

Abdul Ghafor - Transcription

Audio Quality: Good

Focuses on workplace culture, immigration, family life and social events

0:00:00

LMI: Right, I'm sat here with Abdul in Sangat Centre in Keighley. Abdul, can you just tell me your name and about yourself and when you first came to Keighley.

A.G: Right, my name is Abdul Ghafor. I am 70 plus now, but originally when I come from Pakistan, part of a... we call free Kashmir, Azad Kashmir, Mirpur, Azad Kashmir, back in '66 January. And when I come to England, first time I seen the snow. It was up to me knees. And cold, freezing cold. And dark nights. What a memory.

LMI: How old were you?

A.G: I was about 16, yeah.

LMI: And you came over to work?

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A.G: Yes, obviously. My dad was here. They brought me over. My dad was ex-British soldier, you know, and there was something... agreement with the soldier to come over, and they can bring the family later on - their spouse, you know. So my dad, I think, come early in '61, or something.

LMI: Did you come straight to Keighley?

A.G: Yes, my dad was living here, so that's where I come first.

LMI: And what did you do?

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A.G: I worked in a textile mill, yeah. There were very few people them days anyway...or Asian, not so many. Few houses, we knew...well later I got to know sort of most of the people. There were not so many people.

LMI: Which mill did you start working?

A.G: It's called Low Mill, near the railway station, just beside the railway station, Keighley Railway Station, Low Mill. I worked a couple of months there. Then I moved on to... it's called Charles Anson, Fleece Mill, right in town centre.

LMI: So, what were you doing in Low Mill and Anson?

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A.G: So it was like a general labourer, supplying to the machines, you know, the stuff. The lady was working on the machines.

LMI: And was it a spinning mill?

A.G: Spinning mills, that's right, yes. And we called them bobbins, you know. And when they were sort of full of thread, you'd take them away, then bring the empty one back to give to ladies working on the machine. And they would put them on the machine and start rolling their work.

LMI: Can you remember what your first wage was?

A.G: I think it was below five, maybe four fifty.

0:02:41

LMI: Pounds?

A.G: Yes, something like that. A week, no[t] a day!

LMI: So you went from Low Mill to Charles Hanson's?

A.G: Charles Hanson's, yeah. I don't know, they had two names, Charles Hanson, and they called it Fleece Mill as well, so I don't know what that's supposed to mean.

LMI: And when you say Fleece, what was that making?

A.G: The same, spinning.

LMI: Oh, ok.

A.G: They were spinning, yes.

LMI: And how long did you stay there?

A.G: About two years.

LMI: Oh right.

A.G: Yeah. Then opportunity come, because you always try to climb the ladder, you know. I found out there was another friend of mine, he's going abroad and the job he was doing he was earning more money than where I was. So he asked me if I could... no, I got to know that he's going to Pakistan, I asked *him* if I can... he 'put word in for me to give me the job.' And he did and I got the job.

LMI: And where was that?

A.G: And that was a downland to land again called Sir James Hill, Colonial Combing. That was slightly different because it was like a warehouse type job when I started - loading and unloading wagons, you know, the raw material coming from outside, especially was the wool.

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A.G: The mill, they was... bringing the pure wool, you know.

LMI: The fleece.

A.G: And washing it, and cleaning it, and packing it again. And sending it to the spinning mills.

LMI: And was it hard work?

A.G: Of course. And it was a bit smelly as well, yes. And the wool, it wasn't very clean wool. If you pick it by hand, you had a lot of small bits of thorn in, as well, yeah.

LMI: So, it was straight from the sheep, was it?

A.G: Yes, it was straight from sheep. Australia.

0:04:44

LMI: Oh right. From Australia?

A.G: Yeah, yeah, yeah. All the wool come from Australia them days, yes.

LMI: Nothing local?

A.G: No, I don't think so. Maybe somewhere... but... our mill, they used to be like half ton -they called them bales. They were massive, you know, packed in and tied in with steel bands. Yeah, half ton a piece.

LMI: Half a ton?

A.G: Yes, each one. They bring it on the ship or containers... later on in containers. Then the container come in and deliver to us in the mill.

