

## Trevor Keighley - Transcription

*Audio Quality: Good volume and clarity however lots of background noise.*

**0:00:00**

**AD:** Right, this is Trevor Keighley from Keighley. I think he's probably the president of Keighley.

**TK:** I wish.

**AD:** The lord of the manor. And Trevor, just to start, can you tell us how old you are?

**TK:** I'm 76.

**AD:** And you live in?

**TK:** I live in Keithley.

**AD:** Great. How long have you lived here?

**TK:** I've been in Keithley all my life.

**AD:** That's fantastic.

**TK:** Yeah.

**AD:** And which textile mills have you worked in?

**TK:** I worked as an apprentice when I left school at 15 at Smith Brothers and Fosters.

**AD:** What year was that?

**TK:** It would be...

**0:00:38**

**AD:** Roughly.

**TK:** 62, about 1962 when I started, yeah. 15 years old.

**AD:** Wow.

**TK:** As an apprentice.

**AD:** Golly, we're about the same age, we probably bumped into each other in the Ferens or somewhere at some time.

**TK:** Probably, yeah.

**AD:** Okay, and what did you do in the mills?

**TK:** I was a weaving overlooker, which was then changed to a weaving technician, which sounds better. But I was a weaving overlooker all my apprenticeship and afterwards as well, yeah, which actually set me up for the rest of my life, which gave me a good lifestyle and everything afterwards.

**0:01:26**

**AD:** What does a weaving overlocker do?

**TK:** Weaving overlocker repairs the looms that they made the cloth on when they broke down, used to repair all the looms, used to set the looms up with the new warps and the new shafts and everything to do with the maintenance of the looms.

**AD:** So if I was a student listening to this I might not know what a loom does so maybe you could describe that.

**TK:** Well a loom is, they still do use them, some companies now, it's what they make material with which makes the warp and the weft combine together to make the material which was a really heavy job, quite a heavy job yes.

**AD:** All right, okay, so you have to do a lot of manual work.

**TK:** It was very manual, it was very manual work. We had to lift the big, heavy warps into the looms itself, one person. So we-

**0:02:28**

**AD:** I think they look like giant cotton reels, don't they?

**TK:** Yes, yes, that's right, yes. Yeah, yeah.

**AD:** I do remember that. I worked in Millen-Wilson for a while.

**TK:** Oh, right, yeah, yeah. But I mean, obviously I speak as though it was for a while. Oh right, yeah, yeah.

**0:02:44**

**TK:** But I mean, obviously I speak as though it was, and like you said, the students wouldn't have probably have known what I'm talking about when I say a warp or shafts or into a loom or anything, so, but yeah, that's what I did and then I maintained the machines if they broke down.

**AD:** So were you in charge of anybody?

**TK:** Not as such, no, but a weaving overlocker at that time was, there was a weaver who used to do obviously run the looms and then the weaving overlocker was in charge of 16, 20 different machines to maintain them and the weaving overlocker was like one of the top jobs in the weaving industry.

**AD:** So how many people worked in the John Smith Mill?

**0:03:43**

**TK:** In Smith Mills and Fosters, how many people? Oh, I really, I should say.

**AD:** Is it dozens or hundreds?

**TK:** Hundreds, a few hundreds in the different departments. Because we used to, there used to be people who used to make all the warps, then the weavers, and then they used to have the menders upstairs, they used to mend all the material if there was a fault in the material.

**AD:** Oh I remember, that's where I worked.

**TK:** Right.

**AD:** I did the cutling and somebody was doing the perching.

**TK:** That's right, yeah, and they used to look and see if there was any fault in it, and then the menders would mend it.

**AD:** Exactly.

**TK:** Yeah, so there were a lot of people there, yes.

**0:04:24**

**AD:** So, what was it like as a place to work?

**TK:** First when I started when I was 15 it was scary.

**AD:** Why?

**TK:** Very scary.

**AD:** Because you were 15 I guess.

**TK:** Because I was 15 and I was really really shy and there were all these women, all these ladies who were weavers who used to torment the younger ones all the time and it was but it was also very very extremely loud noisy with a machine running all the time hence why I'm deaf

**AD:** Oh are you?

**TK:** Partly deaf yes yeah yeah but overall wonderful a wonderful place to work. A wonderful-

**0:05:13**

**AD:** Why was it wonderful?

**TK:** Just because of the atmosphere of everybody. Everybody were friendly. It was everybody got on together socially and things like that. It was the Smith Brothers and Foster's, the guy who owned the company, Mr Tom Smith, they called him. He was the owner and he looked after all the staff.

**0:05:37**

**TK:** We used to have a Christmas meal out at the Craiglands Hotel in Ilkley at that time.

**AD:** Oh I know Craiglands.

**TK:** Yeah and then if it was really hot weather they'd organise, there used to be an ice cream van come up outside the mill and everybody got free ice creams it was absolutely a lovely lovely lovely place to work.

