

Colin Hobson - Transcript

Audio Quality: Good

Detailed interview on all aspects of mill life including definitions and details of products

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Tech: We're recording now. At the end you just need to press stop.

LMI: Ok.

Tech: If you're not sure, just come and find me.

LMI: I'm sure I can press stop for you.

Tech: You've got levels there. You've got that bouncing up green, so that's all looking good.

LMI: Thank you so much. Lovely, we're rocking and rolling. So, I'm just going to start by asking you to introduce yourself for us.

CH: Ok, well, my name's Colin Hobson. I was born in 1947 in Bradford. I left school, which was Grange Grammar School, it was the old Grange Grammar School, down Horton Grange Road which is now... I'm not sure what it is now...but I left there in '64, and started my first job. I didn't go to university. I didn't do very well at school, admittedly. I think the sum total was about 4 O' levels. But real men sat at the back of the class and wimps at the front, and I've always been deaf, so I missed a lot of what I was being told. But when I left school and started work, I realized the error of my ways and started to... well, day release, technical college. And then I also did evening classes as well.

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LMI: Oh, so you didn't do bad all things considered then?

CH: Sorry?

LMI: You didn't do bad all things considered?

CH: I'm sorry, just a moment. Can you speak up a bit please, I'm sorry.

LMI: Yeah, that's fine.

CH: I can't hear you really, go on.

LMI: So your family has a link to textile mills, doesn't it?

CH: Yeah, my father... well, shall I start sort of at the beginning?

LMI: Yes, start at the beginning and we'll follow you through.

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CH: As far as I know, my father left school and started his first job about 1928 -1930 period. And he went to work in the counting house at Fur Fabric. I suppose that's the equivalent of accounts department in these days. But Fur Fabric was in Carlisle Mills, in Carlisle Road. And it was a really elegant office frontage, and they had on the door, they had a Swiss Admiral in full uniform, you know, to greet people. And the firm had been started by some middle management from Lister's, Manningham Mills. And Lister's were incensed. And if anybody went to work at this new company, Fur Fabric, if they had any relatives working in Manningham Mills, they were instantly dismissed. But they could do that sort of thing, this is Edwardian period, you know, so there was no comeback. And one of the lines they had was maquette cloth, fabric. And it was used for tram seating fabric and railway seating.

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CH: One day my father came home... back to work from lunch and all the office staff were in the cellar under the offices and they were searching frantically for something. And apparently, they'd had a contract for a big railway company and woven hundreds of yards of fabric. And they refused to take it - whether it was off shade or perhaps the design was slightly skewed - but they wouldn't have it. And it was extremely costly. And the firm tried to weather the storm, you know, they got rid of a lot of staff, my father included. They slimmed the business down. But within about six months it collapsed, they couldn't hold up. So my father had lost his job after six months. So then he went to... his next job was in the office at a company called Tetley Street Mills, and they were [worsted] manufacturers as well. Tetley Street runs from Ridge Road down to Thornton Road.

LMI: And what year? Do you know roughly what year this was?

CH: Well, it would have still been about 1930 because he was only six months at the first firm.

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CH: And there were two parallel offices, with weaving sheds behind, at Tetley Street Mill. And the second office was John Greenish & Company. So they were both owned by John Greenish, so it was probably some tax set up, I'm not sure. But the weaving was for both companies, so my father worked in the office. And he became really friendly with a guy, call him Edward. He was a pattern room man in the mill. And my dad was only about 17, I think, but this chap, he was a First World War veteran. And he was really artistic. And my father kept friendship with him. And when I was about 12, I met him, and he'd be nearly 90 then. And he gave me two diaries that his father had written about 1880. And I still have them. They were fascinating. He was a really nice guy, but he was a homosexual, and he got a lot of trouble in the mill for his sexuality. And one overlooker in particular picked on him a lot. And eventually Edward decided to have it out with him, you know, he'd had enough -

persecution. So he challenged him to a fight. And the overlooker said, 'There's no problem, you're only half a man.' But Edward... it was no contest because Edward, although he was homosexual, he'd boxed for his regiment in the First World War, and he was a lightweight champion. So that solved that one!

