

Susan Gee – Transcript

Audio Quality: Good in terms of interviewee. Some of the interviewer's comments are lost in a technical 'crackle'.

Focuses on management and workforce, workplace culture and conditions and discrimination of women.

0:00:00

LMI: Yeah. Excellent. Hi, Susan. I've spoken to you before, so I talked to you about the consent form. Are you still happy to go ahead with that?

SG: I'm still happy with that. That's fine.

0:00:15

LMI: Thank you very much. So, I know that you were one of the youngest people in the factory when you worked. Would you kindly tell me which year it was? How old you were, which mill it was, please.

SG: So I was... it was 1978. And it was... I was 16, I think, 16, 17. And it was George Margate's mill in Bingley.

LMI: Thank you. Can you tell me what the conditions were like, whilst working in the mills?

SG: The conditions were... Well, they were harsh. It was very cold. There was no heating. There was nowhere to sit down. So, it was very warm in summer when it was hot... because it had like a... you know, I think it had a glass type roof or... I'm sure it did. But anyway, it was very hot in summer. But very cold in winter. So I'd often have to, you know, put a couple of pairs of trousers on, the sheepskin coat. Nowhere to sit. You used to lean against the pipe and bob against, sit against that. Or sometimes use a bobbin to sit on, you know, one of the larger bobbins to sit on. But yes, it was very dusty. It was very noisy. We didn't have any hearing protection. We didn't have any respiratory protection.

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SG: So, you were given a Stanley knife with a hook on, to cut, you know, to cut the materials off. So quite difficult really. They're very dangerous work, you know. People often got their fingers squashed. And there were cases of women who were scalped because their hair got caught in the looms and things, you know. So it was... hard work. The people who.. I was one of the youngest. I think I was the youngest at the time, because I... The next up to me were a couple called Jean and... Philip, I think his name was. Anyway, she was...they were in their

early 30s. And they were married. So you know, they were quite... they seemed really old to me.

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SG: But the oldest person was in her 70s. I think she was about 73, 74. And she was still working and putting through an enormous amount of wool on a daily basis. So yeah, it was...

LMI: You wasn't retired, because retirement age at that stage was young as well.

SG: Yeah, it was 60 for women. I don't know if she wasn't a widow, or something like that. But she was still working. I don't really know why she was still working. I suspect... Well, mainly I suppose because she was still earning money. But for me, I came out of an office to work in the mill. Because the office work was only £17 a week. Whereas £47 a week in the mill. But of course, you earned your money. Because the hours were long. You know, I think we started at half seven, eight o'clock. Had a 10-minute break at nine till ten past. Twelve till half past it was lunchtime. Three till ten past it was a break. And then you finished at half past 5. So...and Saturday mornings. So it was a long week. And it was smelly and noisy and... Yeah, not the best place to work, really.

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LMI: Did you receive much training?

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SG: No. I had a week, I think, with a guy called Gerald Tinkler, as I remember. And he showed me how to carry on. But basically, you just got... it was a loom... So I did ring spinning. So the loom was 112 ends either side. So the idea was, the big bobbins were put on the top. And then it was threaded through and spun into finer yarn, basically. So you'd to make sure that the...it's all automated now... but it wasn't then. So you'd to go round and make sure the ends didn't snap. And clean off...we had with a tiny little brush... just clean off behind where they were spinning. Because otherwise it broke off. And if it broke off then it could bring all the loom off. So you were walking around constantly, you know, looking to make sure the ends weren't broken.

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SG: And it got more difficult. So things like mohair wool were a nightmare because it was very fine. And it was very dusty. You know, there's a lot of fibre came off of it. So you could finish it with quite a lot of chest infections, upper respiratory chest infections, because of the bits of the wool, et cetera. And as they got into more nylon wools, or mixtures, you know, mixes of wools, there were different...what's the word... consequences to that.

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SG: Because if that got fastened round, it would very quickly plasticize. So it was really difficult to cut off. And it was thicker, it was harder to tear because it was more durable and that was the whole idea of it, really. So yeah, it wasn't the best.

LMI: In terms of health and safety laws, what was it like health and safety wise?

