

Allan Brack - Transcript

Audio Quality: Very good.

Very detailed transcript concentrating on memories of growing up around Lister's Mill and role in trying to save the mill and other Bradford textile buildings from closure.

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LMI: Right, I'm sat here with Allan Brack, an eminent professor of Bradford and all things Bradfordian. And Alan and I... disclosure here, Allan and I have known each other for a very long time, but unlike me, Allan grew up in Bradford. And so his memories go back a long... a lot further back than mine do. But he also he grew up kind of in the shadow of Lister's Mill, really...

AB: Partly, partly. I was born on Heaton Road just opposite [did i do that sorry sorry start again] I was born on Heaton Road, just opposite that entrance of the mill that has the coat of arms on it. I was born in 144 Heaton Road.

LMI: What year was that?

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AB: 1954. Yeah, 1954. My family had lived there for a long time before. My grandma... That was my grandma's house. And my mum had, I think my mum had been born in that house actually. I never did quite check that out with her. But she was certainly there as a young child along with her three other sisters. And a grandad who was the night watchman of the North Mill, the bit further on. My mum used to tell us that she would take his supper along and pass it through, he wasn't allowed to open the place, you know, pass this through underneath the railings, or whatever, of the gate. And he would pass back a bag of any little bits of velvet that he'd found that day, that evening, that they could make doll's clothes with, and things like that. They were a poor family. And for some reason, I don't know why it happened, but my granddad and my grandma split. And in the end, when I was born, there was the four sisters and my grandma living in that house.

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LMI: So was it just a small terraced house?

AB: Oh, it was a small back-to-back. It was one up, one down. And, I mean, actually... I don't know how this happened, but the night I was born in that house, there was my mum, three sisters, my grandma, and my mum's first three children.

LMI: There's hardly room for you to be...

AB: To arrive. But... And just recently, you know, since... I was in Cartwright Hall, and I noticed Lister, and I always placed Lister at the same time as Salt, sort of, really. But he was much later.

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AB: And it was actually 1938... he might not have been active in the mill by then, but it was 1938 or '37, when he died. So my mum was 12 when he was still around.

LMI: Oh, wow.

AB: And she tells all sorts of stories about their poor kind of situation there, you know. I mean, they they would pawn their clothes and, you know, on a Monday, and get them out again on a Friday. And if times were really hard, they'd even pawn bedding, you know. And they weren't alone. There were a lot of families around there who were living in poverty. And they were earning a crust largely in the mill. In Lister's mill.

LMI: So that would have been in the '50s?

AB: That would have been in the late '40s, '50s. Yeah, yeah.

LMI: And when you were born were they still working in the mill?

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AB: I think, yes. Two of my two of my mum's sisters were working in the mill. I don't know if my mum was, because she had these three kids to a previous marriage. And she'd met my dad, and he was a hard-working painter and decorator by then. But his family also worked in Lister's Mill. Which I'll cover when we get to the mill bit, really. But, you know, when we get to what we found when we got into the mill.

LMI: So you grew up in the shadow of Lister's Mill, literally?

AB: Oh quite... No, we moved, actually. My dad bought a house on Fairbank Road, I don't know if you know it, off Whetley Lane.

LMI: Oh yes.

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AB: And so my childhood was there, but interspersed with going to visit my grandma. And my auntie and her kids, who were kind of our age, who lived on Beamsley Street. So there was a family at the back of the mill. And a family at the front of the mill. And, er...

LMI: And were you kind of aware of what was going on in the mill at that time?

AB: Oh, it was, yeah, yeah. I mean, you couldn't be anything other. I used to know how...you know, I walked on my own, you know, kind of the age of seven or eight, I mean, it felt safe then to go up Fairbank Road and down, past the Elite Cinema, which was at the top of the road, and walk towards the mill. And as you turned Toller Lane, you could already hear the mill.

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AB: I mean, it was like... I don't know how many thousands were still working there. There were five thousand at the actual mill at its peak. But I guess it would have been more like three, three, or maybe even four thousand. But the clatter of the machinery and the earth... the... as you got nearer, the earth just shook, you know. It really was kind of... And it was deafening. And it was weird.

LMI: Even outside the mills, it was like that?

AB: Oh yeah yeah. It was weird. As you turned certain corners... You know, there'd be a kind of access to the mills, you could see it. And the noise would change at particular corners. They were amazing back streets at the back of Lister's Mill from Peyton Street upwards. There's now modern housing there. But it was a whole grid of streets that led right up to St. Cuthbert's.

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LMI: And they were all back to back?

AB: They were all back to backs. And I remember them being pulled down. But more than that, I remember going at the age of five, six, seven to visit my grandma and things, and you know, cousins. And the shops around there were like something out of another age. There was one shop on a corner of Beamsley Street, and it just sold model milk, you know, long life milk. And this guy with a white suit and dickie bow and Model milk almost like a kind of a benediction thing coming down from the...

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LMI: Nothing else?

AB: Nothing else, you know. There was another little shop with an old woman in it and... serving... and all it sold was different sherbets and kelay in jars. You know, no other sweets, nothing. Just this... jars and jars and jars of kaylei. All different colours.

LMI: A child's heaven.

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AB: Oh, yeah, it was really quite amazing. And then my grandma's house on the front... So she was there, I can't remember exactly when she left but it would have been probably when that was being demolished. Which would have probably been the late '60s. I'd often sit in her tiny little front room. And if it was a sunny day and you were there for the afternoon, you'd see the shadow come across and, you know, the mill would create this shadow that just went right across the room. So it was an imposing, really imposing. Quite frightening in some ways, particularly to a young person. You know, that noise and that clatter.