LMI: And so, then you worked there for two years, did you say?

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A.G: No, that was down in Charles Hanson.

LMI: Oh sorry.

A.G: But Colonial Combing I worked from... I think '69 I started. And I finished '77.

LMI: So you worked there that whole time? And were you always labouring? Or did you do other things?

A.G: No, warehouse I was driving a forklift truck. Loading and unloading wagons.

LMI: Did you have a good time there?

A.G: I tell you, yes. No, sorry, same time, after warehouse... because I was dealing a lot with the wagons, and I started driving...

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A.G: I used...in warehouse, our driver used to finish at five o'clock, but I was working sometime late - to unload the trucks. So I had to pull the wagons out and bring them back in as well at night time. Because there were no... all the drivers finish average five o'clock. So that's how I picked up driving. Then I put in for a license, I passed. And then they gave me a job. I was going to go somewhere else because first they wouldn't give me a job for driving. And when they find out I was leaving they said 'No, you can stay here, and we keep you on driving.' Then I started driving for them. I think I started driving '73 till '77. Then this... I was interested in working abroad or going international. There was... I used to read in newspaper a lot of jobs were coming up in Saudi Arabia and... £200 a week. [In]them days! When I was paid only like £50, £60. So I applied for it. I didn't get the job. But anyway, another job come up, driving to Pakistan. So I applied for that and got in and I never looked back!

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LMI: So that was not textiles, that was driving trucks with other things?

A.G: Other companies, yes. Taking goods to...white goods they call it, like fridge, washing machine, international... no, all the electrical goods, air conditioner. To Pakistan, mainly. That was to start with.

LMI: So just to go back to the mill, how big was the mill you were working in?

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A.G: Oh, massive. The Low Mill, they all... were very big. Each one had a... what do you call, one floor. And there was like one overlooker, one labourer, one they call a... I don't know, a jabber - oil man. He used to oil all the machines by hand. So mainly there were like three males. And the remaining...most of them were women working on the machines. And, as I say, men were like labourer and the supplier. And overlooker, he was looking for the machine any one...like a belt, you know, when they spin is, belt broken down. Whatever went wrong, the overlooker were there to sort them out.

LMI: And did it feel like a community?

A.G: Oh, very much yes. Well, I don't know somehow... that's how I picked English up, from them old... well, nowadays they use words 'senior' ladies. They were wonderful. They were like mothers to me. And they were very happy to speaking and learning from me. A lot of things, you know, 'How did you live there, how did you...?' you know. They were impressed with my teeth them days, I don't know why. My teeth were very shining, and they were really impressed They always keep asking me 'How come they're so white and shiny?' And I showed him what I use.

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A.G: You know that was normal thing, like some bark of tree. You know, you rub on it and they become a bit brighter. Yeah. And I mean, they always loved it. Many of them I used to go to the houses, and you know talk to them. And they were so nice to me. And that's how I picked up... I speak a bit more, better English than most of my age group because of them ladies I worked with.

LMI: And you were the only Asian man there? Or there weren't many Asian men working in the factory?

A.G: No, as I say, like in one floor it was only one man... there were other men as well. There was few people on the machines as well. But mainly they were generally labourers them days. But later on, slowly, I've seen a lot of people starting working, learning, picking up and working on machine as well. Because there were more money on machines.

LMI: And so were you living with your parents at that time?

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A.G: Well, them days we lived in one house, quite a few different families, you know. There were no mothers or sisters them days, they were only men only. Either men and boys, you know, somebody brought their son or nephews and cousin, uncle. So there were few living together.

LMI: So this was before the wives and mothers started coming over?

A.G: That's right, yes.

LMI: Just men working in the mills and living there.

A.G: Originally, I think most men come first. The ladies come afterward.

LMI: And what was that like?

A.G: Well obviously, we got... in Pakistan where we come from originally... ladies' job is doing the cooking, like your mother or sister, they do all the provider food, and man only works outside. And here we had to do both, you know, cook ourselves as well, which was very hard for us them days. Didn't like, well, didn't know much about cooking, anyway. So anyway, we learned a little bit from parents, and we did cooking as well as working. But

when they...like then my mum come, then my wife come, then that was job sorted for us! So we only did the work outside.

