

AMS - Transcription 1

Audio Quality: Background noise, other interviews going on.

Detailed interview focussing largely on family life and mill closures

0:00:00

AS: Mill and my grandma.

LMI: Oh fantastic, I'm just going to take some notes whilst we're talking. So you're called [REDACTED]
Is it with an 'e'?

AS: Yeah.

LMI: So, it's been seven years.

AS: Well, I was born in Torrey Hills in the state of Poole, I think in Teesdivore. It was being a social school, new college, but it never happened. So it was a very basic street. The downstairs toilet were outside in the yard. And everybody knew everybody on the street.

0:00:33

AS: My grandma lived at the top of the street, and my auntie and my uncle lived across the street. So it was like a bit like Coronation Street. My mum worked in mill down Dalton Lane, the one that's recently just burnt down. She worked there. My grandma worked there. And my aunties... some of my aunties and uncles, worked in mills. So it was quite... you know. When my mum was pregnant and she stopped at home, my dad came home for his lunch. My youngest sister was born in the living room, while window cleaner come to do windows. You just er, had your kid and went back to work. Yeah, so that was that.

0:01:26

LMI: What sort of jobs did your mum and your grandma do?

AS: My mum was in spinning. They were in spinning, they were doing spinning. My mum died really early. She had bone problems. By the time she was 30 she was in a wheelchair. And we, as children, had to look after her. When I was 11, I used to take her to the toilet and I didn't have much of a childhood. When she went in hospital we'd stop at relatives, who were old age pensioners then. And they looked after us, in a one-bedroom bungalow on Woodhouse.

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AS: My auntie Harriet, she gave up work to look after us. And my uncle Herbert worked in the mill. Me Uncle Herbert used to bring bobbins home. We didn't have toys so we used to build castles with bobbins. And the spinning bobbins, we used to make dolls, dollies out of them. And me Uncle Herbert used to bring sacks home and we used to make tab rugs on a

night for something to do. So it was quite an eventful childhood really. We were supposed to go to school but it were a bit hit and miss. So like history lessons were my Uncle Herbert running round the garden with a dustbin lid and a colander on his head, and he were doing the invasion of the Vikings, and we were Saxons. And yeah, it were just... that were our sort of education fun. So when I left school, (I left school at 16), I went straight from school to work at British Mohair, which is now Grove's Mill, and it's made into flats, what's left of it.

0:03:44

LMI: What was it called? British?

AS: British Mohair. It was the hairy wool.

LMI: I see.

AS: It was really hairy wool. And I had like 600, maybe 700 bobbins to look after. Three or four sides. So if one went... doffed off – stopped, then you'd have to get it going: tie a knot, thread it through, and tie a knot and turn a handle down to keep it going. Because if you didn't, you'd end up with different sizes. So you could take them all off and they'd be the same thickness and they'd go into a cart and they'd go elsewhere to be... something else done to them. But that's what it was. We didn't have a canteen. We just took sandwiches and sat on a buffet at the end of your row, and [you] ate your sandwiches. And if your machine were stopping... you'd carry on, you didn't have a proper break, you just kept on going. Fridays, it was cleaning day, so you had to get under the machinery with a sweeping hand brush, and sweep it while it was still going, because it was so hairy.

LMI: And were there any injuries from that, because that sounds really dangerous?

0:05:15

AS: Probably. I never did owt. If you were trained well you didn't. But it was, you know, yeah, we just did it.

LMI: And were they quite... it sounds like very long days then.

AS: It were long days, started at half past seven. And, like I say, you didn't really have you couldn't just go like and make a brew or... We'd have a tea break, if you were around. If you weren't busy doffing off, you'd go get a cup of tea. They'd have a cup of tea, and you'd go get it. And your cup were always brown stained with tea. It was, and when you got in the lift to go down it was a cage. Trapped... I were always scared in the lift.

LMI: It sounded pretty scary.

AS: Yeah, lifts were pretty scary and if you didn't shut the gate promptly it wouldn't go. As you were going up you saw all brickwork and they were very dark lifts. It wasn't modern lighting.