LMI: So did you think you were going to end up working there?

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AB: Well I did actually, I certainly thought I'd end up... I'd probably find myself in a mill. I was the first person... there were eight children in my family, and I was the first to actually go into full-time education. Which was quite something, because I mean, I was kind of a bit of a mess, really. I was dyslexic. I was dyspraxic. And yeah, you know so I was sort of made for the mill, in some ways. I don't mean that as an insult to people who work there. But I did manage to get to art college eventually, which was great.

LMI: And a good art college as well, at the time.

AB: Well Bradford was like... yeah, was something else at that time.

LMI: Which is another story I'm very interested in. But I mean apart from the fact it's got a fabulous textile... and had a fabulous textile reputation.

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AB: It did have, yeah yeah. And more latterly... I mean, when I went there it was Grove Building (and we won't spend too much time on this) but Lister Building down the road became the art college much later. And in my time, when I was in Grove Building, the old built-for-art college, the Lister Building was like going into a mill. There's tons of machinery in it. And apprentices from different, you know, dyeing, and...

LMI: So it must have had a lot of connection with the actual textile industry all over Bradford.

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AB: Must have had. And the university as well, it had... I've met people who came to live in Bradford to do chemical dyeing, and to actually understand all of that. So, the rest of the time I was down near Brownroyd area, Thornton Road I actually lived on Fairbank Road. As a young child I actually thought I was in some kind of magic land. I mean, we were quite poor, but it was off Wetley Lane. And so there was this rhyme, 'Do you know the muffin man who lives down Whetley Lane?' Or that's what we said. Maybe people said different...

LMI: I think there are different ones all over the country.

AB: Right, ok. So, I mean, I got obsessed with the fact that all these nursery rhyme stories had originated, if not the characters themselves, from where we lived. There was a little wool shop just up the street from us. And you know, 'Baa baa black sheep', all that kind of thing, you know, I grew up thinking 'Oh my god this is...it all happened here!

LMI: So you were really conscious of it being a place of wool, were you?

AB: Oh yeah. And I mean, if you went down Thornton Road, or any of the roads off it... I was trying to remember on the way here... you know in the spaghetti westerns where they get those shrub things that blow about? You know, that... you know what I mean?

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LMI: Tumbleweed.

AB: Tumbleweed. That's the one. Well, wool was like that on Thornton Road. It was just blowing everywhere.

LMI: Oh, really?

AB: Yeah, because of the lorries and everything passing with it. And we had a little... I mean, it was part of, just part of... you know, everybody seemed to work in the mills. There was a huge mill on Thornton Road, occupying the space where Grattan's built that big warehouse... more or less the length of that. Called the Bradford Dyers Association. And that was like an amalgam. It was built to actually make dyeing kind of more cost effective. So all the mills sent their pieces of cloth to be dyed at the BDA.

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AB: And as kids we had this thing... if you saw... and the BDA wagons were up and down everywhere, the roads where we lived. If you saw one you had to get behind the next kid and 'Tap, tap, tap, BDA' on their shoulder. And it was bad luck if you didn't do it, and if they got to you first! So yeah... Brownroyd, in particular, as well, was a very poor area. That's kind of to the side of where Morrison's is at Girlington now. Just before the traffic lights, coming up Thornton Road. And again, down all the streets off there and Duncombe Road, there were mills and warehouses.

LMI: You see, in many ways, I think that's more... truthful about Bradford's textile industry, that all those kind of anonymous buildings that we...many of which still exist on Thornton Road, don't they? But you would never know what they were particularly. Whereas Lister's Mill will always be Lister's Mill. And Salt's Mill will always be Salt's Mill.

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AB: Yeah, yeah.

LMI: So you grew up in there. Did you ever get into the mills when you were growing up?

AB: Well, one of the things that happened to us, why I know that... I still had aunties, remember I had aunties working there...was a Christmas party came along. And my mum sort of in between having kids, would work in the mill and then not work in the mill. Do you know what I mean? She'd always get a job there, and she wanted it up to Christmas, and that kind of thing. You know, just to try and get a bit of extra money. But this particular Christmas...it must have been 1960 or '61. My Auntie Barbara said that her husband... Maurice who worked at the Model Milk factory on White Abbey (It's now an Asian bookshop there) and he er...And the Christmas party was the same night, so that her kids couldn't go to the Lister's one. They were going to the Model Milk one, because they got better presents...

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AB: And so she said would we like to go? Well, I could never lie, you know. And the thing... she said, 'The only thing is, you'll have to be Steven,' And she said to my sister, 'You'll have to be Jackie... [no] Jackie you'll have to be Maureen,' who were the two nearest to us, in age, you know, cousins. So we went, and the first thing I did on this table was to actually call her Jackie. And she said, 'I'm not called Jackie!'

LMI: And were they all children, on the table?

AB: They were all children. They were all like, 'So what is your name?' And then we were taken into this theatre. And I actually thought I was in the London Palladium.

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AB: I mean it's quite funny, because when I saw it years later it was actually not very big. Still a stage. I mean, quite progressive, and...

LMI: Inside the mill?

AB: Yeah, and my mum had told me that things like whilst her grandad had been a...the night watchman, she got scarlet fever. And Lister's actually paid for her to go to Morecambe

to convalesce. So I think there was quite a... in *this* century, as opposed to the one where the big strike happened, I think there was quite a bit of welfare. And quite a lot of clubs and societies off... springing off from the mill. And one of them was this, you know, this theatre. So there was a theatre group in the mill. And er... and we were there to meet Santa Claus. But I honestly thought I was in something huge. I couldn't believe it years later when I saw this space, and how small it was. But, yeah.

