

Sue Barton - Transcription

Audio quality - very good throughout. Just a bit of static and coughing at the very end.

Interview focuses on wool testing and quality control with anecdotes on workplace culture

0:00:00

LMI: And if I can have your name please?

SB: Sue Barton.

LMI: And Sue, please can I have your address?

SB: It's [REDACTED]

0:00:20

LMI: Thank you. And how long have you lived here?

SB: About seven and a half years.

0:00:26

LMI: Thank you. And Sue, where did you live before this?

SB: I lived in Springwell Close at the bottom of Prospect Road. That was in Bradford 3.

LMI: Thank you.

0:00:35

LMI: And Sue, what's your connection with the Bradford Mills, please?

SB: When I was about 18, I went to work at Joseph Dawson's.

LMI: Please could I have the year?

SB: I think it would be 1978.

0:00:55

LMI: Thank you. I'm sorry to interrupt you. So you went to work at Joseph Laycox?

SB: Joseph Dawson's.

LMI: Joseph Dawson's.

SB: Yeah.

0:01:05

LMI: I'm mixing up the mills now!

SB: So am I.

LMI: And where was that based?

0:01:12

SB: It was off Leeds Road.

LMI: And what was your role please?

SB: I was a Wool Tester.

0:01:20

LMI: Would you kindly tell me what that involved?

SB: So basically, we used to be given samples of the wool that was being processed at Dawson's. And we used to look at the quality - the amount of vegetation and other waste matter in the wool. So we would put it into a container and dissolve it with caustic soda. And then measure the amount of vegetation and debris that was left behind, so that they knew what percentage of weight of the the bags of wool was actual wool, and what percentage was waste material.

LMI: Okay. Is there anything else that was involved in measuring the quality?

0:02:20

SB: At Joseph Dawson's I don't remember doing anything else, that was the main job there. I remember going up to Scotland once on a training course, and we went to Galashiels, and we had a really good day there. But they couldn't understand us because they said we spoke too broad. And we couldn't understand a word of what they were saying. So it made for a very interesting day! I do remember as a sort of as a thank you for going up there we were given a cashmere jumper each.

0:02:57

LMI: Oh, and was that from there?

SB: That was from Joseph Dawson's.

LMI: Oh, and in terms of the training what did it involve?

SB: I honestly don't remember. It would have been connected to the job I was doing, but I don't remember exactly what it involved. It was few years ago!

0:03:15

LMI: Bless you!

SB: I do remember once getting a face full of caustic soda though, because I put the water into, no I put the caustic into the water, instead of the water into the caustic, and got a bit of a... backlash... but...

LMI: Were you okay?

0:03:34

SB: Yeah. Yeah. Lots of cold water and milk and...

LMI: And how many years did you work there?

0:03:56

SB: Probably... I was there when I got married, so probably about two, two and a half years I worked there.

LMI: And where did you go from there, please?

SB: I went to Harold Laycox, up Legrams Lane.

LMI: So Harold Laycox, and that was Legrams Lane?

0:04:17

SB: Yeah.

LMI: And that would have been approximately 1980?

SB: Yes it would. Just after that.

LMI: And how long did you stay there?

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SB: Until I had my first daughter, which would have been two years, I think.

LMI: Okay, 1982. And was your job title the same?

SB: Yes, it was.

0:04:39

LMI: Can I ask how much your salary was at your first job?

SB: My first job I have not a clue. My second job, I think it was about £80.

LMI: £80 a week?

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SB: I think so.

LMI: At the first one would it have been much less, or similar?

SB: I think it was quite a bit less. I was only 18 so I think it was... I'm trying to think, is that weekly or monthly? I think it must have been weekly.

LMI: Thank you. In terms of your role, was it the same here? Was it a bit different?

0:05:21

SB: No, it was different. When I worked at Joseph Dawson's, the wool we were getting was the raw wool that we were testing. When I worked at Harold Laycox, we were getting processed wool. So it had been washed and cleaned and things, and combed down. So I was working in quality control at Harold Laycox.

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LMI: And the rest of it was similar? Was the process similar? Were you weighing?

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SB: It was different. There was no vegetation in the wool when I got it. It had all been taken out already. So my job there was to look at the length of the wool, and the diameter of the wool.

LMI: Right. And how much of this did you do during the day? How many samples were you expected to do? Did you sample all the wool that they brought through? Or...?

0:06:28

SB: They would bring samples through, and I just worked my way through them. So it was just constant throughout the day. I'm not sure how many I would have got through in a day, but we just finished one and started another, sort of thing.