0:06:13

LMI: Yeah. What were the actual mills like, in terms of being a place to work? I imagine they were quite noisy.

AS: It was very noisy. I'm surprised I'm not deaf. Because you didn't wear protective muffs or owt. My ex-husband worked in the mill and he's deaf as a post. He worked in Barton at Bradford. So yeah, it was quite noisy.

LMI: And you said that you used... you learnt to lip read?

AS: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Because you couldn't hear yourself think. You couldn't have a conversation with anybody unless you went outside.

LMI: So, because you couldn't have a conversation, did you still form friendships?

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AS: Yes. Oh yeah, yeah, because I was young, so the older women took me under their wing a bit. You know, ask if I was alright in the morning. And yeah, I was like the youngest, so they were quite, you know, they were quite friendly that way and showed me what to do, and that. They used to just check on me, see if I was alright. But it were hard. It was the hardest job, how to do it. Because your fingers would split, because you were tying knots. I never had nice nails. These are fake, because my fingers would split.

LMI: And how long did you work in the mills for, then?

AS: I only worked there about six years. Which were good going, because I was allergic to wool, because it used to get on my chest.

LMI: And did you stay just in... In British Mohair?

AS: Yeah.

0:08:25

LMI: And did you ever talk...? Did you... I know that you said that your mum was quite poorly and things. Did she ever talk about what it was like for her working in the mill?

AS: Yeah, this is why it were hard, because some of them used to go straight, like 12 year old, they were going down to the mill. And that's all that they were expected to do. I'd never, I knew when I left school I was going to go and work in mill. It was said. And it was done. And it was. I wanted to be a fashion designer and stuff but, no, I had to work in mill.

LMI: And what made you, apart from your allergy to wool, what made you change jobs?

0:09:19

AS: I left to go working in a sewing factory, and learn dressmaking, cutting patterns out. But they went bankrupt. Cutting patterns. So I learned my skills of dressmaking. So I could make, when I had children, I made me own kids clothes.

LMI: And was that local as well?

AS: Yeah, that was up at Lees – it were next to Scouring Factory. That's gone as well.

LMI: Can you remember any particular like dramas or any...especially when the mills were going through hard times. Can you remember anything happening there in terms of the workers?

AS: Well, it shut down because I think there were... a lot of... they weren't getting the orders. We weren't getting the work.

LMI: And can you remember what sort of year this might have been, or a decade?

AS: It were in the '70s. In the '70s. I mean, we had a bit of fun. I mean, we used to have like carts...there used to be a long island. There was this Asian lad that used to work there, and he used to come and push carts. And we'd just say, 'Oh hey up, he's here again, who's he got his eye on...?' You know, a bit of banter that way. You know, it was just... You had to make it fun. You had to get on with it as well. But it were... and you'd come out and you still felt like you were bloody hearing mill when you come out at tea time.

0:11:08

LMI: Someone else was saying to me that he was a serviceman, so he got paid by the hour, but a lot of the women got paid by the piece.

AS: We got paid piecework, this is it.

LMI: How did that work then? Did you get paid every week?

AS: We got paid weekly. And we got paid on how much you produced. So, like I say, if your bobbins were stowed, you weren't going to be making any money. So you had to get them...couldn't say 'I'm going for my dinner break now I'll be back'. You had to sit there and make sure they all filled up, because it was your wage. If you didn't do that, then you didn't get a wage. You could like pick what called piece work.

0:11:54

LMI: And did you ever do night shifts? Was this a mill that had night shifts available?

AS: Yeah, I didn't. But my ex-husband did, he worked nights, but he were over in Thornton.

LMI: Yeah.

AS: But yeah, they kept the machinery going constant. It were always going. It were never stood. So when I left, there was someone to take over me in the morning, you know, and he took over in the morning. And sometimes you'd go, and it were a mess. They hadn't done what they were supposed to do, so you had to clean up and start. You know what I mean? Pick up from where they left off.

LMI: And that would cut into your wages.