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LMI: So, did you ever get a sense of the kind of...the textile industry kind of going into decline? You know...or you must have got a sense of that at some point. When did that begin to...?

AB: Well, I mean, the thing is, we know that the decline started no sooner had Bradford become Woolopolis. in the 1890s. The McKinley tariff actually... from America imposed this tariff that led to the textiles being, you know, kind of... it just wasn't viable anymore for Bradford to be what it was, which was supreme kind of Woolopolis. So, it was in decline. And I think it wasn't really noticeable, I would say, for me anyway, until kind of well into the '60s and '70s. I mean, prior to that, prior to when we went smokeless, which would be mid '60s, I mean, there was a constant smog in Bradford.

LMI: There was.

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AB: And it was really, you know, kind of I could use...I was dyslexic, I didn't like school, so I could use the smog and things as an excuse, you know.

LMI: What, got to your lungs?

AB: Get away with murder, really. Yeah, in terms of excuses. But, to scan the horizon of Bradford in those times, apart from the church fires of the Church of England and Catholic churches, there was like... just scores and scores of chimneys. So yeah... Family on and off in the mill. An older brother, Derek, he worked down off Brownroyd, in a mill there. I remember being really upset one day because there was a story got out. And I'd never heard of the thing, it was that... there'd been an outbreak of anthrax and they were worried. I don't know how big that was, whether it even happened in Bradford. But it was enough for us all to be concerned about my older brother going to the mill every day, you know.

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LMI: And that had come out off the fleeces, or something?

AB: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

LMI: And was that very common, do you know?

AB: No, I don't think it was. But I think it was something that they had to safeguard against, you know. I think it was probably passed on through the ticks and things in the wool, you know. And yeah, I don't know whether some of the chemicals involved in washing, you know, the lanolin and all, you know, lanolin from the wool. But the washing of the wool and everything probably took care of quite a lot of that. So yeah, my... the next time I really got sort of involved in the mills was at the age of 16, 17. I joined Manningham Ward Labour Party and quickly became its secretary.

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LMI: At 16?

AB: Yeah, at 17.

LMI: And you were in dyslexic as well?

AB: Yeah, well actually, the Labour Party was my university really. Because I left school with like two O levels, or something. So I couldn't go to art college straight away. So I had to work in factories until I could be deemed to be a mature student, and get to art college that way.

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AB: So I joined the Labour Party. And at that time the Pakistan/Bangladesh war was happening. And Manningham Ward had a lot of Bangladeshi members. And all from... lots of them from down that Cornwall Road area. And they all worked in the mills. It was pre their families coming, so, you know, it wasn't... it was quite usual for there to be 30 plus living in one house. Maybe 40, you know, on roll up beds and things. And working different shifts. And I got to know a lot of them and met some interesting people. And found out about, you know, the kind of things that people had to do to get jobs in the mills that, you know, if somebody came from Bangladesh or Pakistan, they would actually have to pay to get the job. And they'd have to give the foreman a bottle of whisky and things like that, you know what I mean?

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AB: So they'd have to borrow to get the job. And promise to do more shifts, and things like that. They were celebrating things like Eid in their tea breaks. I mean, you can imagine being

in a mill where you're fasting... and you're praying in your tea break and it's sweltering hot. You know, what that must have been like. So I went to the Labour Party Young Socialist conference that year, in 1971, at Skegness. And I stood up and gave this speech about, you know, the Pakistani and Bangladeshi I'd met who'd had to pay to get their jobs. And also, I'd met...and I can't remember his name, but the most lovely Bangladeshi guy who lived on Oxton Street in Girdlington (made a superb fish curry!) But he'd caught his hand in a carding machine. And it was all mangled, a real mess. And he didn't get any compensation. So I stood up in this... they said it was his negligence, you know.

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AB: So I stood up in this conference and said all this, not aware of the fact that there were things like news agencies. And when I got back to Bradford, the front page of the T&A had the then guy, I don't know if you remember the name, Jack Peel? He went on to be a European Commissioner. And he was like way above. You know, he was quite a snooty kind of character. And very right-wing. And he was threatening to sue me for defamation, because I'd said that the National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers was incapable of looking after its members. Very radical. And yeah.

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AB: I also remember, incidentally, about 1968... somewhere between '66 and '68, passing Daniel Illingworth's mill on Thornton Road. And on the gate where there was the vacancies board, was a notice there saying, 'No blacks, no Irish need apply.'

LMI: Really?

AB: So that was quite late. And obviously gave way then to the Labour government bringing in the Racial Discrimination Act. Not just that notice, but you can see why it was needed, if that was going on in the mills, even that late. So yeah...

LMI: So you sort of... you joined the Labour Party, and you've been working in factories and all of that.

AB: Yeah, a mill for two weeks, I think. I can't even remember its name; it was down at the back of the Royal Standard on Manningham Lane.

LMI: Well, I think that qualifies you as a...

AB: Does it? As a textile worker?

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LMI: Yeah, an ex-textile worker.

AB: Yeah. So yes, I managed to avoid the mills. And I managed to make myself political. And the Labour Party became, for me, kind of like my university, really. I went to one of the last meetings of the Socialist Sunday School in Bradford, in the Co-op Hall, next to Sunwin House. And it was kind of like an eight day a week, eight night a week activity, was being in the Labour Party. There was no shortage of meetings and things to go to. So I ended up on things like the National Committee of the Labour Party and Socialists for a couple of years. And became quite unpopular with a lot of the Labour Party members. And I've got a feeling that Edward Lyons actually had a word with the Director of Education and got me into art college, to get rid!

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LMI: So when did you go to art college?