SG: Pretty shocking, I would have said. I mean, it was... as I say, it was either very cold or very hot most of the time. As I remember, there weren't any guards on the machines. As I say, we didn't have any respiratory protection. We didn't have any hearing protection. We didn't have any protective clothing or anything, you know. Nothing. I mean, really, you were just... there were just you and the machines. And you'd just got to be careful.

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SG: You know, there were no hoists and things like that. There was oil on the floor. I mean, weirdly, what's surprising now, when I think about it, is people sat, you know, worked in the mill and smoked. Which was incredible, really, because there was so much oil. You know, all the floors were...some of the... I think some of the floors were floorboards, particularly the upstairs that, you know. And they were all drenched in oil, machine oil, you know, which is highly flammable. But people just sat and smoked, you know. But you wouldn't have it now. But I don't remember there being any.... um...There were no fire drills or...

LMI: Yeah.

SG: ...you know, that kind of thing. It was just a case of you'd to keep your wits about you.

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LMI: Yeah. In terms of in terms of accidents, were they common? Were they rare? If an accident did happen was there any compensation? Were people given sickness and all sorts of things that **we have now**?

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SG: I don't think you got...we didn't get any sick pay. If you weren't at work you didn't get paid. And no, I think, I think... Well, I believe they did have a union there, but it wasn't a closed shop. Because at that time a lot of the factories were closed shops. You had to join. But that wasn't a closed shop. But I mean, the idea of compensation culture was... it wasn't something that was around.

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SG: Which is why people were worried about...well, managing to stay well enough to work. And being at work and not having accidents. Because more or less, if anything went wrong, you know, they didn't do like they do now, where they do an investigation, and, you know...they'd want to do a kind of root and branch investigation as to cause and effect. [Then]It was just assumed that if something went wrong it was... unless the machine had failed, that it was your fault. That, you know, if you cut yourself, well, it were your own fault because you cut yourself. You know, they hadn't cut it [you]. It was a really different sort of idea about work. And I think, as well, that... one of the biggest things was that once you clocked in, the outside world wasn't...you weren't part of the outside world until you clocked out.

LMI: Yeah. [?]

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SG: You were employer's property, basically, at that point. And, you know, once you were in, there were no, you know, I mean people obviously didn't have mobile phones, but you weren't allowed telephone calls. If somebody were really ill or died, then you could. But other than that, you just didn't know what was going on outside. So there wasn't any means of knowing what was going [on] outside. Not even what it was doing weather-wise. Unless of course it rained heavily, and you could tell. But most of the time you didn't know what it was doing.

LMI: And the windows? Were there windows around or not?

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SG: I think there were skylights, you know. Not windows on the walls, there weren't, no. Not that... you couldn't see out. But I think there were skylights, to be fair. Which is why it was so cold and then it'd be so warm. Because it was like a greenhouse in summer, and an absolute freezer in the winter.

LMI: Right. In terms of equality, so...pay-wise, I suppose in those days...

SG: Women were paid less. Women were paid less than men. And I was paid less because I was younger. It wasn't about minimum wage then, it was about that you didn't get the same wages until you were 18. And you got...I think after you were 18 (I don't know if it wasn't 21, you know) but it went up again. But men were paid more than women. There were more... and there were women... There were a mixture of men and women in the mill, but essentially most of the work was done by the women. The male roles tend[ed] to be

supervisory and the mechanicking. You know, like the maintenance of the machinery and all that kind of stuff. That's what they did.

LMI: You mean the heavy load would have probably gone to the men?

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SG: Yeah. But you didn't see... you didn't... you didn't... Well, certainly in that mill there weren't any women supervisors. There just weren't, you know. But the men tended to do the mechanical maintenance of the machinery and the heavy lifting. Like I say, because there weren't any... there weren't... there wasn't anything to... there weren't any hoists or anything like that, you know. It just had to be moved. I mean, my job wasn't heavy, to be fair. [There] wasn't a lot of lifting with it. But you did need to be... you did need to be... what's the word? You needed to be physically active, you know. And fairly manually dexterous and... Because it was that kind of a job. And you'd to watch what you were doing because obviously they didn't like the machines to be stood.

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SG: So they would only stand the machine down at a point at which you were putting a new run on, as they called it. You know, they'd put you so much on, you'd run it through, and then you'd have a bit of respite. But there wasn't like you would have been today, any dawdling or... you know... If you had to... the machine... They didn't like the machine standing. And they weren't automated. So... you know, you turned them on and off, obviously. But, you know, they weren't automated as in... like they are now. I mean, now, I think they're all computer run now anyway, to be fair. I don't think anybody does any mill work in that respect.