LMI: In terms of the wool, what kind of wool?

SB: Mohair, alpaca, they were the main two. Cashmere.

0:07:02

SB: So I used to have an electron microscope, and you'd look down at the wool to look at the diameter of the wool. And also you could see whether it was laid flat or, you know, the condition of it, if you like. And then we used to measure the length of it using a... I can't remember what they called the machine, but we used to draw the wool off, and then you fed it through the machine, and it measured the length. Because obviously not all the wool is the

same length. So it would give you a graph of sort of the longest to the shortest. And that would give them the... sort of average length - how much was at the long end and how much was at the short end.

LMI: Okay.

SB: And we also measured the oil content in the wool as well.

0:08:02

LMI: And was there much oil?

SB: No, not really, not by the time we got it. You know, it had been processed and things.

LMI: I'm assuming in the previous factory there would have been more oil content than if it was...

SB: Well, it was straight off the sheep, you'd got more oil content. And you've got all the sort of vegetation that the sheep's rolled around in, and things like that, and caught in its fur. Or fleece. Not fur!

0:08:33

LMI: Did you ever join a union at either of these two places?

SB: No.

0:08:50

LMI: Did you never need to? Did you never want to? Was there not a culture?

SB: I think I tended to work in the office sort of part of it. And I think probably the unions were stronger in the the mill side, the factory side.

LMI: Yeah.

0:09:08

SB: I don't really remember ever being approached to join a union to be honest. But it wasn't something that I, you know, considered or thought about really at that age.

LMI: After this, where did you go to work?

SB: I had some time off with family and things like that. And then I did go to work at a place called SGS.

LMI: SGS.

0:09:35

SB: And that was on Thornton Road I believe.

LMI: And which year would have that been please?

SB: Um, I'm really not sure, because I worked in a chemist as well, before that. I couldn't be sure when that was, but it was towards, you know, when the mills were not as big as they used to be.

0:10:00

SB: Joseph Dawson's had closed, I think. Howard Laycock's I don't think was there anymore.

LMI: Would it have been late '90s then?

SB: It might have been, might, yeah probably would have been... no, maybe early '90s.

0:10:16

LMI: Early 90s.

SB: Early to mid '90s, Yeah.

LMI: And what was your job title here?

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SB: Again, it would have been Quality Controller, or something like that.

LMI: And was your role similar here?

SB: It was similar to the one at Joseph Dawson's.

0:10:45

SB: So we got the wool from the sheep, and we used to wash it by hand. We used to stand on wooden boards and have the water flush it through and give the wool a good clean. Then we'd card it and comb it and things. And take the vegetation and things out by hand. So we were getting rid of any dirt that's in it, and we were getting rid of all the vegetation. That would have been collected into this sieve, and then measured against the amount of wool that we'd washed.

LMI: Apart from this, was there anything else different in this role?

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SB: Um... No, not especially. It was very similar to the first one, except we actually dissolved the wool in the first one. And the second one we just, you know, cleaned the debris out by hand and things.

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SB: The first and the last were very different from the first one at Harold Laycox. I think I preferred that one really. It was more...

LMI: Cleaner I suppose, as well, wasn't it?

SB: Yeah, definitely cleaner! It was more technical, and I quite like that sort of thing. I enjoyed the microscope work. In fact, it inspired me. I went on to work briefly at St Luke's Hospital, doing cytology. Which again is looking down a microscope. I've always quite enjoyed the laboratory side of things.

0:12:48

LMI: In terms of your salary here, do you have any idea what it would have been?

SB: I honestly don't remember. Not a clue, sorry.

LMI: That's fine.

0:13:01

LMI: If you worked in the office, did you ever come across the rest of the people who worked in the mills? Did you often have much interaction with them? Or were they separate places where you hardly ever saw people?

SB: Joseph Dawson's we occasionally went into the mill to take down samples and things like that. And in Harold Laycox I only really saw... I don't think there was a mill there, I think it was more of a buying and selling sort of place. I'm not entirely sure. But yeah, I don't think there was. Certainly not on those premises, I don't think.

I know at Joseph Dawson's we used to go in sometimes... you could hear the noise, see the machine with the wool coming through it. Very reminiscent of when you walk round the Industrial Museum in Bradford, and you can see the machines with the beautiful white wool coming out. Bore no resemblance to what we saw when we got it in the... where we washed it and everything! And the machinery that they've got... the laboratory machinery that they've got over in the Industrial Museum, was the kind of, you know, the length of the machines that I used.

LMI: In terms of the atmosphere, what was it like working in the office and mills of these...?