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CH: There was another First World War veteran worked there, an overlooker. And he'd been wounded in the upper body. He was still working, you know. When wet weather came, these wounds played up a bit, you know, in the damp. And my father wrote a ditty about him. It was...

'Down the gate comes Charlie Quick, key in hand and picking stick, "Oh me back and oh me side, I wish to God it was Bowling Tide.'

I just wanted some rest. But a 'gate' is the alleyway between looms, or spinning frames, as well. 'Picking stick' is part of a loom. And 'key' is a Bradford word for a spanner. You know, a big numbspanner, and they called them keys in textile trade. You don't see it now, but bow-legged people were called key-legged, but I think it was rickets or something. But there were lots of names. I mean, really tall men, we used to say, 'Oh, he's a traveller, in mill chimneys' And then there was a 'watch'... A 'blacksmith striker', they were like muscle bound blokes that bash red iron, you know, all day with a sledgehammer, but a really weedy man, we called him a 'watchmaker striker', you know. But anyway, the John Greenish who owned the mill, a country squire who had an estate in Nottinghamshire. He used to come up to business in Bradford. And while he was here, he stayed at the Bradford Club. I'm not sure where it was, but there was one. And he stayed overnight there to look after his business. In later life [?] he took up with a dancer from a show. And she was in her 20s and he was in his 60s. And he passed away, I suppose it was exhaustion, you know... But he died and his wife didn't want anything to do with this dirty Bradford mill, so she closed it down and took the money out. So my dad had no job again. So, er...

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LMI: And how long did he work in that mill?

CH: He was in about... longer probably, four or five years maybe. I think. And he told a lot about it so he must have been there, you know, longer.

LMI: So how did you become involved with the mills then? Because you obviously had your dad's history and involvement with them.

CH: Yeah, I wanted to go into textiles really. I thought it was really interesting and something I wanted to do, maybe a bit misguided. But er... my father certainly didn't encourage me, but as I mentioned he helped me to get a job. So...

LMI: And was that through contacts that he knew, then?

CH: Through my father's contacts, yeah. But this comes later. I mean he got yet another job as an employee. That were a firm called Cuddon Hughes in East Parade. And he went there into the office again. And they were what they call, 'manufacturers without looms'. So they got the orders for fabric and then they put it out on commission to be woven. It was a typical Little Germany method of business, you know. And their speciality was a black figured silk fabric. And when Chinese ladies become widows, they adopt a jacket of this fabric (and probably trousers as well). And so it's an extensive business. And every year Mr Cousen and Mr Hughes used to set off on a sales mission. And one went east through Mongolia into China. And the other one went to America. And on the West Coast there's a big Chinese community so he flogged his way there. And then they met up in Shanghai and compared notes. But come 1939 everything stopped. There was no shipping available for that kind of goods. So again, *they* were stuck with many hundreds of yards of this black fabric. And they managed to offload it onto another company, a Jewish firm in Leeds, they were called Moishe Barke. And he was a paint dealer which is you know, textile waste, fabric waste. And he had the bright idea of flogging it off as a blackout curtain, so that solved that one. But my father joined the RAF then, you see, in 1939. And then when he came out in '45, he went into business with his uncle, as a worsted manufacturer.

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CH: It wasn't a very big firm. They had about 12 weavers and about three blokes, I think. There were about 30 looms.

LMI: And whereabouts was that based?

CH: That was in Perseverance Mills in Wibsey. And Perseverance Mills had been built as a speculation. Most of the mills around, it would be say, Whiteheads or somebody. Or Lumb Lane Mills was... they own and utilize the mill. They built the mill and used it. But Perseverance Mills was built purely as a 'room and power' to let to tenants. Just like in a modern-day industrial estate, you know. So my father and dear oldest uncle, they rented a series of rooms. And the power was from the overhead shafting driven by the mill engine, you see. That never stopped. That was just there. So that's what you rented, and you paid rent for the space. In Lancashire the same system was called 'renting space and turning', but it was called 'room and power' in Yorkshire.

LMI: So did they own the machinery in the space?