AB: I went to art college...well, I went first in '73 but I didn't get a grant and I just couldn't afford to stay. So I left. And I was really unhappy then for the next two years working at places like Hepworth & Grandage's. Before that I'd worked on the Parks Department at Ladyhill Park. Again, very near to mills and textile workers. And then I went back, I re-applied in '75 for art college.

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AB: And I was called in to meet the Director of Education, Richard Knight. And he was in a little tower. This was all pre like what happened to councils where they suddenly had old floors in Provincial House, and things like that. He was up a little turret, with the secretary at the bottom and him on a desk in a far corner of City Hall. And was very... really quizzed me on why I wanted to go back to art college. And gave me the idea that he'd known of me.

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AB: We'd been standing Bengalis in Bradford, Manningham. And we'd been losing. So we had... what should have been a Labour ward had three Tory women councillors. And the Labour right wing hated me, because they actually thought I was to blame for that.

LMI: And this is more to do with the kind of racism of the electorate at that time?

AB: Yeah, the racism of the electorate. And the fact that the Bengalis wanted to have some representation. And the Pakistanis had fallen out with the Bengalis because of the Pakistan war. So the Pakistanis voted Conservative, and there were more Pakistanis than... So, it was the kind of thing where somebody who has been a bit more, kind of like, 'Labour Party interests at heart' would have said, 'We'll support Pakistan.'

LMI: That's interesting. I think it also it's a very indicative example of the kind of complexity of the population of Bradford really in a way.

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LMI: And it's very easy for people outside of the city to make very easy assumptions about, you know, who lives in Bradford, and where they come from, and what kind of people they are. But actually, it's much more complicated than that. Then and now.

AB: Yeah. And there was a funny incident, I don't know, I shouldn't really even own up to this because it puts me in a bad light. But...I, so I was Manningham Ward's secretary. And there was all these Bengali members voting for a Bengali councillor to be the candidate. And I was asked by the constituency party to go university ward to actually oversee their...you know, to be a representative of the constituency at their selection to make sure everything was all above board. And there there was a Bengali standing, a guy called Manwar Hussain, who became the first Bengali councillor, Asian councillor, along with Ajeeb, I think the same year as Ajeeb. And when I got to the meeting, there's all the same people from Manningham Ward. And I just didn't know what to do. So I just kept schtum.

LMI: And pretended you didn't know them?

AB: I pretended I didn't know. And they were all waving at me at the meeting and smiling, you know, mischievously.

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AB: Anyway, there you go. They were fighting for representation. So yeah so...

LMI: So are we gonna move on now, to your later kind of... ? So... this is another project, but you know, you had a great career as an artist in Bradford. And then setting up the Bradford Festival and running the Bradford Festival. And obviously, you know, an important part of Bradford's life. And throughout the whole of that period the textile industry was closing down. And, you know, we all know the story of, you know, mill closures and mill fires. And redundancies and people, you know, the whole of the economy of the city being restructured, effectively. And at the same time as Thatcherism was... had the nation in its grasp.

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LMI: But you came back to Lister's Mill much later on? After it had... was it completely closed when you started getting involved again?

AB: No, there was still a little bit of weaving going on in the North Mill.

LMI: And what year was this? Roughly?

AB: Right, it would have been, well, '93... In '93 we did this re-enactment. But I think it would have been before that, in '91 or '92, when Justin Kornberger, who was the chairman of Lister's, put forward the idea that that Lister's should become Lister City, a development... because a lot of the main mill was empty. And that they should apply to have the India collection from the V&A in the mill.

LMI: I remember that, yes.

AB: Dusty, who you also know, Dusty Rhodes and Raise the Roof, did some work for Justin Kornberg and... to put a display on in what later became the community space in Manningham Mills. And then we knew things weren't quite right, because they didn't get that. And everything went very quiet. And a couple of years later it was this time for this re-enactment.

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LMI: Give us the background to the re-enactment.

AB: Right, ok. I mean what had happened was in 18... without a complete, you know, going into too much detail. In 1890-91 there'd been a strike. Which I think some of my family must have been involved in. My mum and dad are dead now and I don't think they would have remembered. But grandparents and great-grandparents lived round the mill. So they must have been around at that time. But 1890-91 there was a lockout, because Lister actually wanted to reduce the wages by something between 15 and 33%, depending on what the activity was.

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AB: A lot of the people who were getting the 33% wage cut were the majority of the workers. They were mainly women and young people. And this was on the 17th of December he announced this. It was in the same year that they'd actually made record profits and dividends. So it was naughty of them to do that really. But they were doing it in response to the McKinley tariff. And things getting a little bit harder for them in terms of their profit margins and investments.

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AB: So the mill became a really interesting moment in Bradford, where the strike lasted for five months through the winter. And public meetings started to be held in support. The women went off walking all over Yorkshire and Lancashire and even up to Scotland, collecting money for the strike fund. And Bradford became a very political place overnight. The Liberal Party controlled the Trades Council at that time. The council was conservative

and liberal, largely mill owners, and the like. And they actually used the Watch Committee to outlaw the public meetings in the streets.

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AB: So on, I forget the date, but at some point in April, towards the end of the strike, they read the Riot Act on a crowd in Bradford City Centre. And they actually... they read the Riot Act, and they brought in the police with truncheons, and 100 Durham Light Infantry with bayonets. And they charged the crowd at Ivegate, and it was quite a scene. The following Saturday the strikers responded with stones and missiles and things. And somebody said, at the time, it was like a scene from the French Revolution in Bradford. And what happened was that that led to all sorts of people nationally noticing Bradford. Keir Hardie came up. And they organized the founding conference, in 1893, of the ILP in Bradford.

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LMI: The Independent Labour Party?

