

Andrew Walton - Transcription

Audio Quality : Very poor, echo and background noise.

Interview focuses on workforce, conditions and mill closures

0:00:00

LMI: I'll just set that up. So you said that you worked in the mills then?

AG: Yeah. I worked in two. I was helping up down the mills. We'd done six big mills down.

LMI: Can you relate to that?

AG: I worked down there. I just lost some of my seedlings and I didn't want to spend my money on them.

Mariner's?

Yeah. It was a big mill [?] [All Mariner's grounds], I call that a playground... There was a big car park up front where we'd play football, cricket, so I booked it where I was where we'd ride, you know, old go-karts, what we call boogies, round that like jungle where we'd built dens and everywhere. So I grew up next to that one and I actually watched it burn down.

0:00:50

LMI: Did you?

AG: Yeah.

LMI: What year that was? Or roughly?

AG: It would have been in the '70s. I was in my grandma's house when the fire started 'cos she lived round the corner. And I watched it burn down stood next to Dr Who off the telly at the time. Which was Jon Pertwee. Because he'd been driving past, and he'd pulled in to see what all... things and he stood and watched it burn.

LMI: Did you know anyone, like did you have any family that worked in that mill, or did you just live close by to it?

AG: We just lived close by, but we knew them all because we'd play in... not all, because it was a big mill, it went further down back and that, because we used to cut through their ground. We knew some of them by sight. And you'd see them every day, but see what days were you'd see big queues walking to work.

0:01:44

AG: They started at seven in the morning but there were like 100 women walking up and down and all the lads that worked in warehouse or laboured. And we knew them. We knew

labourers. Well, that were actually second mill that burnt down. 'Cos there were one higher up Halifax Road. I'm not too sure what the name of it is... it was just past where that Open Anchor pub is, round the bend.

LMI: It wasn't Beech Mill, was it?

AG: I can't remember, I don't think it was Timothy Hills. There's a sign and design place and that there, now. But the day that burnt down, where that pub is on corner, there was a barbers across the road and I was in barbers having my hair cut, when we heard all commotion. When that mill went... but that was before Mariners.

LMI: So that was before?

0:02:38

AG: That one burnt down before Mariners.

LMI: But still in the '70s, do you think?

AG: It could have been in the '60s, that, late '60s. But then we moved from there, and then I got a job at a mill through me next door neighbour. She worked in a mill and got me in a summer job there. But... it was a mill, but it had been sort of modernized. It wasn't like you see pictures of old mills. And that was Hayfield Mills at [?]

LMI: Hayfields Mill.

AG: It's all been sort of... when you see pictures of mills on telly... an old mill. It had all been modernised on. Still did all the same things. All modern machines then.

0:03:24

LMI: And was that a spinning mill? Or was that a weaving?

AG: It did everything. It had wool. It dyed. But we weren't called labourers, we were called service men.

LMI: Oh right.

AG: Because we were there to service the women who ran the machines. Like the department I worked in... well, three of us... there was me, and I looked after the twisting. But a fella called Eric, a big hairy biker, he looked after the spinning. And down at other end where we did some sort of weaving were a... when I got the job they all said, 'Be wary of him, he's a football hooligan. He goes to Chelsea.' And they called him Fletch. But he was ok. And it was all modern. As far as... from what I've seen on television, it was all pretty modern. And it was pretty easy work, really.

0:04:28

AG: For me and my mum, it went on and on. I left there, switched jobs, and then I got a job with a friend of mine. We got a job at Illingworth's Mill at Crossroads.

LMI: And what sort of job were you doing there then? Was that a similar thing?

AG: Similar, but my friend got a job, and he were on the bottom floor, that had been practically modernised.

0:04:52

AG: There were a the middle floor, which had been sort of semi-modernised. And I got a job on the top floor, which hadn't been modernised. And my job title there, I'm sure were too, but the only bit I can remember is, I were a 'doffer'.

LMI: A doffer?

AG: For the spinning. And that's spinning with all little wooden bobbins. Taking them off as they'd finished, and then loading them up with new ones for them.

LMI: I see.

AG: And that was where doffer comes from, from doffing them off, or something like that. But with proper old-fashioned mill machinery up on that floor.

0:05:28

LMI: And was it the same with a lot of mills, where they had the process started at the top and it went down to the bottom, in terms of the final steps were on the ground floor? Was it a similar set up to that?