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LMI: In terms of shifts, how many shifts were there at your factory?

SG: There were two. Days and nights. So the night shift came on... I think they started at six or seven o'clock, or something like that. They were mainly men. And they were mainly Asian men that worked nights.

LMI: Was there a pay difference there? That you're aware of?

SG: Not that I'm aware of, but it wouldn't surprise me if that was the case. I mean, for me, I never saw any sort of... Well, I don't think I saw any direct discrimination of people, but everybody kept their selves to their selves. There was a level of civility, but you weren't really encouraged to mix, so to speak.

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SG: And to be fair, quite a lot of the night workers, they didn't speak a lot of English. Because of course, we were only in the '70s then. And really speaking, I think it was more or less the early '60s when lots of people started to come into the country, as bus drivers and mill workers and that kind of thing. So there wasn't a lot of competition for the jobs, interestingly enough. I don't think it was about that.

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SG: But there was still a general sort of... complete gap of cultures... really different cultures. People didn't understand it. And quite often, you know... people would think about... Well, I suppose at the end of the day then, the differences were very different. Because the first lots of people that were here, they hadn't at all... You know, they lived here and that was it. But they kept to their own communities. They kept to their own people. They ate their own food. There was no integration. You know, you would never have gone in a cafe, for example, and seen an Asian family in a cafe. And obviously, you'd never see them in a pub or anything like that.

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SG: In fact, apart from really seeing people going to work, or at work, or in their own communities, you didn't really... there was no opportunities to mix. Because people just didn't. And I think there was probably timidity on all sides.

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LMI: Last time I spoke to you, you gave me a lovely anecdote about people leaving you a bit of curry. [?]

0:15:03

SG: Oh yeah.

LMI: Can you tell me about that again, please?

SG: Yeah, just they used to, when it was very cold, they'd leave little like billy cans, I don't know what you call them. But they had, you know, curry on a morning. And just a small, like a one drink, one shot of brandy, type thing. Yeah, that was quite a nice little touch.

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SG: And it was... I mean, to some extent, the older people in the mill, the older white people, you know, were a bit aghast at me eating it. You know, because there's still this idea that, 'You don't know what's in it.' And all that kind of thing. And of course, at that point, you've got to remember that the '70s food was only just the beginning of people starting to embrace eating curry. You know, I mean, at that point, pasta was considered to be far out. You know, that... any kind of... garlic was frowned upon. It was difficult to find and frowned upon. So it was quite a different thing. But it was a nice thing to do, and, you know, that they did. Because I suppose that, you know, I wouldn't have really thought about how young I looked, but I must have looked really young to them, you know, as well. Bearing in mind, as I say, the oldest people up from me were... Jean was... I think she was about 30.

LMI: Yes.

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SG: And her husband was there. And Jean's mother worked in the mill. And Jean's grandmother had worked in the mill. So, to an extent, there were lots of... there were generations of families that had gone through the mill. And I think that's how it was. Because people got their own people on.

LMI: Yeah.

SG: They'd vouch for people. But then of course, the other thing was the employment laws weren't what they are now.

LMI: Yeah.

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SG: You know, so people could be finished more or less on the spot.

LMI: Yeah.

SG: So none of that, you know, three strikes and you're out. Or warnings, or any of that malarky. It was just a case of you either turned up and did the job and if you didn't turn up they'd sack you.

LMI: And equal pay came in?

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SG: 1978.

LMI: It came in that year as well.

SG: Yeah, it did, but it wouldn't... I think it...like everything, you know, it took some time to filter down. Because unlike now, there wasn't the same ways of tracking data that there is now.

LMI: Yeah.

SG: You know, so they weren't... Companies weren't inputting it. It came in and it was just expected that it'd be addressed.