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CH: Yes, the only... you owned... it's your machinery. You merely rent the room, or series of rooms. And...they took on a fair bit of commission work. And my father's great uncle, Gerald... won't go into complicated family relationships...but they had a lot bigger business at Dudley Hill than Jonas Kellet. My father traded as Kellet and Green off. And Jonas Kellett had a lot bigger business, so he used to give them commission work. And one day my father and Gerald were in the weaving shed and the phone went, and they asked one of the weavers to 'See who it is, love.' You know, 'Won't be a minute.' And she came rushing across

and 'Jonas Kellet - badly ill.' So they jumped in the car because not only was he flesh and blood but he was also a meal ticket. So they sped across Bradford. And Jonas Kellet was alive and well, nowt wrong with him. But he was a public-school boy and he'd actually said on the phone, 'It's Jonas Kelly, Dadley Hill.' So, anyway, she got it wrong. But they, er... I think that's about it about them. But in the next er... series of rooms there was another company, and they were also worsted manufacturers. And that was run by a guy called Colonel Holden. And it wasn't a military title, he'd been christened Colonel and... There seemed to be right a lot of it in Wibsey when I was really little. But sort of 1880s/1890s, I think there must have been like a bit of jingoism after the Boer War, and, you know, and people were christening their babies with fanciful names. And we even had in Wibsey, there was a guy called Admiral Muff. And he was a wool sorter, just an ordinary bloke, but they called him Admiral Muff.

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LMI: It's quite a reputation to have when you don't actually have the military status.

CH: Well, yeah, [it's a good thing.] You'll have heard of Brown Muff, the shop, the store? We had a department store in Bradford called Brown Muff.

LMI: Ok.

CH: Yeah, it was a lovely store!

LMI: Before my time I'm afraid.

CH: When Mr Brown and Mr Muff became successful and wealthy, Mr Muff moved to Burley-in-Wharfedale.

LMI: Oh, that's near me!

CH: And he changed his name to Morph. So people used to say, you know, 'On the banks of the Wharf it must be Morph; In Bradford, Muff is good enough'. And on the same theme of these silly names, there was a butcher's shop on Reevy Road. And there was a sign inside and it said, "The meat in this shop has been sold by a squire, killed by a duke and farmed by an earl." And the butcher was, er... Squire Tordoff was [the] butcher, and Duke Thompson, was [the] slaughterman. And I can't remember the farmer's name, but it was Earl something, you know. But anyway, this, er, Colonel name came in really handy because the Australian cricket team came to play. There used to be a Yorkshire County cricket ground on Horton Park Avenue. And, er, my father and Gerald wanted tickets, you see, so Gerald said, 'We'll go see Colonel.' And so they went next door and they got him to ring up and, 'We'd like two tickets for the Test Match and send them to Colonel Holding.' 'Yes sir, straight away.' And they got the tickets, you know. So that was that.

LMI: So your dad and your great uncle had this business?

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CH: Yeah, my great uncle. My dad's uncle. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

LMI: How did you then get involved? Because you didn't work directly for your dad, did you?

CH: No, my father... I left school in '64 and my father carried on until about '66. Something like that. But he did already advise me that they were going to wind it down and pack it in. Because, you know, they were in a very parlous state in the '60s.

LMI: So already...

CH: In fact, I don't know why he invited me to go into worsted spinning because it's the same thing. But I lasted a bit longer at that. But er...

LMI: So your dad already predicted that the industry was in decline...?

CH: Yes, it was going to... I don't know how old he would be, but er, when he closed the business down, he actually could warp twist, he was a warp twister for himself.

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CH: He twisted the warps into the back of the loom. So he went to a guy he knew and did some warp twisting for him. Just to basically pass the time, I think. Just to keep active, you know, in retirement.

LMI: And what was your first job in the mill? Where did you work?

CH: Well, I went to work in a worsted spinning mill. It was Sam Smith at Shelf Limited at Clough Mills which is at Stone Chair. And they were worsted spinners. And we spun weaving yarn, hosiery yarn and hand knitting yarn. And I was in the sample room. So, basically analyzing samples from weavers. You get a postcard sized piece of fabric and then you analyze the counts of the yarn, the twist in the yarn, the color of the yarn. And you matched it up. And then the boss would submit a price to the weaver, 'This is what our yarn would cost.'