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LMI: When did your mother and wife come over?

A.G: I think my mother come in 1973 or '72, I can't remember exactly. '72 or '73. Then I think a year later my wife came as well.

LMI: And did you have a family then?

A.G: Oh yes, yes. Well, all except one child, one of my oldest child because I got married in Pakistan. He was born in Pakistan. The rest of them...I had another four children. They were born in England, Keighley. I always lived in Keighley.

LMI: And did you like living in Keighley?

A.G: I loved it, I tell you. I had a lot of friends around in Keighley, because them early days, I was the one who had a motorbike, going with the English lads.

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A.G: You know, I had a lot of friends. And going around with them every time, wherever. We used to go every night. Then there were motorbike rallies. We used to go on the rallies. You know, and there was a club called Denham District Motorcycle Club. I became a member of that, and we used to unite and go wherever they were planned to go on weekends.

LMI: Did you have very much free time to do things like that?

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A.G: Yes, it seems to be that them days we had a lot of time. After work we would always go to Victoria Park, play football in the evening time and socialise with friends. And... until we started a family and growing up then slowly, slowly we started more occupied. Yeah, the free time is gone then!

LMI: Four children at home.

A.G: That's right, yes.

LMI: And when your children were growing up did you want them to go and work in a mill or a factory? Or did you...?

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A.G: Well, them days there was a lot of apprenticeship. It was like traditional work, you know, son takes after his father. And I've seen a lot of people doing apprenticeship in... some were joiners, some were ...other work. Whatever their parent did, mainly the children

followed it. And same. I wanted my children to do better than me, really. But when they finished school, they sort of ended up working in mills and so on. Yes.

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LMI: And just... were you... did you, could you see the mills and the textile industry closing down at that time? Were you aware of less work and some of the mills closing?

A.G: No. Early days when we come early there was mills everywhere. You leave one job, go to next mill, and they said, 'Take your coat off and start.' They never said 'Come back tomorrow or next week.' A lot of them, they were, 'Do you want to start now, or you want to come tomorrow?'

LMI: So there was plenty of work?

A.G: Plenty of work going on. Yes.

LMI: So when you left in the 1970s, it was still like that, was it?

A.G: Yes, there still was a lot of work. One time I can remember, they tell me there was shortage of wool coming from Australia. And somebody said Japan bought all the wool. Even... I don't know, they said then, they talk about they don't have an industry of textile much. But they just bought it, stored it, and the mill had no wool. So they had to pay extra money to them to buy off them again. Yeah, that was a story them days, you know. And that did affect a lot. It was similar to the... like the coal strike. I remember that when the coal strike went on three days.

LMI: In 1974.

A.G: That's right. A lot of shortage of everything. So them days the mill went on three days, because no electricity.

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LMI: What was that like?

A.G: In a way, generally it didn't affect much, because the government did sort of compensate us - give us the money. Whatever [was] your average wage, they paid you.

LMI: That was Edward Heath, wasn't it?

A.G: That's right. Yes. Or Margaret Thatcher?

LMI: No, no, too early for Margaret Thatcher.

A.G: Yeah, that was... she was a bit later, yeah.

LMI: So, even though you had left the mills by the time they were closing, were you aware of like mills closing in Keighley when you were still living in Keighley?

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A.G: Yes, yes I seen...and couldn't believe my eyes, you know, 'What's happening? All them big mills, not many people working.' You know, and slowly, 'How come this textile work dried up?' you know. It was a surprise to everybody, you know. 'Oh so and so is closed down, so and so is closing down.' Yeah.

LMI: And when was that happening?

A.G: Well, that was like... eighties onward started, yeah.

LMI: And presumably your friends and people... family, other family members had been working in mills and had to stop working in the mills. So, what was it like for your friends and family when all of that started happening, who had stayed in the mills?

A.G: Well, slowly they cut down. And the good workers they kept on -with long service and with experience and that, kept to the last minute, until they managed to keep it going. You know, like one of my son [who]were working in textile [mill], called John Haggis. And I think, what do you call it, where they were colouring the wool?