SB: Working at Harold Laycock's I worked very much on my own. I occasionally saw one of the directors or something, who would bring something in. And the guy that I worked next door to, we worked quite closely. He'd bring samples in for me, I'd take results out for him, sort of thing. We'd occasionally see women in the office, and we'd meet up with them at lunchtime, and things. But very much working on my own. I used to have the blinds down because it would be dark. And I'd just sit there and get on with it on my own.

LMI: Okay. Early on you showed me a decanter that you've got.

0:15:36

SB: Yeah.

LMI: Can tell me where it's from, and what it meant?

SB: So it's from Harold Laycock's. And I'd been working there for quite a short length of time, probably a few months or so. And everybody was called up to the director's office, or the director's boardroom. And there was a lovely lunch all laid out. And everybody who worked for Harold Laycock's was presented with one of these Wedgewood decanters, to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the company. And it's got the engraving on the front, of the name of the company. And in the top there's a sheep, think it's probably an alpaca, or something, in the stopper. We all got one of those and we also got £50 each which was quite a considerable amount of money at the time. It's still quite a considerable amount of money now! I'd be happy to get 50 quid any day of the week!

LMI: I think you said it was like equivalent to a week's salary.

SB: It would have been, yeah.

0:16:53

SB: It was very welcome, and very much a surprise. Like I said, I'd been there no time at all. I felt a bit guilty getting one when there were people that had been there for maybe 40, 50 years that were getting one as well.

LMI: I think it just shows the culture of the place, doesn't it? How they valued the staff.

0:17:14

SB: It was a lovely place. It was very... like I said, directors bobbing in to, you know, to call in and things. And they were all very down-to-earth, very... very nice, you know. It was a nice place to work.

LMI: Is there anything else you'd want us to know about that job, about that role? That time? The mills in those eras?

SB: I was struggling to remember an awful lot more about it. I was quite young and had a lot going on at the time. Because I was bringing up, you know, my children. I think I mentioned to you before, when we were talking, that I was making a teddy bear for my baby to be, when I was pregnant. And I actually stuffed it with wool that would have otherwise been thrown away. And so I actually had a teddy bear that was stuffed with mohair and alpaca wool!

0:18:21

SB: It weighed a tonne! And it was probably worth quite a bit of money!. I have no idea where that teddy bear is now. I think it probably got loved to death or parted with somewhere along the way.

LMI: In terms of the teddy bear, how did you end up with a kind of shell of it? Did you buy it?

SB: No, I cut it out from fur fabric and sewed it up myself. And I was going to buy the stuffing, you know, the kapok. Then I was sort of throwing all this into the, you know, the bin where you put everything.

0:19:00

SB: And I just thought, 'Oh, do you know what, why not?!'

LMI: Yes.

SB: Yeah.

0:19:08

LMI: What a lovely treat.

SB: It was a nice souvenir to take away when I went off on maternity.

LMI: Was that the last time you worked in...in terms of mills?

SB: I did work at SGS very briefly.

0:19:28

SB: I don't think I was there very long. And then I think it was after that I went to work in the hospital. In fact, I'm pretty sure it was.

LMI: So, in terms of SGS, how long did you stay there?

0:19:41

SB: Probably less than a year, I think.

LMI: Okay.

SB: It was one of those jobs that, you know, I was sort of trying to balance around family, and as the family got a bit older I could work more hours.

0:20:01

LMI: In all of these did you work full time?

SB: Yes.

LMI: And what kind of hours did you work?

SB: At Harold Laycock's, it would have been sort of office hours. Probably the same with SGS.

0:20:16

SB: With Joseph Dawson's I was saving up to get married. So I did some quite long hours. And I remember we had to...what do you call it...?

LMI: Overtime? Or clocking in.

SB: Clocking in. Yeah, we had to clock in and clock out. But there was a period of time when I was doing 12-hour days there, just because I was trying to save up. I can remember walking home from there several times, in the snow, or from the snow.

LMI: Yep.

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LMI: Is there anything else you would like us to know?

SB: I can't think of anything off the top of my head. I wish I could remember more. I really don't remember Joseph Dawson's that well.

0:21:26

SB: There's certain things that stick out in my mind. Harold Laycox, I remember better. But it was literally looking down a microscope all day looking at the... It's very much like looking at hair. You know, your own hair is very similar to what the wool looks like. I got quite good at being able to decide which one I was looking at and things like that.

0:21:58

SB: I can't really think of anything else I can tell you that would be...

LMI: Thank you very much.

SB: Thank you.