AG: No, to be honest, in them two [mills] it was just scattered around. The ground floor at Illingworth's, I think that was just pure spinning.

LMI: Yeah.

AG: And I think the middle floor was pure twisting. And the one I were on had a bit of both - old machinery, with a bit of twisting on at one end and spinning it another. It was all the old things...because I know one of my jobs was I had keep oiling the spindles, or brass things on, like spindles. I had to keep oiling them or you'd see filings all the way on. But that was with proper old little wooden bobbins.

LMI: So how many different mills did you work in?

AG: In them two.

0:06:28

LMI: Just those two?

AG: Yeah.

LMI: And like how long did you work in them for, roughly?

AG: 24 months, maybe a bit longer.

LMI: Okay. So about...

AG: But in them days you could just go from job to job.

LMI: Yeah.

AG: I mean the Hayfields one paid well, and it were clean and everything, but... I found it pretty easy work there as well. Because we're just taking all these big cones off, weighing them, working tear out, and bagging them up. And basically, that were about it for me. And taking different, taking two samples a day, and that allows me to make sure I'm doing the right number of twists per inch, and things like that.

0:07:17

AG: I mean...

LMI: And what was it like from a social, like a community perspective?

AG: Well, that's where you met characters.

LMI: Yeah. Can you think of any that come to mind that I can keep anonymous?

AG: The villainous one on the top floor where I worked. There's a couple of women stands out. One of them, she was like a grandma you'd see off telly. Little pleasant old woman, little chubby one. The grey hair as we have them, glasses, she just looked like the perfect granny I could tell you, but she could swear like a docker.

0:07:47

AG: She had one of the foulest mouths I've ever heard. If you looked at her, you wouldn't have thought it, you'd have thought improper. But she just could swear on everything. And another one she was like...if you had to pick a stereotype of a Northern down to earth woman, the other woman was like her. Nowt... free wearer out and everything, she always stuck in... On the floor below me were a labourer, called Jackie Bobbin. And his name was Jack. And we called him Jackie Bobbin because he had a learning disability. And he lived on his own in Haworth. But we said...he didn't know how to just exactly look after himself properly... what talk of him. So he kept running out of electric and gas and all. So he didn't have a fire and that, and he was always taking bobbins home, to burn in fire. Any broken

bobbins and everything. And he'd come round... he'd go around every room every day, and he'd come up to you, 'Have you got any bobbins?'

0:08:59

AG: You have any bobbins? That was his name; Jackie Bobbin we called him.. He'd take the bobbins home to burn on his fire.

LMI: And was there any...do you remember any particular dramas, or any... you know, as the mills started to close down and lose income.

AG: I know after Christmas break on, first Christmas I worked at that Illingworths. When we went back to start, *after* it had all flooded. Pipes had bust on top floor and flooded the whole mill. So it was closed for two... And apparently the mill were owned by a film star's wife, as well. It was supposedly owned by James Mason's wife. He was an old Hollywood actor, wasn't he? And I think he had... she had something to do with a mill in Saltaire. Because I think it was an Illingworth's at Saltaire, as well.

LMI: Yes, yes.

AG: I'm not a fan. But it was a proper old mill, were that.

LMI: Yeah.

0:09:54

AG: Going up to the top floor, and you'd have to kick the old lift that you daren't go up and down in, and...

LMI: And so when the pipes burst, did you have to take time off it?

AG: We had to clean it all out.

LMI: Okay.

AG: And... the thing that... we were very loathe to close our mills.

LMI: Mmm.

AG: You see, a lot of women, they were always on piecework, where they got paid by what they did. And that's why they learnt to swear.

0:10:18

AG: If you ever got on... If they thought you were holding them up, you know, they were *at* you. [LAUGHTER] It wasn't a pleasant job labouring for women in mills. If they thought you were holding them up.

LMI: So were you on... were you paid hourly then, as opposed to?

AG: We just got paid an hourly... we got a set wage, but they were on what we call piecework. And if they thought you were weighing them wrong as well, if they got a word in, and they thought...you know, we copped it, us labourers, or whatever the title was at the time.

LMI: So were you working in the mills when they started to close? Or had you moved on by that point?

AG: No, they were starting to close.

LMI: Yeah. And did people working in the mills...?

AG: They were either modernising or old ones were closing.

LMI: Yeah.

AG: They were going both ways then. They were either going totally modern.

LMI: And what was the feeling of the people that worked there as that was all happening? Because that must have been quite a lot of people...