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SG: But if you consider even now, companies like Morrisons and Asda, etc., have just had massive claims about unequal pay. And we're, you know, like 50 years, nearly 50 years after it. But there was... and I think, you know, and certainly for men at the time, they were very unhappy about women being seen as equal to doing men's work. You know, there wasn't any endorsement of that. There was a great deal of resentment about that. And an outrage at the idea that, you know, women thought that they ought to be. Because largely, women, really.... Well, working-class women hardly ever went into careers, really speaking. And so when they went into mills...you know, the idea for most working-class girls was, you know, to get yourself hooked up to a man who was going to do well. Or at least if he wasn't going to do well, he was going to work. You know, not somebody who was going to be feckless and, you know, and not work.

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SG: So, you know, a lot of the time, once women got pregnant or, you know, had got married and got a family, it was respectable then to go part-time or not work at all.

LMI: Was there childcare available?

SG: Oh, no. People... you know, there was nurseries...nurseries and things were available. But I think the biggest thing was, you know, people looked after other people's kids. But certainly, in terms of your... what would you say, your employer having any cares or thoughts about what you did with your kids, they weren't... You know, there were none of that flexible working or leave. You know, your kids were your problem.

LMI: Maternity pay?

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SG: I don't know because obviously I... I seem think to think there will have been. And women didn't tend to work as long as they do now.

LMI: Yeah.

SG: I think now you see women, you know, working up to more or less before they give birth. Whereas they didn't tend to do, they tended to give up early. But I think on the whole that people thought about having babies as a condition then. You know, that idea that you were eating for two, for example. Which was rubbish. Or, you know, that you needed to look after yourself and you had to put your feet up. There were lots of sort of urban myths about pregnancy. And the delicate...

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LMI: It was difficult, like you said.

SG: Yeah.

LMI: It is very hard work, so that would have...

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SG: Yeah. And so to continue to work in a mill... plus the fact, you see, that... it's like now, where... it's interesting, you see all celebrities, you know, with everything... bumps on show. I mean, decent women, if that's the right word, were, you know, there was an expectation of being modest about being pregnant... because... even though, you know... the idea was that you were supposed to be married. It were still very much frowned upon if you weren't married. But I think the other thing as well was that it was still evidence of sexual activity.

LMI: Yes.

SG: If you see what I mean. And nice women didn't. So, you know, so I think there's still a lot of that. I mean, I can remember... I don't know why I remember it, but people, you know, women who were... if you heard about a woman who was 40, for example, getting pregnant, people really frowned upon that.

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SG: Because it was considered to be old, to be still having sex, you know. And this idea that you could get pregnant at 40. I mean, the majority at that time, I think the average age of giving birth was somewhere around about... between 19 and 23 years old. I mean, you were

considered to be a late... an old mother. When I started nursing in 1979, early '80s... old... you know, women who were 30 were considered to be at risk. Because they were older mothers.

LMI: Yeah.

SG: So there was an entire shift. And it's interesting now that you've got women who were, you know, in their 40s... It's almost like, how did that even happen? You know, that nobody seemed to get pregnant at all when they were older, and now nobody seems to get pregnant when they're young.

LMI: Yeah.

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SG: You know, it's a complete anomaly, really. Anyway, yes, we digress, sorry. But, yeah, so it was, it was a... It's a difficult time to describe, really. But they were male dominated, were all workplaces. That's for certain, you know. And you did as you were told. And it's like with the bosses and stuff, you didn't... You know, I don't think I ever saw the person who owned a mill. I saw the man who managed it.

LMI: I suppose the overlookers and supervisors, what were they like?

SG: Well, in where I worked the guy was pretty scary, really. Because he wasn't a man who...he was quite a gruff individual. And he seemed old to me, but I mean, he would have done. Thinking about him now, I would imagine that he was probably in his early 50s. And he'd obviously worked in the mill a long time. He was a single man.

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SG: He didn't, you know, give a great deal of eye contact. But there were none of that... you know, being aware of your demeanor or... I mean, people would argue and fall out and... You know, things got said that people would have a fit about now.

LMI: Right, yeah.

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SG: You know, but it wasn't, you know... And being shouted at wasn't something that was unheard of. You couldn't complain. We didn't have any HR, for example. You know, you got your wages. That was it, really. That's what happened.

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LMI: In terms of socializing, did you guys go out together to the pub on a Friday?

SG: No.

LMI: Was there such a thing as a working men's club? Any parties? Things like that?

SG: Sometimes you'd see people in a working men's club. But I don't remember *them* having any do's.

LMI: Right.