**AD:** Like a community.

**TK:** A community, a lovely place to work, yeah.

**AD:** Do people live near the mill as well?

**TK:** Mostly. Mostly people were from, you know, the Keighley area. Yes, yeah.

**AD:** So you kind of, you could socialize as well?

**TK:** Yeah, but at that time when I was 15 years old, probably didn't do much of that really.

**0:06:18**

**AD:** Oh, right, yeah. You're still living at home?

**TK:** Yes, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

**AD:** So, so you started when you were 15. How long did you work for?

**TK:** I worked in the textile industry until I was 29.

**AD:** Wow, so that was another 15 years.

**TK:** Yeah, yeah.

**AD:** So you finished in about 1970?

**TK:** I finished in 75 in the textile industry 75, then I joined the fire service.

**AD:** Did you get a sense of the textile industry contracting?

**0:06:54**

**TK:** I did.

**AD:** What was that like?

**TK:** Well, as a weaving overlooker, if all the machines were running as they should do, we had certain things to do, but then you had time to sit down and do whatever you wanted to do. But I could see at that time that the mills were starting to close around Keighley all over the town and I thought I was just thinking to myself at that time I need to be moving on somewhere and that's when I left in 1975 and joined the fire service.

**AD:** You were 30 then?

**TK:** 29 yes.

**AD:** So that was really the beginning of things beginning to decline

**TK:** yes yeah yeah it was one of those where they were sending work or machines across abroad to New Zealand a friend of mine went to work in New Zealand and like India and places like that and and I thought nice this is this is not going to last.

**0:08:01**

**AD:** No.

**TK:** As it happens, the company where I started work is still going under Pennine Weavers.

**AD:** I must get in touch with them. I must get in touch with them.

**TK:** Yeah, yeah.

**AD:** And so one of the questions we ask you, have you got any kind of memorable moments or events?

**TK:** Well, when I started work at 15, my wife who also worked there, but she worked, Jennifer worked in the office upstairs, but we did meet and we started courting at that time, going out together.

**0:08:34**

**AD:** Were you working in the mill together?

**TK:** Same mill, yeah.

**AD:** And you met in the mill?

**TK:** We met in the mill and then obviously we got together and we got married and we're still married

**AD:** Wow

**TK:** so that's we've been married now for 55 years

**AD:** that's quite impressive

**TK:** so yeah yeah we're a good time yeah yeah

**AD:** so were you working in the mill when you got married?

**TK:** Yes, yes I was, yes. Yeah, yeah, in 1968 I got married, two children, doing well, yeah.

**0:09:22**

**AD:** So would you like, if you could, would you wind the clock back and recreate that world of Bradford and Textiles?

**TK:** Oh, I don't know, that's not a good thing really, is it?

**AD:** You probably couldn't manage the hard work, maybe?

**TK:** No, I couldn't, no, I mean it was really, really hard manual work. And when I left, I remember when I left to join the fire service, I was 29. And when I had my interview with the fire service, one of the bosses said, you're 29 years old. Will you be able to keep up with the younger ones who's joining the fire service at 21 years old?

**0:10:00**

**TK:** Well, because of the manual work that I did, I had muscles on muscles. And I said, you're joking. I was I was really, really, really fit because of the work.

**AD:** Yeah,

**TK:** and now it makes me laugh sometimes when if you go to a dance or something, and they'd say, put your hands together for the DJ who's worked really hard. And I think, I think they don't know what hard work is. So yeah, it was a good lifestyle, a really good lifestyle, yeah.

**AD:** What was your, so it sounds like you had a good relationship with your bosses as well.

**0:10:45**

**TK:** Yeah, we did. Yeah, everything was weird. There was the manager in charge of the overlookers. And then if something went wrong, that one, you had to go upstairs into the main office. Well, you thought, that's when you started to shake a little bit, thinking, what have I done wrong? What am I doing? What have I done wrong? Or else if, say, for instance, some of the material, the cloth that had been woven, if there was a serious fault in it, all the way through, and you had to go into where they repair the material, and you had to go, he got called upstairs into the mending department, there again you knew you were in trouble.

**0:11:32**

He'd done something that he shouldn't have done, or he hadn't been doing what he should have done.

**AD:** Oh wow, that's interesting. Yeah. But there was, because one or two people I've talked to, there was bits of inter-agrial dispute. Were you ever involved in any of that? Anything like that?

**TK:** Um, not really. No, not really because the weaving overlookers had their own union.

**AD:** Oh right.

**TK:** As a lot of them do now, yeah, fair enough. But the union for the textiles, for the weaving overlookers, was really, really, really strong. So, they didn't sort of get into any serious disputes.

**AD:** Deals were done?

**TK:** Yes, yes.

**0:12:16**

**AD:** Oh, that's interesting. Yeah. So you're glad you got out when you did?

**TK:** Yes, because throughout my career, when I left, after I left, obviously the opportunities to go somewhere else were very limited because a lot of the mills had closed down.

**AD:** Yeah, yeah. Bradford was not in a good place.

**TK:** Not at all, no, no. There are a few mills now still weaving, but at that time...

**AD:** And do you see anybody that you worked in the mill at that time?

**TK:** Yes, I do. A friend of mine started with, he moved to Spain, but we still keep in touch.

**0:12:59**

**TK:** Another friend who worked in the mill, but with a different job. I see him every Saturday when we go out. You know, yeah.