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LMI: And did you enjoy it?

CH: No, it was fantastic. Especially if the yarns were solid. You could dye loose wool or yarn dyed or piece dyed which is the fabric, but they were all solid colours, you see. But mixture yarns were obviously lots of different colours. So, a simple one, like charcoal, would be say 80% black wool and 20% white. Or variations of that. So I had a sample set of machinery in this sample room. So, you know, if a spinning frame had 100 spindles, mine had 5. So I sort of made up this mixture of wool, put it through the machine, and then I matched it up to the

sample. If it was a bit too dark, then I adjusted it, you know, 2% more white or less. And so on.

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CH: So, it was really, but the, why are you all sweating about that? The more, you know, exotic colours were better, you know, like heather mixtures. If you imagine Harris tweed jackets. Matching the yarn up, it was really good, it was like [being] a colour detective.

LMI: And so you...that was your job and you worked on your own? It wasn't a team of you doing it?

CH: No, I was responsible to the manager. But yeah, I just ran this little room on my own. But there was a lot of... we didn't have any dyeing facilities, so the hand knitting yarn was sent out to dyers. Commission dyers. And they would send the...back in bales. And I then went and took a sample hank out of the bale and matched it up to the stock shade in my sample room. And there were no computers, it was just a case of laying one at the side of the other and you held it up to a north light and looked along the surface. And it was deadly accurate, you know. You wouldn't believe how... But the dyers never got it wrong. They were skillful people.

LMI: Yeah.

CH: We dealt with a firm called Dunridsdale and they were at Buttershaw Dyeworks just a couple of mile on the road. And Harry Ridsdale used to come on a Friday afternoon and, you know, smoke a cigar and he might have had a glass of whiskey as well, I don't know. But I wasn't parley to any of that. I used to er...I mentioned that the company was owned by an Australian sheep farming family. And whilst they had it, the managing director who ran the mill fought them with a guy called Harry Shield, and then his son Jack Shield took over. And Jack had been a prisoner of the Japanese in the Second World War. He'd worked on the Burma Railroad, or something like that. And he got recurring malaria. Every year he was laid up for a couple of weeks. He came back. But I actually went out with his daughter. And I... She used to write...we were only about 17, you know. And she used to write me notes and put her dad... And I could see this look of disdain on his face, as he gave me these notes.

LMI: So her dad had to play the messenger for you two lovebirds at 17?!

CH: Anyway, I went to her house one evening, well, several evenings. And I went one evening, and her dad was watching TV. And I think it was an advert for a Japanese car came on the TV. And they called him Jack, Jack Shields.

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CH: Jack leapt up out of his chair and whanged the television off. And he was really, you know, he couldn't have anything to do with Japanese after his experience, which I can't really blame him, you know.

LMI: Yeah. So he looked after it but actually it was an Australian family that owned this mill?

CH: No, he was the managing director and he liked to... But to all intents and purposes, he was the boss, you know.

LMI: So, do you remember them coming to visit?

CH: Oh yeah, yeah, they... well, they just kind of very briefly walked round the works. They didn't, you know, they didn't spend too much time with the likes of us. But obviously, they spent most of the time in the office discussing, you know.

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CH: But I remember them coming, yeah, as I say. They had their Rolls Royce kept in a garage in Sunbridge Road and somebody looked after it for them because they had another, I think they had two wool merchants businesses in Bradford. I think, but I've left my info at home on that one.

LMI: And what made you change from the mill, the first mill you worked at, to the second mill?

CH: Because it was closed down by the... the Australian family sold it, and an asset stripper bought it. And he took out the best bits and shut it down. So then I went to work at Thornton's Spinning Company which was at Try-mill, T-R-Y, just on Thornton Road at the corner of Preston Street.

LMI: I know where you mean, yeah.

CH: And er, it was actually, the company was owned by a firm.... George Mallinson & Son at Spring Grove Mills in Linthwaite in Huddersfield. And Mallinson's were woollen and worsted (I don't know if you know the difference) but [they were] woollen and worsted manufacturers. And they were always short of worsted yarn for the worsted manufacturing weaving parts.