SG: But I probably wouldn't have gone anyway, at my age, if you see what I mean. Because you wouldn't have been able to get in the pubs. Because it was, in a daft sort of a way, it was more strict then. And I wouldn't have wanted to socialise with them because they were, you know, such a lot older than me. And they seemed old. You know, I mean, when I think about some, you know, some of the people that were probably only in their 40s, but they were like old people. They really were old people. But the... and again, the working men's clubs, you know... well, women tended to go on a... not so much... it was a Saturday night that women went to working men's clubs because they had bingo on and a turn.

0:25:17

LMI: Right. Yeah.

SG: And you couldn't go in the taproom anyway, because women weren't allowed to. And you couldn't go in the working man's club as a woman unless you were signed in by a man.

LMI: Right.

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SG: Weird, isn't it? Weird really, when you think about it.

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LMI: And drinking, were you allowed to drink?

SG: In the pub, if you were old enough, yes, you were, if you were old enough. But nice women weren't... You know, they might have had a shandy or a babycham or a snowball or something. But nobody was standing there doing tequila slammers and anything like that, you know. And women were... they weren't encouraged to drink. And certainly, nice women didn't. I mean, I think the whole thing about the expectation of women that... there was so

much that you couldn't do, and that you had to get right. Because it was so easy to be tarnished. You know, the kind of the 'nice girl' scenario, you know, it was a really fine line.

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LMI: I remember one of the words you mentioned that we had completely different connotations about was 'slut'.

SG: Yes.

LMI: You said because they were being lazy, and they didn't look after their appearance or house.

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SG: Yeah, it's sluttish, you know. If your hem was down, you know, somebody would say that, you know, you looked like a slut because, you know, it wasn't... you weren't tidy and you didn't pay attention. I mean, it's like today now, people don't iron things. But ironing your clothes and being presentable was a big thing. And mainly because obviously, we didn't have the same choice of things. You didn't have as much. So people tended to want to... I mean, you know, as daft as it seems, in a way, clothes would have been more expensive then than they are now.

LMI: Yes, I can imagine.

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SG: Because good clothes... You know, you could only buy certain clothes. There weren't, you know, we weren't importing things from China and India and, you know, all of that kind of thing. Most of the clothes were made here, apart from clothes that might have been made in Europe. But I mean, they were out of the reach of working-class women anyway. For sure.

LMI: In terms of holidays, like Christmas, or holidays... When did you have holidays?

SG: So usually, you had Christmas Day and Boxing Day. And then you would have had Good Friday and Easter Monday, and maybe Tuesday. I think it used to be Monday and Tuesday. And then there would have been the Whitsun Tide holiday, which is the end of May.

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SG: And then there would have been the... all the factories closed for two weeks in the... their holiday, Bradford holiday weeks. I think it was July, or first two weeks in August. And everybody... Everybody had the same holidays. That was it. None of that, you know, 'I want

a day's holiday.' Everybody had holidays when the mill shut. It's not like it is now where you could say, 'Oh, can I have two weeks off now?' Because you couldn't.

LMI: In terms of your mill, did it ever organise Christmas parties? Or trips away to Blackpool or Scarborough?

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SG: Not that I remember, no. But I mean, in the end, I was only there about a year. Probably a year and a bit. I wasn't there a long time. But I like I say, it wouldn't have been something I would have wanted to go and do. But a lot did. A lot did.

LMI: When we were speaking, you mentioned about other houses where they had machinery, where people were working. I think it was the menders you mentioned.

SG: Oh, menders and, yeah, bur[lers]...

LMI: You said about the houses rather than the factory, **you said** that women were working from?

SG: Yeah, sometimes, sometimes women... people took things in. You know, took, would take things in to do, mending and things like that. But a lot of it, obviously, was done in a mill. But people could do, could take things in to do at home. Home workers. But that I think was more poorly paid.

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LMI: Right. And in the factory, did they have a salary? Or was it piece rate?

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SG: You got paid... Well... I think you could work on two systems. You either got what... so I got paid £47 a week, but some of the different activities could be aligned to a piece rate. But I mean, piece rates... you really had to be on your game to do that kind of work. Because you had to be like the machine. Because the piece rates weren't designed for the worker to win.

LMI: Right.