AS: Yeah. So if there were some carts that were left over or half of bobbins... and sometimes... if they got stuck in the yarn, you'd have... if they weren't going onto the bobbin properly, you'd have like snags. And it'd cause problems when it went to the next job. So they'd have to get a Stanley knife and cut it off the bobbin.

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AS: So if you came with a cart of bobbins for you to use, some of them still had the wool on. And you had to get a Stanley knife, cut it off so that you could use it for the next... for your job. So it was, it was constant. You were like inside of a clock. If your little cog didn't work, the whole lot would go. And it would, you know. You couldn't just think, 'Oh well, that's just dropped, I'll leave it two minutes.' Because that two minutes [was] making such a difference.

LMI: Yeah. And what sort of things were you specifically making? So you had the..

AS: I was doing mohair. I was doing the winding. So I was winding the mohair wool onto bobbins and cones.

LMI: And can you remember any specific events or celebrations?

AS: Yeah. Well, it's quite funny you should say that, because my friend has just gone back... well she goes back tomorrow, back to Canada. But they were having an outing to Blackpool, and my friend from Canada used to come over every summer to Keighley, and I took her on this outing.

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AS: You could take a friend. You could take your partner, your husband, or... You could go in a charabanc, called it a charabanc. And we went to Blackpool, and I took Lizzie from Canada to Blackpool. And I think it were... the fun fair, the big fun fair had more or less just opened, or... It was so amazing because I'd never been to Blackpool. I'd always gone to Morecambe as a child. So it was a big event to go to Blackpool, and to go up to the tower.

LMI: And that was organised through the mill?

0:15:04

AS: Through the mill, yeah. It was a summer holiday.

LMI: And did you do anything for Christmas, or anything like that, from what you remember?

AS: Yeah. They had Christmas do's, but I didn't go to Christmas do's. Because I were only young, and they were all sort of taking their husbands, and stuff. And I feel like I wanted to do my own thing. But yeah, went to Blackpool and we had chicken in a basket. And that was thing in '70s. You were posh if you had chicken in a basket.

LMI: And can you ever remember talks about unions when it came to that.

AS: Yeah, you had to be a member of the trade union.

LMI: You had to be a member.

0:15:50

AS: You had to be a member. If you weren't a member of the trade union, you didn't stop in the job long. And so much money went out of your wage packet for trade... you paid your union bit, you got...you paid your national insurance, and then you paid your trade union money as well.

LMI: And did you get paid on a weekly basis?

AS: Yeah. We got a little brown envelope, with your name on and your clock number. You had to clock in every morning and clock off.

LMI: Yeah, yeah. Amazing. And were there any memorable characters that you worked... You don't have to say names if you don't want to.

AS: Yeah, well, I can't really remember them all, but there were, I remember the trade union guy called Bob, and his wife Jean. She worked there as well. And they used to have a few arguments and stuff. So you could tell when... you could used to watch them and see what the mood [they] were in when they were arguing.

0:17:08

LMI: About work, usually?

AS: Probably, yeah. But you know you just say, 'Oh, hey up, he's not happy.' And he'd march...he had like a bit of a goose step when he were marching up and down aisle. I used to look round loom and think, 'Oh, hey up, he's here. Better behave. We'd better not upset him.'

LMI: And have you got friends that you still stay in touch with that you met through the mill?

AS: Yeah, my friend that I used to go to school with, we started both of us on the same day. We're still best friends. And sometimes when I'm at work now, I get old biddies coming in and saying, 'Oh, I remember you? Do you remember me?' And I'm like, 'No.'

LMI: And when the mill started closing and shutting down, what were everyone's thoughts and feelings? Can you remember that, like, among the workplace?

0:18:08

AS: Well, with British Mohair, I think it was because it was specialized wool. I mean, there were Haggas's that were going, and they was... A lot of people that left where I worked, went over road to Haggas's, because that were doing wool as well. So they'd go... they went over to Haggas's. And it wasn't... in them days it wasn't *what* you knew, it was *who* you knew, for a job.

LMI: And so, if you were to change from one mill to the next, you could just... could you just walk into a job?