AG: That Illingworth's one, that would have been... it's sad because that was like... the majority of them that worked there were from Crossroads, it's just out of Keighley, up main road. A lot of them were from around that way... Crossroads/Haworth area and there weren't much for them up there other than that... See some mills had burnt down and some had shut by then. So I thought we must go and for women, if they were skilled at one job it was hard for them to go to another mill, because it'd been a...

0:11:48

LMI: Sort of specialized.

AG: Yeah. That's what happened with... a lot of mills similar. They went all modern and specialized. Like, I think Haggas's ended up doing trousers and everything. Making them and all sorts. Whereas these were just pure yarn mills, I worked in. Whereas Illingworth's was just solid as it was, as they'd done it. One at the Hayfields had a big dye room. They were dyeing it. I'm not sure if Mariners had... because Mariners... used to be a lot of knitting catalogues of Mariners' wools knocking about and they were all covered with wools. But I only ever saw it from outside, Mariners'. It would have been...

0:12:36

LMI: Yeah. So, because you said that the Mariners' isn't there anymore. And the street you lived on isn't there anymore. Do you know what is there now? Or can you remember what happened when it was... after it burnt down, and what kind of happened?

AG: It was just empty ground for a while.

LMI: It was left for ages?

AG: But it's a... part of it's been developed and there's a place... it didn't just go from up there, which is just off Halifax Road, it went as far down as...if you just go on from Morrison's where Screwfix is, that's called Mariner Road. And Mariner's come down this far as there, and further on. It's like little units now, some of it. And one part of it, what used to, I know used to be mill building, is like a storage place now. And it's got all big porta, you know, containers out back.

0:13:30

AG: Now, up where that car park bit was, up where I was, was some sort of thing there, but I don't know what it is. I keep passing it. Because I was going to try and get in one day on this. And I was scooting around that car park where we'd all played and things to do around that area. Where we've done Victoria Road, well Mariner's were...It was a street, Mariner's were here, and behind us was a foundry, a proper old foundry called Furnside. Well, that ain't there now.

LMI: Furnside.

AG: When we were kids, we'd best of everything. We'd all Mariner's ground to play in, the car park

0:14:06

AG: We'd work with a [it were a] rough car park, all the jungle around the back of it. And where Fernside's foundry was were down, well Victoria Street here and Fernside's went down here and down here. Well on this side, they'd all big doors where they got all the sand up for moulding. Well, that used to seep under the door, so we had us own beach down that street. You couldn't have lived in a better...

LMI: Inland Beach? I've never heard of [it]!

AG: You couldn't have lived in a better place in them days for playing. We had everything we wanted.

0:14:34

LMI: Yeah. Oh, that's lovely. Let me just check if there's anything else. If you've got any other stories, honestly, we love... It's not on here. It must be on here. Got a little digital...

0:14:56

LMI: Did you join any unions when you worked in the..? Because I know you were only in there for two years.

AG: Weren't ever mentioned.

LMI: Ok.

AG: There were no mention of any unions in them two mills.

LMI: And were there any particular like celebrations or events that you can remember that were part of the mills?

AG: No. Er... Hayfields, I think they had someone that was them but a fair few of their workforce were women. I think they were from Malta or Cyprus.

LMI: Ok.

0:15:41

AG: Yeah. Because the one that I worked in, her husband were a labourer in another room. But I think they'd brought them across to work. When they couldn't get labour at one time, and no one could replace them. I think it's called Winsford Institute now, but I think that was lodgings at one time. Oh, and Hayfields ran 24 hours a day.

LMI: Did it?

AG: Not quite 24 but...

LMI: They had night shifts.

AG: There was a gap between shifts. Because we'd work over, and we'd leave before... and there was a big Asian night shift.

0:16:20

LMI: So there was quite... because there was quite a big Pakistani community and things, wasn't there then?

AG: There was an Asian night shift, and they worked through the night because they were always... when they finished work at end of a shift... on the big bobbins that I did... that I did with twisting, the women had to mark how many things from end, from top to what to look at the piecework, because next shift they'd come on, turn it on and carry on. So you know we got paid by... however it were worked out. And we're always arguing over what we're actually on at the beginning and start of a shift. Asians would say women had changed it for them, and women have said, 'Nah, he's changed that. I left this at 18 last night and he's put 16.' You know, so he were getting paid for it. And there was a lot of that going on, between them.

0:17:05

LMI: And so, they had quite a lot of international people that worked there.