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SG: You know, so people who got highly skilled and highly adapted at doing... I mean it's like when you watch things now where people do repetitive... you think, 'Wow, how do they do that?' They get used to it. But you've really got to be on your 'A' game all the time. Because there's no room for manoeuvre, really.

0:31:15

SG: I mean, I remember, funnily enough, before I went to the mill, I worked at Damart, which was a French clothing company. And in the summer, when they weren't selling thermal stuff (because obviously people didn't go skiing and doing things like they do now, going on winter holidays) we had to do the catalogue packing. And you had to stuff a thousand catalogues in the day. And it was absolutely horrendous because it'd make all your neck ache. And once you'd done them you could go. But, oh my god, it took some doing. And all of that kit, that kind of thing that's automated now, was just done by hand. And it was backbreaking stuff. It was... there were long hard days. And I think I said to you last week that, you know, the thing for me is, it's never... it's never left me what it means to have the privilege of having a professional job. You know...

LMI: [?] where you what you worked with since? **The difficulty of the job.**

SG: Oh, God, yeah. Yeah. Well, I mean, you know, I did my nurse training. I've done three degrees. Two at master's level. I get paid to think now.

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SG: And sometimes it still resonates that, you know... I think to myself, 'Am I really getting paid to do this?' Because I often think about people who are out there in manual roles, because they're hard. They are, you know, it is hard work. And it is no wonder that people died early. Or died young. Or retired and they were worn out. Because it was physically difficult work. And they were... once they were in, they were in for years. Years.

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LMI: Yes, the repetition and the kind of how it kind of deadened you because there was no space to think or do anything. And you just kind of...

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SG: Yeah, stuck there. And I think as well though... and we touched on it when we spoke about it last week, that one of the things was that people... there was a... As hard as it was and as brutish as it was, people were, in a way, more content. Because they knew where they were in life and what... you know, that having a job was the best thing to have. And, you know, they didn't worry about what they weren't going to be. Or what they weren't going to achieve. But then again, of course, we didn't have the globalization that we've got now. So, you know, if you were working/living in Bradford, you didn't know what was going on in Leeds, never mind what was going on in, you know, in Liverpool. Or... you certainly wouldn't have known what was going on in another country.

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LMI: Yeah.

SG: Because there wasn't any mechanism to know. So people, in a way, accepted their lot.

LMI: Yeah.

SG: And in a way, I think it made it easier, because they weren't striving for things that were going to be terribly difficult to attain. You know, and I think I said to you last week, when you consider in 1971, only 3% of the population went to university. Compared to now, which it's something like 56%. You know, you had to be really clever, or really rich. Or both. And there were occasional routes out of working-class life into... a better life, if you like. But certainly for women, I mean, not really. Certainly working-class women. Maybe, you know, the really pretty ones might have got picked up by a richer man, etc.

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SG: But largely speaking, you know, you were where you were. And that's where you stayed.

LMI: Can I ask, for somebody like yourself who was quite aware of things and left after a year, how come you ended up in working in a factory?

SG: Because... So my stepfather died and me and my mother were left in poverty, really. And it never looked like that. But what we didn't realise was that—[oh, gosh, I just need to see if I've got that in this blinking meeting, just a second—] what we never realised was—[I think it's half past four, isn't it? 1961]. Actually, it looked like we had a lot, but actually when he died it was all a bit of a paper tiger. You know, it was a house of straw, if you like. And so all of a sudden, you know, we were plunged into this sort of poverty.

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SG: And I'm earning, I were earning £17 a week at this office job. And it just wasn't enough. So that's how I got into there. And I thought I'd be able to... 'Stand it,' is the word I want to use. I thought I'd be able to just buckle down, but I couldn't. I couldn't continue to do it. It was driving me insane because... I didn't hate it, but I tried really hard to get into the mindset of just... You know, like when I looked at people like Jean who was 30, and I'd look at her and think, 'I can't do this for another 15 years. I can't be here when I'm her age.' And she seemed old to me, you know. And I thought 'I *can't* do this day in, day out.' I mean, the first, you know, couple of months over there it were a novelty.

0:36:53

SG: But the novelty soon wore off and the money, you know... Well, I suppose we're back to that thing of... When you look at all the work studies that are done now, you know, people work... They don't just work for money, although there are a certain mindset of people who would say, 'Well, that's all you're working for.' But actually, the richness of work is nothing to do with money a lot of the time. And you have to have a particular mindset and discipline. And they did. Because their lives were mapped out, you know. They went to... they left school... most women left school at 15 at that time. 14, 15. You know, they went into manual work. They got married. Well, they got engaged, they got married. Within a year or two, they'd started having a family. They had two weeks holiday a year.