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CH: So they'd bought Thornton Spinning from its founder, Fred Harrison. And they kept Fred Harrison on as the managing director to run it for them. And he was the rudest man that you've ever seen. And I don't know if he can hear me now, but I thought he was fantastic. He was really great. And as I mentioned, I did rather abysmally at school but then when I got cracking with night school and day release, I ended up with more qualifications than the chap that was teaching me. Because you were expected to take a paper in... There were City and Guilds in those days. And then you could go to Higher National, the one above that, which was just under a degree, basically. I took the worsted spinning one, but I also took wool combing, wool merchanting, mill engineering and chemistry. And got... because I was embarrassed at, you know, wasting time at school. Anyway, I took a paper in psychology, sociology, it's a bit of a weird paper. And it was to do with assessing workers, you know. And

Fred Harrison, as I say, was an unsophisticated man, 'What you taking that for?' And I said, 'Well it was, you know, I thought it may be come in useful.' And he said, 'Well, I'll tell you my psychology - you chuck them under the chin and you kick them up arse.' But he er...

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LMI: But he got a job done by the sounds of it.

CH: Sorry?

LMI: He got a job done by the sounds of it.

CH: Oh blimey, yeah. He had a dispute with a spinner over her wage. And she brought her partner, her husband, one Friday afternoon to sort things out. And he was a labourer, you know... And Fred didn't have any office girls, he had two, three men in the office. Two typists and an office manager. And then his wife worked there as well in the office. And my office then, with the manager, was a little way away. And we could hear this argument develop. And it got more and more violent, and it ended up with Fred on the floor with this labourer, fighting. Fred was on top of him, banging his head on the floor, on the floorboards. And his wife was there, 'Fred, Fred, you're going to kill him!' And he was saying, 'Shut thee mouth, woman.' It was a real melee. The police should have been called, but the labourer, I think, had a kind of a shaky relationship with the law, anyway, so it was agreed, you know, nothing was said. And...

LMI: Dealt with privately.

CH: But he used to go out on a Friday afternoon to lunch, with his wife. And I got the job of taking them, you see, in his car. And I dropped him off at Red Lion at Wyke and... about 11 o'clock. Then I had to go back for him about half three. And I could have the car for the day, and it was a Jaguar. And I've had two Jags myself since then, but this one, you know, I was only about 21. And it was a Racing Green and...

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LMI: So was that part of your job role then?

CH: Well, no, it's just...

LMI: Just a handy asset to have?

CH: Handy bloke to take him to the pub, you know.

LMI: So what was your official job role at the second mill?

CH: I was an assistant to the manager. And the manager... well, he didn't need an assistant, he was a really clever, nice, gentlemanly man. As opposed to Fred the owner, you see. But he was really unlucky. And he lived in Elland, and he was coming to work one day, and he crashed into a cattle truck. Or the cattle truck crashed into him. And he ended up in the foot

well on the passenger side. And nearly every bone in his body was broken. And he was in, you know, in traction for ages. So I took over his role. And then he hadn't been back at work for six months and he tripped over the matchstick at the top of some stone stairs and went down a flight of stone stairs in the mill and he broke his arm and his shoulder.

LMI: Gosh, where's there's a blame there's a claim. I'd have been a...

CH: But I also... the overlookers who we mentioned before, I had to take, run their room also when they were away ill. But there was a big snag, because you asked me about unions, and... I don't like to say this, but I was a young Conservative at the time, and er... I felt the girls were better, you know, so... And all the overlookers were in a union, and they wouldn't tell me anything about the job, you see, unless I joined the union. But being a Conservative I couldn't bring myself to join a union, you see. So they wouldn't tell me anything. So I had to take over the room and just play it by ear then, you know. But managed ok. But...

LMI: Did most of the people you work with, were they part of a union?