AG: Hayfield's did.

LMI: Was that mainly at the bigger mills then, rather than the local ones?

AG: Yeah. I mean, I never saw any of the Asians. All I know was that they worked at nights. And you only knew because of things they'd left when you went in the morning. Stuff they'd left behind. There was a gap between the day shift and the night shift, where you never... And Hayfield actually... A lot of Keighley people worked at Hayfield because you got free transport. We had our own car, and it picked everybody up in Keighley, and brought them home at night. And even if you worked over and there weren't many left, you'd still get back to Keighley on the bus. And you finished at Friday dinner, at Hayfields as well.

0:18:06

LMI: So did you do quite a conventional...? What was your work day? Can you remember the sort of times? Was it quite an early start for you if you were on the day shift?

AG: I think it was about half past 7.

LMI: 7.30. And then you'd run until Friday tea...?

AG: We finished on Friday dinner at Hayfields.

LMI: That's quite good, so you'd finish...

AG: But I worked over a lot on nights at Hayfields, because all you had to do was sort rubbish out. You were getting two hours for nowt, practically.

0:18:41

AG: So I'd be there while six. Half past six. And then, um... The Illingworth's one, that were half past 7 while half past 4. With an half an hour dinner.

LMI: Perfect.

0:19:11

AG: I did work in a third mill actually, but it wasn't a textile mill.

LMI: What kind of mill was it?

AG: Paper tubes. It just come to me. Stealth tube mill, I worked there.

0:19:29

LMI: Thinking back to the time that you worked in the mills, and things. What are your thoughts about, did you enjoy the work? You said that you quite enjoyed some of it because it was fairly easy.

AG: I went through. Once I met a mill, I said I don't know about all the names, get me down to the mill and get them down. It wasn't like that all in them... It might have been when mills first come out, and owners were after money as fast as they could get it, but...

LMI: Do you feel you were treated fairly when you worked there?

AG: Yeah. But, you know, you've talked to people who worked in other mills, and a lot of it depends on what the overlooker were like, the person inside the room.

0:20:00

AG: Like, you'd have a foreman in the factory, wouldn't you, but you were an overlooker. Now when I went to Hayfields, my overlooker was called Gordon. And he was ok, was Gordon. Besides working at Hayfields, he was a bit of a singer. And he was doing a bit of singing in pubs at night, because he once asked me if I had a record, and he said... I forgot what it was called, 'I've Got My Blue Jeans On', or something. And he wanted to learn it for a weekend. Anyway, he left, did Gordon. I hadn't been there that long, and he left. And I kept seeing him in paper in pubs over years. In local paper, in groups. He was playing in local groups round town. And I once went in a pub with somebody one night, and he were actually there playing, were Gordon. But I didn't see him or talk to him. Then about... I've lived where I am now for... about five years ago there were a knock on my door one morning. I lived up one lane and I answered it and it were Gordon. And he was a Jehovah's Witness. And he launched into all his Jehovah's Witness talk when I answered the door. And I just stood there until he'd finished, and I said, 'They call you Gordon, don't they?' He said, 'How do you know?' I said, 'I know you.' I said, 'Gordon Curry.' He said, 'Yeah, that's my name.' I said, 'You play in bands and that, don't you? I saw you a while ago in King's Head, in a band there.' 'How do you know?' I said, 'I worked for you.' He said, 'I don't know you.'

0:21:38

AG: I said, 'You were overlooker at Hayfields. And I were...one of the serviceman in the room.' 'No. no.' I said, 'There were me, Eric and Fletch.' He said, 'I know Eric and Fletch. I remember them.' I said, 'I worked on spinning with Frances. Frances. She got me the job. I know Frances. And he couldn't remember me at all.

0:22:00

LMI: How strange.

AG: We were talking, he said, 'You must have worked there to know all these things, and these people,' He said 'but I cannot place you.' I said, 'I even lent you a record to learn. I found him singing because you were going to sing it. I could tell you which club he sang it in -West Ward.' He went, 'Yeah, you're right.' But he couldn't remember me.

LMI: That's such a small world.

AG: But it shocked me that he was a Jehovah's Witness, because I said, 'I don't think you were a Jehovah's Witness then, were you? He said 'No, I've had a lot of heart trouble and I've seen God.' That don't go with what I've heard of Jehovah's Witnesses, but...

0:22:35

LMI: And are you still, do you have any friendships or neighbours, or people that you met through the mills that you still keep in touch with?