0:37:47

SG: You know, they saved up for a car, decorated the front room. Everybody had a front room. Nobody ever went in it, you know, that kind of thing. And they were just content. They went to the club on a Saturday night. Sunday, they made the dinner.

LMI: Yeah.

SG: It was just all laid out. I mean, it was just so pedestrian, really.

LMI: If you could get into nursing, how come other women didn't try? Was it easy for you to make that shift, **to do**, like an apprenticeship or...?

0:38:15

SG: Yeah, I think, for me, I just had to... I just could not... I don't know that they didn't want to... I think you kind of either struck out and tried to get there of your own volition, but... I think a lot of working-class women held on to the idea that, you know, 'Don't worry about getting yourself a job or having a career. Just get yourself a decent husband.' That was kind of the focus. You know, get yourself a decent husband, get settled down and start the whole process again.

LMI: You weren't working class were you, originally?

0:39:00

SG: No. Well, I was originally, and then I wasn't, if you see what I mean. So I came from working class people. But then, you know, we had a period where we weren't working class really, we were quite affluent. Or it seemed that way. We were, actually. But I just didn't have the... I couldn't quieten my brain, really. I just could *not* get satisfied. I couldn't get content. I hated, I *hated* the whole idea of male dominance. I hated the fact that the most stupid of men would be listened to above a woman with a brain.

LMI: Yeah.

SG: You know, that just merely being male gave you status.

LMI: Privileges and status.

0:39:45

SG: And privileges, yeah. Which most of them didn't deserve. You know, and I think that's... that were a big thing. So you saw men getting on and... You know, there were always a particular type that were managers. And you know, they all dressed in a particular way. There were so many uniformities of what life looked like then.

LMI: I suppose the women weren't looking for promotions because, like you said, the focus wasn't to stay in mills to have a career. So...

SG: Oh, no, no. It was just a case of earning money.

LMI: [?]... a case of trying to just be that and... Was there a level where they could get promoted to from this machinery to that, or something, where they could earn a bit more? No?

0:40:30

SG: Not really. People had a discipline of what they did, if you see what I mean. And they learned their craft of... So you didn't tend to get people moving around. Because people liked their own machine and their own, [way] you know, [of] doing. But there wasn't... You know, women, like I say, nobody wanted to get promoted. People just wanted to go in, do the work, come home and get out. And I think part of the thing now, why older people... or as I was growing up, you know... thought young people were feckless and lazy, was because they couldn't get their head around the idea of having to... You know, when I think about my grandfather... My grandfather was down a pit at 12, you know. And if you think about that now, I mean, you could[n't]... Your average 12-year-old didn't even get on a bus on their own.

0:41:34

SG: Never mind going down a pit and doing a day's work, you know. And I think that was the thing, that there was... that they were they were kind of in awe of the fact that... Nobody expected life to be easy.

LMI: Yeah.

0:41:47

SG: At all. And I think really, when you look at it, and you can see it sort of historically now, that when you look at how... You think, 'Oh, you know, it would have been great to have been rich.' But women that were born into rich families had different kinds of problems. Because they died of boredom for different reasons.

LMI: They weren't allowed to do much, were they?

SG: They weren't allowed to do anything. Just sit around, you know, sewing or reading by candlelight. Or just being nice, you know. But they... I mean, it's *fascinating* in a way, to think how women have been held back so much because of, you know... considered to be some sort of inferior species to men.

0:42:47

SG: And I don't know that it's gone anywhere entirely. Even now. I think now there's different tensions because there's a massive resentment, you know, about the fact that women... Funnily enough, I was just looking on LinkedIn today. And a woman I work with called **Selena Ulla**. She worked at Bradford Council, and she's just put on something, she's finished up... She's had a few chief executive jobs. She's been really, you know, had a very prestigious career. And Selena was just making the point that, is it National Hijab Day or something, today?

LMI: It was yesterday.

SG: And she was making the point that when she started work 30 years ago, she never, *ever* saw a woman of colour, or in a hijab, in a position of authority in a workplace.

