'I'm halfway through my breakfast, Ernest.' He'd just done it to get me to back lorry in. There wasn't anybody there. So I thought right, so I backed it in, went back up, my breakfast were going cold, so I thought right, 'It's payback time.' So I left it a few month, and one day on my way back from Lancashire, I came up the road towards mill and I parked up down the road and walked up to the mill, and I said to Herder, - the telephonist on the switchboard and I said 'Could you do me a big favour, don't let on it's me, Herder just say there's an outside call coming for a Mr Ernest Benson. But don't let on

it's me.' And she says, 'I will, Steve.' So I went down into one of the departments, to what they call the grey room at the bottom and I was on the internal phone and he came on. And I tried to disguise my voice a bit. 'Oh' I said 'Hello' I said, 'Is that Mr Benson?' He said 'Yes this is Mr Smith. I don't know whether you know me' I said 'You live up Hawthorn Avenue don't you?' He says 'Yes'. I said 'Well the thing is' I said – (what you've got to remember is about this, he used to organise pantomimes for the town hall at Yeadon, he used to organise the scenery coming, and everything.) I said, 'The thing is Mr Benson, I live opposite'. I said, 'I don't know whether you know me or not'. He said, 'No I don't'. I said, 'Well there's a big removal van turned up outside my house, and they're unloading scenery.' 'Oh!' And I said, 'It's starting to rain.' 'Oh, no they aren't.' I said, 'Yes they are, I just thought I'd let you know'. There was a panic on with Mr. Benson, I can tell you. He said, 'I tell you what, I'd better come out of work and come up to my house and have a look'. And I thought 'I'd better not have him coming out, I might get into trouble.' So, I said look, 'Don't come out Mr. Benson,' I said, I says, 'If you come out of the gates of the mill on the main road I will come down in my car and see you'.

0:44:29

SG: 'It's an orange VW beetle. I'll see you in a few moments.' 'Okay.' So, phone went down. I ran back to my lorry and waited a couple of minutes. I set off as though I was just coming in. And Ernest was just at the gates. 'Hi Ernest, are you alright?' 'No, I'm not'. So I said 'Just pull up'. So I parked up and I went back to him. I said, 'What's matter, what are you doing?' He said, 'You won't believe this,' he said, 'Somebody, *somebody*, I won't repeat what he said,' 'Somebody, the driver has left a load of scenery outside my house that's supposed to go to Newton Town Hall and it's starting to rain', he said, 'I'm fuming'.

0:45:06

SG: So with this, as I'm walking around, I said, 'You've heard of the programme, Ernest, on television, called You've Been Framed with Jeremy Beadle? I've just got you back for when you called me out at canteen.' This gentleman Ernest never spoke to me for two or three days. And he had to load me. He never spoke to me, he'd load me without speaking, he was fuming. But I tell you what, the mill had a damn good laugh. It went round like *that*. And they used to say to me, when I used to nip through mill, they'd say 'Steve were you taking the scenic route?' and things like that to wind him up. So I've never forgotten that, you know about this yeah

LMI: so um so did you have any difficulties?

0:45:51

LMI: Was it a bit difficult with people that were in the mill?

SG: No, I used to walk round... I'd walk round... to get to the toilets you had to walk through

part of the mill, and I'd walk round and have a chat with them while they were working, and I'd have a chat with them and asked them if they minded if I watched how they did it. What they call the making up room, that's when the cotton...getting back to the cotton... when it was finished they used to roll it up in boards, and then they'd wrap it up in brown paper, you know and put a tape with like some like a ribbon all the way around, then they'd put a sticker on it to say that it was from the BDA, which I'd brought. And I would watch them doing this, and to see they had about a dozen girls that used to do what they did with what they call making up, parcelling, they'd wrap them all up in brown paper and stack them in a cart, and then they were taken to a loading bay to be put on pallets and then wheeled into my lorry to be delivered to shops and wherever else they were going. I mean I had the privilege of going to, I had a delivery in what they call Chatsworth House in Derbyshire, and they wanted curtain lining, so much curtain lining and I went and I actually drove through the grounds of Chatsworth House in Derbyshire. and in later years, in relation to that, when textiles disappeared altogether and I was carrying anything and everything on the lorry, I used to go, there was a big garden centre in the grounds of Harewood House, and I took big pallets of what I can describe as bags of peat that you put on your garden. I took tonnes of that in pallets and they'd unload me, and I'd always try and make it my last delivery because then when I'd delivered before I set off back to the depot I could sit in the grounds in the lorry and have a coffee and just sit in the grounds of Chatsworth House. And it's absolutely stunning place if you have a chance to go, go. It is beautiful. That's one of the places where, well, members of the public can see, because you can go and have a look around. And then I'd head back to the depot but so.