AB: The Independent Labour Party, yes. So Bradford - a huge kind of... and from that ...I mean, after that... the council, slowly but surely, moved labour and brought in reforms like nursery provision. People like Margaret Macmillan came to Bradford. And free school meals, these kinds of things. Bradford was quite a socialist, progressive kind of place for a while after that, really.

LMI: So you decided...

AB: Yeah. So the local trade unionists had had a word with Dave Kennedy, who was chair of the Union.

LMI: This was a hundred years later.

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AB: Yeah. And said, can we do a re-enactment? Well, I mean, it was such a lovely project. Tony Lidington actually did the organising for it. And... we did a lot as well. But we put this thing together. And on the day, we had Ron Toddock... there's a plaque on the corner of Lister's Mill, that's still there, that he unveiled, about the strike and the formation of the ILP. And we had about a hundred people dressed as strikers, ragamuffins, chimney sweeps. Horses at work, with a big cart. Victorian policemen.

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AB: I didn't know at the time, but the policeman who arrested me in the enactment was actually John Noble, the rugby player, who went on to be, I think, the skipper of Bradford Northern (or the Bradford Bulls, as it is more popularly known these days). And we marched from the mill to...with a brass band as well, dressed in period costume, down through Manningham, and into the centre of town, where we gave speeches. And Tony Lidington did a quick changeover from being a striker to being Mr Lister, and arrived in a Landau carriage with the Lord Mayor to read the riot act. It was good fun and a great thing to do.

LMI: I think it's quite interesting, I mean, in many ways people hadn't forgotten the story of... even though the mills were closed, people still remembered the stories, you know.

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AB: Yeah, I think that strike went down in Bradford folklore. I don't know to what extent now, with the decline of textiles, people would know about it. But maybe even still, now, yeah. So, yeah, it was a really great day. We actually met at the Manningham Woodworkers' Court, which was the old stable block for the mill. On [?] Road

LMI: Do you know, I'd never knew that before.

AB: Yeah, yeah.

LMI: That's interesting.

AB: And we all changed there, you know. And it was a cold December day. We did it on the start day of the strike. Yeah, it was like one of the best things I think I've ever taken part in, really.

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AB: I really enjoyed it. We sang the Red Flag and the International. And we made banners, and you know, it was quite quite...we made a broadsheet to hand out.

LMI: That wasn't the end of your involvement in Lister's Mill?

AB: No. Well, not too long after that...I er... Also, it's fair to say, the other building of note that we had quite an involvement with, was the Wool Exchange itself. And again, it was Tony Liddington. And Opera North who organised...

LMI: I just want to interrupt you here, just to point out that Tony Lidington comes from an illustrious family. which includes a Tory minister, and I think, Deputy Leader at one point.

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AB: Yeah, David Lidington. We used to crib him about it!

LMI: Tony ran the theatre in the mill in Bradford for a few years.

AB: That's right. So they did this Wool Oratorio, working with local school kids and people. I think there were a few people from the mills still who were involved in that. It was a lovely piece. And I remember getting a phone call from the Alhambra, saying that Patricia Routledge had been looking through the... she was appearing there in some play, I can't remember the name. The Green Man, or something like that. Anyway, and she wanted to come and see the Wool Oratorio. So I spent the lunchtime sat with her. And she absolutely loved the Wool Exchange.

LMI: So was the Wool Exchange sort of semi-derelict at that point?

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AB: Yeah. The council were looking to kind of develop it. And I really wanted them to develop it on the lines that we were.

LMI: I think we need to point out here the Wool Exchange was one of Bradford's magnificent buildings. And also, the heart of the wool trading industry in Bradford. And to some extent, you know, of national importance, in terms of wool dealing and selling and buying.

AB: Absolutely. And it's no accident if you look around the Wool Exchange, that all of those big banks, you know, the NatWest and Lloyds and all of them, are grand buildings, there's Barclays. They're all really grand buildings. And they were all around the Wool Exchange so that people could do their cash transactions.

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LMI: And by the '90s a lot of these buildings had fallen into disrepair and decay. And some of them weren't banks anymore and the Wool Exchange was not being used.

AB: And it was called at that time, in the '60s and '70s, and beyond... The Grand Old Duchess of Market Street was the name for the Wool Exchange.

LMI: Do you know, I've never heard that.

AB: Right. And Palmerston had opened it. You know, John.... Oh gosh, what was his name, the art critic, John the Victorian?

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LMI: Ruskin.

AB: John Ruskin. John Ruskin had written about the Wool Exchange and how it was built like

a cathedral. But it was to commerce rather than to religion. Palmerston came to open it. And apparently all the workers, who'd been given the day off to turn up, to see this opening, actually turned their backs on Palmerston, as he arrived. Because he was so unpopular for the economic situation at that time. So a really important building. And really sad, because Bradford was always... Bradford was by this stage, not only was it losing its mills, but people like the building societies were pulling out and going to Leeds. And Hammond Suddards, and all these kinds of firms, were sort of going to Leeds, as it was becoming the kind of central regional city.

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LMI: And part of the city centre had been redeveloped as well. And that was in a... not very good way. And Bradford was suffering because of that classic curse of '60s redevelopment.

AB: Yeah. I mean, I really wish to God that the Bradford that I remember as a child... I stood outside Kirkgate Market at the age of 18, with a petition against that, you know. We got 21 or 22,000 signatures at that time, of people who wanted to say, 'Save the building'. It was only 70 years old. But they demolished so much of Bradford city centre. Swan Arcade and all the surrounding streets that... Were it to be here today it would be an absolute Victorian kind of tourist paradise.

LMI: It would be. It would be like Harrogate, or something like that.