CH: No, only the overlookers, the foremen of each room. And then... I don't know, I couldn't really say, I don't know, no, I don't think any of the spinners, the girls, women or labourers would be in a union, I don't... I can't vouch for that. But the... my favourite room to work in was the drawing department, which was the one before spinning. And there was a machine called a gill box. Which basically, you put about five slivers in, half a dozen slivers, and it came out as one. It was a reducing machine. And it also combed the wool as well, at the same time. And it was called a gill box. And one of them was looked after by a nubile girl called Marlene. On these machines, if you put a thick end of wool through, they were only made of cast steel so you could damage the machine. So they came up with the idea of a shearing pin which was a softer metal like copper or bronze, fitted into the machinery. So if a thick end of wool went through it broke this softer metal pin and it didn't damage the machine.

LMI: That's a good idea.

CH: Yeah. So about once or twice a week she used to put a thick end through and then I had to come and fix it. And then she utilised this time... it took me about 10 minutes, you know.

LMI: Original.

CH: She always wore a mini skirt and draped herself on this machine. And she used the time where we discussed where we're going on tonight's date, you see. That was the ploy.

LMI: That's textile flirting?

CH: It was the plan. But er, that mill again, came to the end of its time. And Fred Harrison, you know, MD said, 'You really ought to have a go on your own. You're going to just lose jobs.' You know, through and no fault [of my own]. So I haven't had a boss for 70 years since he said that. Well, 50 years, you know, I went on my own.

LMI: And what did you learn from working in the mills?

CH: In respect?

LMI: Well, obviously you learn a lot of technical things, but did you learn anything that's helped you in life since?

CH: Sorry?

LMI: Have you learned anything in the mills that's helped you in life since? Anything a bit more metaphorical than technical?

CH: I'd have to say no, not really. I er...

LMI: That's ok, it was just if you had. And when you worked in the mills, what were your work hours like?

CH: Oh, they were quite good. When I started, I think it was a 7.30 start. And then there was a break about 10ish. And then I think there would be probably one hour for lunch and then in the afternoon again. And then we finished, I think about half four, I'm not sure.

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CH: There weren't excessive hours, just normal at that time. It was about 40, maybe 42 hours at the beginning. I know my wage was six pounds a week, the first job, the first wage. And then when I finished in 1972, I think I was earning about £30 a week.

LMI: That's quite an increase, that's not bad.

CH: Yeah. But as soon as I started on my own, you know, I rectified that.

LMI: And at lunchtime, what did you do at lunchtime?

CH: Well, everybody in the mill... not everybody, but most people in the mill went to the canteen for the meal. I think we'd probably an hour. So it'd probably take 30 minutes. All the men obviously sat at... it wasn't compulsory, but men would sit at a table and talk about football, and, you know. And the women on other tables. And so it took about 30 minutes to get served and eat your meal. And then most of us went out for a stroll. And the guys who smoked had a cigarette. And we walked around the streets. And then went back to the mill.

LMI: And would you tell us about the steam ovens that you told me about earlier?

CH: About the?

LMI: The steam ovens.

CH: Yes, prior to there being canteens, there were what they called steam ovens, which were a series of cupboards in a wall. And they were heated by steam pipes from the boiler in the mill. So people would bring something from home, perhaps a homemade pie, a meat pie, and pop it in in the mid-morning break about ten o'clock. And then it [had] warmed up nicely by

midday. You opened the door and took your pie out. And I don't know where you sat and ate it because I wasn't at that time there. But it was a good system.

LMI: It's a good use of the heating.

CH: Better than cold sandwiches, you know.

LMI: Absolutely. So you left in 1972, did you say?

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CH: Yes. Yeah.

LMI: And you said you started up on your own.

CH: Yes.

LMI: What did you do?

CH: Well, that's another story to be honest. I started as a rag merchant and... Well, I've got to try and steer myself away from the image of rag and bone man. Rag merchants were an entirely different thing. It was Dewsbury/Batley based business. And it's all gone now. Probably about three businesses left in that line. But there were hundreds. Probably before my time. But there were three auction houses in Dewsbury who auctioned nothing but rags. And they came from all over the world, the rags. And it was really big business.

LMI: And what did you do with the rags when you purchased them?