LMI: Dyeing

A.G: Dye house, they call it. He were working there, and that was more or less last one to close down before all mill then they closed down and he was made redundant as well.

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A.G: So everybody was disappointed, you know. They didn't know what to do and there was not a lot of work going on after that. But slowly there a lot of people got into taxis, restaurants. You know, started looking different ways. One time he was just work for somebody else and that was it. And I think that was a good thing because, you know, you don't have too much headache. Once you leave, come home, you're free. You know, do what you want. But when you started your own work, even did a taxi, a restaurant, that was a... is an extra responsibility which was very hard to cope.

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LMI: More hours.

A.G: More hours, yes. A lot of people on the shops and that, they were more or less 24 hour working, you know. And that was a bit hard. Yes, easy... for me even, easy was, working -starting 7.30, finishing average about 5 o'clock. That's it.

LMI: So when you came over to Keighley, did you think you were only going to stay for a little while and earn some money?

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A.G: That's right, yes, that was my parents' planning that 'We'll go work a few years, get

some money, and when we are better off, we'll come back.' You know, and do this and do that. And slowly, slowly, we went in deeper, deeper, deeper. And then I forgot about it, sort of thing, now. Because I always... I do know my dad and dad's uncle, and so on, they said, 'Oh when we retire we'll go live in Pakistan.' Then they found out 'Where they are going to go if they are our children grandchildren's are here, they need looking after there's nobody to look after them.' So they started... decided, 'No point going there now, we don't have anybody looking after us.' So they stayed here as well. And same now, I'm same as my dad age. Even I'm older than my dad now. Because my dad passed a bit early, I'm 70 plus and I think he was just over 60 when my dad passed away. And same goes with us now.

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A.G: We have nowhere to go in a way. We do go see... if we got a little bit of a relation there. But we can't go and stay. There's nobody to talk to, nobody knows you in a way. Yeah, so it's a bit difficult now, yes.

LMI: Keighley is your home.

A.G: Keighley is my home now, yes.

LMI: Well, it's been a long time, hasn't it?

A.G: That's right, yes.

LMI: 50 something years.

A.G: Yeah. Well, when I was 16, as I say, we came over. By younger age you don't know a lot about your own country because you go to school, then finish school they do because we were originally farmers, and we had a lot of work after the school as well: herding sheep, cows taking to water, buffaloes and that. We had all these animals, you know, as a farmer.

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LMI: That must seem like a very different life to your children and grandchildren.

A.G: That's right, yes. They're so scared of them animal. They could not believe we used to play with them, at the moment. You know, when you have your own animal, they don't sort of, what they call, go for you. You know what I mean? But now the kids are so scared of some of them.

LMI: So just before we finish, have you got any kind of particular special moments, memories, things that happened in the mill, you know, odd, strange things that happened?

[You can pick, the twine is a hot, you can stay off.]

A.G: Sorry.

LMI: Have you got any particular memories, moments, things that were unexpected or special memories that you've got of time in the mill? Little bits of scandal?

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A.G: I was just so happy, I tell you, them days, because, as I say, eight hours... I realised later on, when I started doing driving, going abroad, away from home, I thought that was the best job. Finish five o'clock, come home, eat something, then go and park, play. Come night time, home, sleep, and back to work in the morning. That was very peaceful. We did not think about anything else. Them days, younger days I'm talking about.

LMI: Simple life.

A.G: Simple life, yes. But even now we got a lot more money than what we had then, but we are not that happy. I tell you the truth, yes. We have a lot more responsibilities. A lot of things are going on in the family, and one thing or another, you know. So it's more stressful life now. With traffic, them days very little traffic was on the roads, and now look at traffic, you can't move. You know, you can't predict what time you're going to be there. Them days you could say 'Oh, 20 minutes there; two hours to get there.' That was no problem. But nowadays it's too much stress.

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LMI: Yes. I think you're very right, I think we'll stop there. That's great, thanks for giving me all that.

A.G: Thank you very much for your time as well.

LMI: Well, you know, I'm not going to go away, I'll be back, so if you actually think of anything, any particular story you want to tell me, then I can come back and we can record some more.

A.G: Yeah, no problem, yes.