AB: Yeah, yeah. And probably even better, because it was actually built to be this Woolopolis. You know, this kind of Mecca for the woollen trade.

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AB: So, yeah, so... Lister's, just around, I think it would have been about 1999, 2000, I was approached by George Moffatt, who was a vicar of St Paul's. And he came with a woman called Molly Canyon. And they wanted to see if we could work to open a community space at the mill. So I went along with them. And I was just absolutely shocked at what had happened to the mill. Apparently, what had happened was... I mean, what we saw was that like... lots of the floors were were in the process of being stripped of their paving stones.

LMI: This is Yorkstone which was, I mean, worth a lot, and still is. But you know, as we found out in Bradford in the '80s when whole streets would get taken away in the night and sold in London...

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AB: Yeah. Well, and there were acres of this stuff. You know, every floor had this flooring of pavement, paving slabs. And I immediately got on the phone to Dave Kennedy and said, 'What's happening?' you know. And little by little I found out bits of truth - that that remnant

of the textile... (You know, the fact that there was still just a little bit of manufacture of cloth going on in the North Mill) had been used by Lister's company to say to the council leader (it was Gerry Sutcliffe actually at the time, I think) that they wanted to take the stone out. And if they didn't take the stone out, they'd have to make all those workers redundant. There was perhaps a hundred people. I mean a hundred people losing their jobs is bad, there's no question.

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AB: But it was going to happen one day. So, I mean again, if you'd have looked at it logically you would have said, 'Look, let's save the mill. And, you know, we'll try and save the jobs as well. But we won't destroy the mill, being the one of the biggest mills in Europe.'

LMI: You could say that that was an act of vandalism.

AB: Yeah I thought it really was. And the demolition men were quite shamefaced. The council had... Paul King told me, a good friend, who worked in recreation. He said the day I rang Dave Kennedy, he said there were meetings up and down Jacob's Well about it. But they were pretending to me they were being really cool. But it caused quite an uproar really. They knew what had been happening, but they didn't want it to get into the press. And, um...

LMI: So did it get into the press?

AB: Yes, I think it did. [Laughs]

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LMI: Now who did that?

AB: I can't remember! [Both laugh.] I had a good friend, Jim Greenhalf, at the time, on the T&A. And we used to work together on... as we were watching Bradford decline and the shops close, I would go around and do little surveys and feed the information to him. And he'd do these big centre spreads, 'What's happening to our town centre?', you know. And they knew. They knew it was me. And they knew it was him. So I was pretty unpopular. And we fought campaigns on the Wool Exchange and lost it, because that went to a property developer.

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AB: And also even demolishing Provincial House, which though it wasn't the best looking building, was eight or nine stories high. And that doesn't happen anymore in the centre of places like Bradford. So we were actually advocating the Banking Hall to be an art gallery and cafes, and things. And then above it, student accommodation, to keep people in the city centre. But we lost that as well. So Lister's Mill came along. And I really did fight quite

ferociously, along with other people, incidentally, to... you know, quite... By this time now there's quite a number of us involved in the mill as a project

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LMI: Can I just ask was it listed by this point?

AB: I'm not so sure that it wasn't I'd have to check that. But I think it was listed only as a Grade 2.

LMI: So the prospect of it actually just being pulled down was real?

AB: It could have happened, yeah. And the demolition men who were taking the stone out said to me that it wouldn't last long without the stone, because the roof had gone. And so the water was coming in. And all there was on the floors was these kind of vaulted brickworks with rubble. And that that getting wet and damp would eventually push the walls out. And actually lead to the mill falling down. It was quite uncanny to get... I mean, I actually got the keys to the mill. Lister's had given up on it. They gave me the keys to the mill. And I was walking, you know, around thinking...

LMI: That's incredible!

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AB: Well, it just is! Because you couldn't make it up really!

LMI: That wouldn't have been a bad place, apartment to live in, would it? One of those floors.

AB: No, all my family had worked there, and suddenly I had the keys to the place, you know! And that was quite something. So we started to do all sorts of work there. I mean, Cath Walshaw, I don't know if you remember Cath? Cath, we employed her to do workshops with people. Schools' groups and stuff. We kept raising bits of money to keep activities going. We had a 72-hour challenge where Sarah Robinson and Paul Cowell (who worked on the festival at the time) did this challenge that got the interest of the BBC Radio 4 network and things.

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AB: And my mum actually went onto Woman's Hour to talk about her childhood memories in the mill and working there, as a result of this. And we just began to find out so much. Kath actually went and interviewed, on Emm Lane, a very very old man who was the son of Reichstag, the manager of the mill who'd locked the workers out in 1890.

LMI: Wow.

AB: And she spent an afternoon talking to him. And I met ex-workers... and I lived at the time up Daisy Hill, so it wasn't hard to find people who'd had involvement in the mill. I'm sad to say actually that one of my sister's...her father-in-law was a[n] overlooker in the mill. And apparently, he was a bastard. Really racist and [a] real disciplinarian of the old school. He's not around anymore, but apparently he was hated and despised as much as anybody from the 1890 strike. But I also met people like... I remember meeting Robert Galeta's father.

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AB: Robert worked at Bradford College for a while. And his dad was Polish and... Michael, a lovely man. And he'd worked in Lister's all his adult life. And he told me that he he was lifted by the Nazis in Poland as a young 14 year old and taken to Germany to work in the munitions factories. And then couldn't go back to Poland after the war because the Russians had taken that. So he found his way to Britain. And ended up working in Lister's Mill all his life. Which is quite something, isn't it, to be taken out of your little village at the age of 14, and never see your family again, you know. Staggering. There was another guy called Stefan who was next-door-neighbour-but-two to me at the same time as we were doing this Lister's work. And he was a real alcoholic. And he used to drink in the Queen's pub, you know, at Daisy Hill. And get into a really shocking state. But he'd been a mill worker all of his life.