AS: Yeah, the winding in British Mohair would have been the same as Haggas's. It was the same principle of how to do it. So you could sort of go [from one to] the other. But there were a mill that... I can remember a mill burning down. There were a mill that burned down on Halifax Road. And it was burning for days.

LMI: Was it Mariner's?

0:19:20

AS: That's the one.

LMI: Burnt for days?

AS: Yeah.

LMI: And did you get, did you see that then?

AS: I was sat on my Uncle Herbert's doorstep watching it. And then the day after he went down, and he brought some rusty burnt scissors and stuff that were left. That were all burnt, and he were going to do up stuff. They had a rummage to see what they could find. It went up like a tinderbox because of all the oil. Yeah.

LMI: That must have been quite scary.

AS: Yeah, it was scary. You could, more or less, it was so... that where my Uncle Herbert lived, it was a wood house on the front, so you got a really good view. Yeah, it was a bit horrendous, because you were thinking the whole town were gonna go up. But thinking I was only young then, only a kid. So, yeah.

LMI: And can you remember what happened to, for example Mariner's, when it burned down, what happened to it afterwards.

0:20:28

AS: I think they just dampened it down. I don't think there was much left of it. And a lot had lost their jobs. But I say again, they would have gone to Haggas's. Gone to other mills that were working. But then eventually Haggas's was the last mill, I think, that was left, that were in Keighley. And that's in Grey. They closed because they'd lost all the... all the work went over to China. So that were it.

LMI: Can you remember what time that was?

AS: It was the '80s, I think. Because Haggas's, they're buried in Inglewood churchyard. He had a really big tomb. It's St John's church. His sons, I think Haggas's, John Haggas's sons, pay for grass being cut in St John's Church, because it was near his church. I only know that because I was talking to a gardener a week ago.

LMI: Well, part of what we're doing isn't just about the mills, but also the mansions of people that owned the mills. So anything like that is really helpful, to like hear about the legacy of that as well, and how they still contribute to the local area. Because obviously they were all family-run buildings, weren't they?

0:22:04

AS: I know that Robert Clough when he's... He had a big mansion, and he donated a Christmas tree for people of Keighley one year.

LMI: That's amazing. I'm going to really quickly check my interview notes in case I've missed any questions that I want to ask.

AS: See, Dalton Lane were... it were full... all down Dalton Lane, those houses, they were all, you know...[?]

LMI: So, were those houses built specifically for the workers?

AS: I would have thought so. I think my dad bought it... I think he said it was £100, when they bought that house. It had a yard. I remember yard. [It] had a toilet, paint washed. And we had to have a potty under the bed. And we all shared a bed.

LMI: Did you?

AS: Yeah, three sisters, we all shared a double bed. With potty underneath.

LMI: Wow. And what were your thoughts when Dalton Mill burnt down last year?

AS: Well, I was quite sad because it's such a gothic building. And it's so much of Keighley's history. And it was so horrendous. Because there were so many... I reckon it'll be haunted. I reckon there'll be... there'll be quite a few souls in there. Because it was horrendous. If you imagine them working there, the kiddies used to work there, and it were hard.

0:23:42

LMI: Oh fantastic.

AS: I mean my dad was supposed to go work in the mill, but he didn't. He went to work in the sawmill, on Bradford Road.

LMI: I bet that was hard work.

AS: He lost his finger. That...with a saw when he went to work there. He did his national service as well. But he were lucky he didn't go and work in the mill. But my mum did, and my grandma. I think more the women.

0:24:20

LMI: Yeah.

AS: Than owt else.

LMI: And they mainly stayed doing the weaving and the spinning and that kind of thing?

AS: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

LMI: And in terms of...

AS: And they were combing, doing the combing.

LMI: Combing as well. Amazing. Did you ever see any of the owners of the mills when you worked there?

0:24:41

AS: No, never. No. They were too busy in their big houses, weren't they?

LMI: Yeah. So it was mainly the, like the servicemen that would come round?