**AD:** Oh, that's good.

**TK:** You'll see people that we know. And there again, he met his wife at the same company as I met my wife. And they're both still together.

**AD:** There's something, isn't there, about being proud of Bradford and its textile history?

**TK:** Oh, definitely, yes. Yeah, definitely.

**0:13:32**

**AD:** And you were part of that.

**TK:** I was part of it. And it was a big thing. And where I worked, you used to weave material which was really high class, what they're called, suiting for suits.

**AD:** Oh, yeah, yeah.

**TK:** High class suits. And I know now you can go and buy a suit for, I don't know, say 50 pounds or something from Asda or somewhere.

**0:13:56**

At that time, the material that they were weaving, that I wove, just had to know you couldn't, it was all going to Saudi Arabia and where all the money was and everything. So really high cost material, yeah. And the material that was cut up at that time, if there were pieces left, we were able to buy it, we could buy it, to make, and my wife used to get these pieces of material, which was about 12 inches long and she used to make a skirt out of it.

**0:14:30**



**AD:** Not enough to make a suit though.

**TK:** Not enough to make a suit, no.

**AD:** 12 inches isn't a very big skirt.

**TK:** No it's not.

**AD:** This was when she was a bit younger I presume.

**TK:** That was when she was younger, yeah.

**AD:** Mini skirts made out of offcuts.

**TK:** Off the offcuts, yeah.

**AD:** Did quite a lot of people do that?

**TK:** Yeah, a lot of people do that, yes.

**0:14:52**

**AD:** That's really interesting. I've not heard that one before.

**TK:** Well, yeah, you did, yeah.

**AD:** I'm conscious of the fact that other people are turning up here. Right, yeah. But this has been really good. Really good. And if you remember, if anything comes to you, in any particular instance or story, or something, you know, I did write down any good gossip, but you know, because we don't name names.

**0:15:16**

But little kind of moments that might come to you.

**TK:** There's always something in it that I always remember. One of the dangers of working with the looms was the shuttles, when the shuttles are going across, across the loom. And if something went wrong with the loom, the shuttles would fly out. And quite often, they flew out the shuttles. And I always remember once, the shuttle flying out, hitting one of the weavers, who collapsed, and her arm went down into the loom, which crushed her arm.

**0:15:55**

Just little incidents like that.

**AD:** That's not a little incident, that's quite a big incident.

**TK:** It's quite a big incident, yeah.

**AD:** Did she get her arm, did it recover?

**TK:** I think she did recover, yeah, but it was quite a dangerous place.

**AD:** It sounds like you turned those machines off rather quickly.

**TK:** Oh yeah, yes, yeah. Another instance was one of the other mechanics was repairing a loom and the belts on the mortar. We used to feel at the belts to see if they were if they were tight or slack and he was doing that and he caught his finger and took his finger around the pulley and he just stood at the back of the machine with his finger. Just hanging on with a piece of skin and he was just smiling, wiggling his finger.

**AD:** Did they stitch it back on?

**0:16:56**

**TK:** I think they did, yeah, I think they did do, but there was lots of little incidents like that, yeah. Yeah.

**AD:** Oh, they're quite amazing.

**TK:** We had lots of fun. We had lots of fun as well. Yeah. Yeah.

**AD:** You had time to do that, did you? You didn't...

**0:17:10**

I was talking to someone the other day who works in the mill where they took all their newspapers and magazines and books off of them when they came off on the shift, kept them and gave them back at the end so they wouldn't sit and read.

**TK:** No, no, it wasn't like that. We did our work and you had to make sure you produced, obviously, and everything was done as it should.

**AD:** Was it piecework?

**TK:** No, no, it wasn't. The weavers used to get paid for how much material they produced. So I suppose in a way, it was like piecework in a way. So if a machine was down, if it was broken down, they wanted it repairing, which was what our job was.

**0:17:50**

So that's when we sprung into action, if you like, and started repairing or whatever we had to do, yeah. But it wasn't a lot of pressure like there are now and all, a lot of these jobs these

days, it's quite easy going, but at the same time we did what we had to do. Yeah. Yeah. And when I started work, I remember starting, and my first pay was £2.50, I think it was £2.50 a week, I think it was.

**AD:** When you were an apprentice?

**0:18:29**

**TK:** When I was an apprentice, yeah. But then obviously it went up and it was quite a good pay scale. And when I left in 1975 to join the fire service, I left virtually for the same pay I was getting per week, which was, I think it was £25 a week when I left.

**AD:** That's about what I was earning then.

**TK:** Was it?

**AD:** Yeah.

Whereas now it's obviously, it's quite a lot more up there than everything else is. So, yeah.

**0:19:03**

**AD:** That's great, great. I'm going to turn this off because I've got a feeling people are turning up here. Yeah, yeah. And I know that man, he's writing me off. But, that was, that's great. And I might come back to you.