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AB: And he again said that he was Ukrainian and that he'd been...he lived in a small town and that the Nazis came along and because he had a pair of boots, they recruited him. A lot of people who lived around him had no footwear, you know, bare feet. But he had a pair of boots, so they recruited him. And when you found him in the pub drunk, he'd often just be streaming with tears because he... and he would incoherently, but nonetheless you got the drift, um he was digging graves for the SS, you know, for murders and things that happened. And he couldn't live with himself.

LMI: And he ended up in Bradford.

AB: Mmm. And again, worked in Lister's Mill.

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LMI: So you were... you became quite instrumental in the kind of... making sure that the mill still stands today really, weren't you? I mean, you had quite... I mean, I think... you're an activist.

AB: Yeah. I think that that Labour Party upbringing and everything else! And the fact that I've always felt passionately about about Bradford, you know. I did move away for 15 years

when they took the festival from us. 'Cos I just thought, 'I'll kill myself fighting these people, actually.' You know, fighting the lack of vision. I mean, I'm really pleased to be back now, you know, and I love the place. But I definitely had to get out at the time. No, I think what happened, was Urban Splash came along just before... I think they took a bit of a tumble on the stock market eventually. They got a bit too big for themselves, perhaps.

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AB: But they had developed buildings like the Dunlop building in Birmingham, and others. And they had quite a reputation.

LMI: And they'd come out of the regeneration of Manchester, hadn't they? Urban Splash.

AB: That's right. Yeah, Oxford Street and all round there.

LMI: And they presented themselves as a developer with a kind of ethical take on redevelopment. Whether or not that's true or not, I don't know.

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AB: No. And because I was largely on my way out by that stage I don't know. I mean, I met Urban Splash and tried to get them interested as part of... but I wanted, I and some other people, to see a community development as well. So we wanted to see floors laid open to things like a bazaar, to have bars and cafes and outdoor markets, and things like that in the area. And also, maybe to look at... I'd seen something in art college years before when we did these day trips out. We'd been to Crossley's Mill which was quite amazing and visited there when it was still making carpets.

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LMI: Oh, over in Halifax?

AB: Yeah, that was quite something. And we went into the art department there where there were people designing the rugs and the, you know, the carpet lengths and things. Why do I mention that? I've lost my way.

LMI: Well, you were with Urban Splash and...

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AB: Yes, Urban Splash. So we met them and I tried to get them to buy into what I wanted. But in the end, I think they just went for control of the project, really. And I was actually invited by the guy they put in as the manager, to go along and have a meeting with him. But I'd already felt like we'd fought and lost, really. So I didn't turn up that day. And I've often wondered if I should, you know, I probably should have done. I should have done.

LMI: A fork in the road.

AB: Yeah, yeah. Well, the other thing we haven't mentioned... I mean, before the Bradford Festival, I organised one in Little Germany. And that again, you know, this kind of merchant's quarter, textile quarter, was like just amazing. And I looked at it and I thought this is, and I know these words get bandied about, but I thought, 'This could be Bradford's Covent Garden.'

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AB: There were loading bays and through-access things through some of the buildings. And I just thought, 'Wow, you put artists in here and let them live here, like in the Docklands, for the next five years, and develop something organically, and it'll really work.' When I organised that festival, they were selling buildings, mill buildings in Little Germany for £36,000. I'd bought a house in Daisy Hill for £34,000. But you couldn't get a mortgage for a mill. But what happened was the very panache and the fanfare of having the festival actually led to pension funds and the insurance companies seeing Little Germany as a back burner development. So they bought the buildings up for nothing. And apparently what they then do is they use them as collateral for developing elsewhere, you know. They actually say, 'That's in our property folio.' Even though it's falling to bits.

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LMI: It's very interesting, isn't it? I mean, what you're pointing at here is, we've got all this kind of fantastic architectural heritage of Bradford's textile industry. And it's become a commercial asset. Generally. I mean, I think we do have to acknowledge the fact that Mind The Gap Theatre are based in Lister's Mill now. And there is a bit of... there is a community centre in the mill, as well. But that's a tiny proportion of the actual volume of space available there. And Little Germany, again, has not really got much in the way of kind of community assets, it's mainly commercial assets. And it doesn't deliver an awful lot of community benefit as a consequence.

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AB: No that's right. And a couple of things I wanted to mention, because it's quite funny really...because I think... So, for me you know, organizing Bradford Festival at its best...And we've made lots of mistakes here and there. And you know, things you would do different. But the charm of it really, was that it did involve a lot of people. And it was kind of by and for Bradford. And on route we'd find ourselves using these spaces, like Lister's Mill. Or the Wool Exchange, or wherever, you know, whilst they were there; in that unlooked after state; and made really nice things happen to them. But it begged the question of longer term. But the Council never saw the things that we were talking about as longer term. And I think it's a great shame, because I think had they have gone down *that* road more... had they have treated Bradford town centre as it was falling to bits; had they have treated it more like Camden Lock, you know, and done organic things, I think...

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LMI: I'm not trying to make excuses, I'm not trying to make excuses for the Council here, but, you know, Camden Lock was always a good commercial proposition because it's in a wealthy part of London and... relatively... and within a kind of huge urban population around it. And in the capital city. Whereas Bradford was very much an outlier a lot of the time.

AB: But it was an outlier partly because it *didn't* try to do things differently. I mean, in actual fact I think it's something like 11 million people live within an hour's drive of Bradford. So it's quite a big number of people...