AS: Yeah, I only saw...I think the only big people who I thought were big were the personnel officer that come... that I went for a job interview for...with wages. You know, come round with like a wooden box with your wages in. And Bob were union man. And if they were going to go on strike... Sometimes they'd be threatening that they were going to go on strike. They never did. I can't remember a strike. But there were always that talk that they were going to have a strike.

0:25:38

LMI: Have you got any other specific anecdotes or memories, or anything that you can think of? I mean, you've given me so many already.

AS: Oh just... Yeah. We used to play with bobbins, the big bobbins. We used to use them as buffets. And build a castle with small bobbins. It was just us imagination, you know, something to do, that sort of thing. Yeah, and then they'd go on fire.

LMI: Burn them?

AS: But I think my Uncle Herbert wasn't allowed to bring them home, you know. But don't tell anybody. They'd go on fire, because they were greasy, so they'd burn.

LMI: Yeah, I mean, much cheaper than firewood.

AS: Yeah, yeah. It were hard for them.

0:26:35

LMI: Yeah. Oh, that is like such amazing imagery.

AS: You reckon? Oh God.

LMI: As in the bobbins, like using the bobbins as toys and everything.

AS: Yeah. Because my mum were in hospital all the time, we were shipped, I say shipped, we had to go live with my auntie and uncle in this one bedroom bungalow. And my Uncle Herbert must have been in army, because we used to fight over who was going to sleep in the 'army' bed, which was a piece of canvas with sticks. Made with sticks. And his old army blankets. And we'd sleep in their bedroom, and they'd have... they had a fold up little single bed that made it into like a table, in the living room. So at night they'd go... we'd go to bed and then at night you could hear them arguing over this bloody bed and stuff, you know. But it was, it was good, good childhood. And then like in the morning we had to have this great big tablespoon full of malt stuff that... like thick treacle. And porridge.

LMI: Well, if you're having a full day.

AS: And dragged down to school. And then me auntie Harriet used to go to Olympic... I think it was Olympic Cafe, near by bus station.

0:28:03

AS: And she used to tell tea leaves, do tea leaves, make cups of tea. And we used to sit there right quiet. And she said, 'Behave yourselves, don't move and don't say owt. I won't be two minutes.' And then she'd take us to school. We used to go to Eastwood School. Which was, at that time, it wasn't, you know, school.

0:28:27

LMI: Thank you so much for sharing all of that with us and being able to just hear how...

AS: Everybody's story is going to be different anyway because they're all different memories. I look at it like this now, everywhere I've worked, Skipton Properties have took it over and made it into flats. Because I worked at the sewing factory next to the scouring place. And he pulled that down and built houses. And then when my kids were growing up, I went to work at Yorkshire Biscuits, and he's built on that. And then I went to work at Webb's factory, chicken factory. Did a few year there. That were an experience in itself.

LMI: I bet.

AS: But that was... I'd say it were a good experience. How could you work in a chicken factory? I'd more fun in that chicken factory... It was!

LMI: Because of the people?

AS: Yeah. It was a horrible job. It was horrible. But it was the people. There were some characters. There were one woman and she were covered in tattoos. And if you imagine me, prim and proper young lass, and she was just like Popeye the Sailor with all these. And her boobs hanging out all the time! Oh and some right characters. But it were good because we used to get a mini bus from Keighley Library, would take us to Crosshills in the morning, and bring us back on a night. And we were allowed a big tray of eggs for a pound. And a chicken. *And* we got us breakfast and us dinner there while you were working. You got your breakfast and your dinner free.

0:30:16

LMI: Oh, that's better than the mills.

AS: Yeah, but it was chicken. Or egg on toast, scrambled egg on toast.

LMI: I bet you were sick of egg by the end.

AS: I couldn't eat chicken for a few years afterwards. But that's what it was. But it was a job. And it were hard work. But...every job that I had, I could start...you know, walk straight into a job. You can't now. You can't find a job. But yeah, what an experience. If you want to research, the Webbs Chicken Factory.

0:31:06

LMI: Yeah, I will. Separate from this project. I'll just do it, because it sounds fascinating!

AS: It is, it's so funny. There were no health and safety in that place!