LMI: Yeah.

SG: And when I thought about it, neither did I.

LMI: Yeah.

0:43:42

SG: Neither did I. And now, you know, it's so commonplace, and rightly so, that you see women of all denominations and ages. And you know, colours and backgrounds, and whatever. But you never did. You never did. I mean, even as I was... When I think about working at Damart, you know, there were female supervisors. But they weren't hardly ever managers. You know...

LMI: [?]

SG: ...rarely did they get into... They might have been... if you think about... Well, like Seabrook's Crisps, for example, you know. That was started by a guy called Colin Brook. And his wife never worked, but his daughters went into the business. But that was kind of how

people got into it, because they were born into families that had established businesses. But then the women did the nicer sides of the job.

LMI: Yeah, yeah.

SG: You know, no mill owner ever put his own daughter in the mill.

LMI: Yes. Yeah, yeah, I can imagine. So they're always in the offices and in the...

0:44:44

SG: Yeah. And you know, that kind of thing. You wouldn't, you know, it was... It's a strange thing, really, because, you know... It's a funny thing when you sit in it and then you come out of it. Like now, I look at people in working class jobs, you know, still manual labour. And you think to yourself on a day like today, when it's been windy and raining, you know, 'There's somebody out there working on motorways,' you know. I mean, again, I suppose it's interesting when you look now at the fact that since we came out of the EU, they can't get people to pick the veg.

LMI: Yes.

0:45:23

SG: And the best people that do it, and seem to have an absolute aptitude for it, are, you know, Polish workers, Eastern European workers. And they have a work ethic that is completely alien to your average British white person. They wouldn't do it. They couldn't stand it. And it's weird how it is. But they wouldn't. They just wouldn't want to do it. They'd rather do nothing. And to some extent, I think one of the problems is... It's even when you look at like kids at school... you've got kids all over the world that would give anything to go to school. And we've got kids here that have got some of the best education in the world. And you can't get them to go for a few hours a day, five days a week.

0:46:05

LMI: No. I know you need to go to another meeting. So... I remember one of the things you said was that a) working in factories have never left you, and b) owing to the poverty spell, you never say no to work. So I'll let you say those, and I'll finish on that.

0:46:19

SG: Yes, and I absolutely would say that. That, you know, once you've had a, you know, a scrap with poverty, if you like, it leaves a mark that never leaves you. You never ever forget

what it's like to have nothing. And the fragility of the fact that you can have everything and nothing in a heartbeat. And yet, in many respects, what you do know, as you move away from it, and you've got more money, etc... I never thought I'd say it, but I do know now as well, that money makes life more comfortable. But it doesn't bring you any more rewards than an ability to buy comfort. Because it won't make you happy of itself. It's got no value in terms of relationships or... you know, the things that matter. Universally matter to all of us. It holds no store at all. But you never forget the smell of poverty.

0:47:18

LMI: I like that. I lied to you, there's one other thing that I've remembered. You quoted lots of quotes and I'm sorry, but I couldn't remember the 'rule of thumb'. What was the 'rule of thumb'?

0:47:26

SG: Yeah. So the 'rule of thumb' was when a man could beat his wife with a stick, providing it wasn't any wider than the thickness of his own thumb. Because it was acceptable to chastise women and keep them in line. Mainly because they were considered to have sort of, you know, underdeveloped hysterical brains. So obviously, you know, you needed to keep them in order.

0:48:00

LMI: What's your job title now, Susan?

0:48:03

SG: Now, I am head of Occupational Health for Yorkshire Water.

LMI: Thank you for that.

SG: And I've got a master's degree in Health Care Law, an MSc in Leadership Management and Change, a BSc in Public Health, and a diploma in Cardiology. And I feel... And I have to say, I got all of those qualifications working for the Council. So yeah, you know, I would say I've been lucky. Yeah, I think I was when I look back on it. But it was a privilege to work in the mill. And when I saw this advertised, you know, the Lost Mills Project...because I never thought about myself being part of a generation or part of something that's no longer around.

0:48:45

LMI: Yeah.

SG: Anyway, it's been lovely to speak with you. So if you need anything else, you know where I am.

LMI: Thank you very much.

0:48:56

SG: Take care. Bye-bye. Bye-bye, love. Bye.