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AB: And had at the same time Leeds becoming this inevitable super city, like Manchester is, or, you know, Birmingham is, Bradford could have taken a more alternative route, and complemented that super city of Leeds. Rather than actually becoming the poor relation. But it's a moot point, I mean, I can't...

LMI: Like I said I wasn't trying to make excuses for them. They were trapped in the world of the marketization of everything.

AB: Absolutely.

LMI: And so they had to look at the value of every asset they had any kind of control over. And in a way it's very difficult to measure the creative value of something. You can't necessarily write that in pound signs, you know.

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AB: No, except that Bradford had done it once already, by demolishing its Victorian city centre, largely. And going for this kind of wardly vision that is now being back filled by the

day. Having made that mistake once, you would have hoped that the next time they thought about development.

LMI: So, to sort of bring us sort of to now in a way... because this is a fascinating conversation. We're kind of, we're still in a world of, Bradford still has an enormous amount, if you think of the districts particularly, enormous amount of textile heritage, physical heritage - buildings mainly. Although I think you could probably say the canal is part of that, as well. And maybe we can keep that hope alive a little bit, that the textile buildings and architectural heritage of Bradford becomes something which everybody can enjoy, rather than just a few. And can find benefit from. And that we can fill it with some of the things you've talked about already.

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AB: Well, it's funny, you know, because when I was down in Cornwall, I couldn't stop kind of thinking about Bradford. And I found myself, I actually had to write a letter to one main officer in the council, I shouldn't mention his name, really. I actually had to send him a card to say, 'Look, you're in my dreams every night.' [Both laugh.] 'And I don't want to... And I know we fell out over the festival, but can we just call bygones bygones.' And and lo and behold he stopped appearing in my dreams! And sent me a very nice letter back saying, 'Do you know you're responsible for a gallery opening in the town centre?' Which was nice of him to say. Because we'd had a go about Provincial House, and they'd opened the um...

LMI: Impressions Gallery.

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AB: Yes. And anyway, that happened. But what happened to me...and still to this day, I'm a really... I guess most creatives are like this...but a vivid dreamer. And the two...two of the places, besides that... I have lots of dreams about Falmouth. And it's always different and it's got different things to it than actually [was]... Falmouth's a really nice little town where we lived. But I'd have these dreams still about the Wool Exchange, you know. And sometimes I'd be excavating it. Like literally an archaeological dig. And they'd be digging up the bones of Saint Blaise, and all sorts of things, you know. And other parts of the Wool Exchange were so big that they had kind of Art Nouveau, very French-like cafes, and grand staircases, and things. And Lister's Mill. In my dreams, Lister's Mill went on forever. You'd be familiar with Mervyn Peake's Gormanghast.

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AB: I always thought that the Yorkshire Mills and Bradford's Mills had that kind of Gormanghast quality, that *acres* of stone. But in my dreams...and I have them quite often...Lister's Mill is like about five times bigger than it is. Not tall upwards, but long. And it goes off into the countryside. And it's got railway sidings coming into it. And all sorts of activity going on in it. And I'm sort of wandering around this mill, like I did when we first got the keys to Lister's Mill. I didn't tell you when we were just running through that, the funny thing was... a lot of it had been trashed, you know. There was a... the back of that very posh office on Heaton Road, literally behind Justin Kohlberg's fireplace, was...it had just been trashed, it was just a disaster.

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AB: So they hung on to this kind of little posh office bit at the front, whilst they were letting the mill just fall to bits. Or it was falling to bits anyway because it just wasn't being used. And when we opened it, we found a safe in the wall. And when we opened the safe, there was all the kind of cash books of Lister's Mill. But they'd all putrefied. And they'd just gone completely into kind of mush. And then, there was an infirmary room, with like an operating table, and a dentist's chair. But all smashed up and higgledy-piggledy and everything. And Cath Walshaw was with me that day and she just looked down and she picked up this little book, hardback book. A writing book, you know, a notebook and... with those kind of marble-y covers, you know, and it was all empty pages except on the last page. And it was from the spinning shed, in the 1940s. And the names... there was about 30 names there - both my grandmas. And my dad and my auntie, the day they left school, getting a job there.

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LMI: I hope you still got it!

AB: No I haven't. I don't know what happened to it. We were saving everything for, you know, the kind of eventual 'This is Lister's.' You know. But yeah. So that was quite weird as well. So to get the keys to the mill, all that background, and all that kind of socialism, and everything. And then to find that book. And to still have those kind of dreams that are, you know, they're not fanciful, they're strange. In the end, what I don't know, to sum up, I don't know when I think about all of that, whether my memories are just what I have; whether there's some inherited memories that I don't know about; or whether it's imagination. But I think it's a mixture of all.

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LMI: Well, listen Allan, that has been fantastic! That's been absolutely fantastic. And we've sort of ended up back at your family, haven't we? With their names in a little schoolbook. That has just been a brilliant... And it's taken us down parts of the story of Bradford's textile

industry which I'd kind of not really given much thought to. And that is... now I wish we had another year or two to explore some of the themes you've come up with.

AB: Well, the trouble is... The reason why this is important, and why I challenged myself when I saw your thing, first off. Because at first, I thought, 'No, they won't want to know. You never worked in the mill.'

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AB: But you know, you've collected, I've collected bits of imagery and stories, and been a part of bits and bats. But if we don't... if we don't save those, they are going to be lost, aren't they.

LMI: Exactly. Exactly. Thanks very much indeed, Allan, it's been a pleasure.

AB: I'm glad it was useful. You know, right up to coming I thought, you know, 'He's gonna think what the fuck is he...?'

LMI: And on that swearsy note we'll finish!