AG: I still see some of the people I worked with in the mills. Well, some of the lads that were young worked on it, a lot of women were older and may have passed away now. But I see a couple, a few. And I still see people that I know worked at Mariner's, because their faces sort of stick in your mind, from when you were kids. 'Cos you'd see them every... day in day out, going in and coming out... I mean, they were proper processions. When they talk on telly about queues going to work every morning,[?] it was true. It did happen.

LMI: And how old were you when you first joined... was it Hayfields you started at?

AG: Yeah.

LMI: How old were you then?

AG: 19.

LMI: About 19, yeah. So by sort of 21, 22 you moved away from mill work then?

AG: Yeah.

LMI: But was the mill your first job?

0:23:51

AG: I've worked in some awful industrial places.

LMI: Oh.

AG: And I've worked in... Before Hayfields, I'd actually worked in... There's a place down the road, down at the Royal Arcade, where it's all like little artisans shops and things now. I worked there when it was just one big ironmongers. It was one... the old passage, the old arcade, (they all chopped down the front, up the side), it was one massive hardware store, called Gordon Butterfields. And I didn't know about... apparently there's tunnels underneath it now and stuff. We didn't know anything about that, but it was proper... We didn't sell nails by...we sold them by pound. To builders if they come in, 'Pound of nails.' But that were a very low paid job. That wasn't the best one, that one.

0:24:52

LMI: And have you got any other random stories or anecdotes or things you can remember at all?

AG: No. They just keep coming back to me now and again, some things that happened in mills.

LMI: Yeah. I can't believe that you've seen two mills burn down.

AG: Because we'd play pranks. There'd be all pranks that went on and like... because you're using big plastic cars for pushing things down. Well, we'd hide somebody in one and then when mummy went in, you know, tricks like that.

0:25:32

LMI: Oh, that's amazing. Oh, thank you. Well, if you think of any other stories, or anything that you think could be relevant, we're either doing... we're another drop-in next Monday actually, but it's in Manningham, it's not here. Or we've got... I can give you one of our leaflets. I mean it'll be on the Facebook thing anyway if you have anything. Yeah, we can always come back and have another chat with you and things. But honestly, what you've said has been so helpful because... it's all these little stories that will help the future generations learn about the mills in a way that they'll understand. Because a lot of those positions now, they're quite hard to visualize, because obviously the mechanics and the industry is so different.

AG: I remember quite a bit of it. The fella in charge the room I worked in, the overlooker - I can't remember his name -but he was a little bald man and very quiet. He hardly ever spoke. But one of the women knew him. And she told me, she said, 'You won't believe it about him.' She said, 'When he goes home, when his working week's finished on a Friday,' she said, 'he spends every Saturday and Sunday sat on the riverbank, smoking a pipe, just looking at water.'

LMI: Not even fishing?

AG: No.

LMI: Just...

AG: I forgot what [the] place is now. I've been to it as well, it's a long way out of Keighley, it's a long way out of... way past Ilkley. She said 'That's all he does. Just sits there with a pipe. All day. Saturday/Sunday.'

LMI: And were they quite noisy, the mills?

AG: Oh very.

LMI: Yeah, did you... someone else was telling us that after he finished it could take an hour to days to stop...

0:27:21

AG: Whether it had something to do with it or not, I don't know, but I got tinnitus in one ear now and it... It was very... You could hear the racket in Mariner's when they were opening the doors to go into work. From 50 yards away. The machines going. They were proper... very noisy places.

LMI: Yeah. Yeah.

AG: In fact, I don't think... I've worked in discos, and they weren't as noisy.

LMI: I might put that as a quote! Wow.

0:27:58

AG: You could hear noise from...

LMI: Because that sort of stuff just wouldn't be allowed now, because of the long-term hearing damage, and things that potentially was caused by those.

AG: It's a strange noise. It's like a clattering noise because all machines are doing some letter over.

LMI: Yeah.

AG: It's like one loud clattering like... it's like them things they used to wave around.

LMI: I know what you mean, like...

AG: It's like thousands of them being... It's not like a constant noise... it's just...

LMI: I bet it was hard to concentrate, if you were having to count or do something particular.

AG: Hayfield's wasn't so bad, 'cos that was pretty modern. Illingworth's no. And Mariner's... I'm saying I knew about all the noise there.

LMI: Oh well thank you for talking with me. Like honestly, it's amazing hearing all the stuff.