0:47:58

LMI: I know you mentioned that the textile mill started to decline, when did you change jobs then? When did that start to affect you?

SG: From starting in the '70s to going right through until I finished on the lorries, I changed companies about, it must have been about 6 or 7 times. But my time with them carried on because they were a different name but doing the same thing. I had all sorts of different logos on my lorry. And... I could actually see it happening... the decline. Because places were starting to lay people off, the workplace got smaller. And then to see these mills when they were empty just falling into disrepair, it was quite sad to see, we were quite emotional about it. I know it sounds a bit silly saying that, but it was my working life. I paid my mortgage through going...doing all this, to the mill. And I saw the decline of mills, people being laid off and it was quite sad. And then we actually got away, when it finished like I say, I got away from all that because they had to diversify into carrying anything and anything to keep going. At one point we delivered, they had some lorries kitted out into what they called hanging garment vehicles. They put metal wheels across inside, across from one side to the other, and they used to fill them full of garments, suits, leather clothes for like River Island, Dorothy Perkins and all sorts, and I've delivered to them, it was a nightmare because you were going down precincts in city centres, and that were hard work.

0:49:40

SG: Yeah you know. And Burtons were worst, when Burtons were going, delivering suits to Burtons .

LMI: Do you remember any mills that burned down? I know it's a lot of years, but it may have been before you started working.

SG: I remember Drummonds, one of the last ones I went to was Drummond's on Lumb Lane. And I was quite upset when that burnt down, because previous to this when the mill was empty, it was empty for a long time, there was an article in the Telegraph and Argus newspaper saying that anybody who had any interest or worked within the textile trade, or that mill could go and for the last time see it as a non-operational mill before it was made into apartments. And there were 15 of us turned up that day, and the caretaker, for want of a better word, took us on a guided tour of this place for the very last time. And we went up in the lift to the second floor, and when he opened those doors onto the second floor I had a massive flashback, that floor was filled with looms and to see that building... to go in and see that floor with nothing in it... you could have heard a pin drop literally, there was nothing, it was so silent. And it all came back to me when I used to go up and have a look at all the looms going; the smell from the floorboards, the women rushing, the noise and everything. And it got the better of me asking him, I wasn't going to do it but I thought, 'No you can only ask.' Going back to what I mentioned about the boxes that stick out at the top of the roof...

0:51:40

[Waitress comes]

LMI: Sorry, we will get out of your way. We're just doing this to pretend to help. Just doing a little interview, so that's fascinating. Thank you so much. And part of it about this mill as it was.

LMI: So you asked him a question.

SG: I asked the guy a question. I said 'It might be a no, but I'll ask.' I said 'Is there any chance of going to the top floor and seeing the crane?' I mentioned earlier about the wooden boxes that you can see if you look up at the buildings, which is the sign of where they used to be working with wool and bales usually.

0:52:16

'Can I go and see the mechanism that operates this?' And he said 'well we're not supposed to because of health and safety.' And he said, 'When they've gone down, when I've taken them down in the lift I'll come back up and I will show you'. And it's the first time I've ever been

into where the mechanism... I was astounded at the size of the mechanism that worked...All it was was a rope that came down on a pulley to the back of the lorry, and it had a hook on, and you'd hook the bale on, and up it went. They'd pull a rope inside the mill, and it worked a mechanism that lifted the bale up onto whichever floor they entered it. And to see all these workings, it was huge for such, you know, for what it did. And to see that...and I said, 'Thanks very much, I appreciate it.' I have some photographs somewhere. And then we came back down, and he showed us in the cellar where the boiler was, all just not doing anything.

0:53:11

SG: And it's quite sad, because I've stood and watched men... they were known as stokers...throwing coal into these boilers I mentioned earlier to keep the boiler going to power all the looms. And to see that boiler just stood there, they were known as the Lancashire boilers, because they were made in Lancashire, obviously, and to see that just stood there were quite sad really but you know. Now getting back to...

LMI: What I might suggest is we pause...

SG: Right.

LMI: Just because they want us to leave...

SG: Oh, are they closing?

LMI: Because they shut at four.