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CH: Well, they were sorted into... They are... knitted rags. They were called stockings because they used the stocking knit principle. So a sweater wasn't a sweater, it was a stocking. So you would buy... you'd go to the auction and buy two tonnes of stocking and take them back to your warehouse. And then girls sorted them according to the quality of wool in the sweater. There were no synthetics at that time, much. And the colour. So the whole idea was to do away with dyeing, which was expensive. So, you buy, say, one tonne of sweaters and you sort them. And you get a pile of scarlet and a pile of dark red and a pile of... and so on.

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CH: Pillar box red and... And then they were pulled into shoddy, which is back into the fibre; they were fed into a machine. So you ended up with a tonne of scarlet shoddy, which was then reprocessed and back into cloth again. It was scribbled and spun and woven into... And as I say, the main thing is, it obviated, you know, you didn't need to dye it. So it was a cheaper alternative.

LMI: And what happened to the cloths that...

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CH: The cloth one, the cloth rags... well, they obviously...you needed a lot more violence to rip a cloth rag, a man's suit, than our sweaters. And so the machines had been invented about...by a chap called Law...about 1860, I think. Rag pulling machines. And it was basically a wooden drum originally, with really vicious iron teeth. And another roller on top with teeth. And they were revolved at speed and just shredded. It came out as fibre. The individual fibres were exposed. But as I say, to rip a suit you needed a lot more 'oomph'. And so the fibres from a suit were shorter, broken and coarse, so you could feel it. And that was called 'mungo'.

LMI: And what did it get used for when it was remade?

CH: Mungo was blanket, army blankets, slave blankets...

LMI: Wow...

CH: And there was a big company in Dewsbury called Wormald and Walker, Dewsbury Mills. They were specialists in weaving blankets for the Zulu nation. And they used them as a, you know, around the shoulders as a cloak. And then they put it on the floor as a tablecloth. And then they rolled up and slept in it. So they were really an essential item. But they had photographs at home of King Szech Wai-o. He was a leader of the Zulu nation. And he was a fat man, because obviously he could afford to be plump. He didn't do much fighting. And he's draped in a quite an exotic blanket. And then middle management, the officers, they had a sort of a... not bad. And then the, you know, the rank and file had a fairly coarse blanket. But they were all woven in Dewsbury. And er, Wormald and Walker, er Captain Wormald was a very famous Boer War officer. And I have a photograph of him in his regalia. And the Boer War was later than the Zulu War...er...

LMI: We won't fact check. You're alright!

0:39:38

CH: So if he...What I'm trying to say is, if he *had* been an officer at the time of the *Zulu* war then he would have been fighting a horde of men wearing blankets woven in his dad's mill. But he was actually, you know, an officer in the Boer war, so...

LMI: So you kept with textiles, just in a different form?

CH: That's it, yeah. Bradford is a worsted trade, where you take virgin wool and comb it and remove the short fibres which are noil. And the short fibres are then sold into the woollen trade. And the woollen trade uses short fibre from the worsted trade. And also recycled rag fibre, which er, you can't comb them (they're too...they're what you call 'scribble,') on the machine, which actually, as you can imagine, match the fibre together and then you spin it into yarn. But I've got some Edwardian casement cloth at home, and that is made from mungo. And the thing is... I mean, just a sample, you know. But when it was hung at your

window, as curtain, especially in a biggish house and you couldn't see it really in detail, it just looked like any other curtain. But it was made from a cheap source of [?]

LMI: Recycled materials.

CH: Cheapness, reducing the cost a bit. So...

LMI: Oh, that's brilliant. I'm just checking through my notes for what we've anything we might have missed. Oh, you mentioned earlier about the Christmas parties that you had. Could you tell us a bit about them?

CH: We had Christmas parties at both mills. And on both, the system was, that the management, and I have to say, I was only very junior, very junior. But I was still classed as er... And the canteen, the dinner ladies would produce a Christmas dinner. And everybody came in and sat at the tables in the canteen. And then we, the management, served them. It was just reversing the roles, you know.

0:41:55

LMI: I love that.

CH: As a Christmas treat. But I don't remember any music, it was just talking. And I think smoking was allowed if I remember rightly, as well.

LMI: And where did this take place?

CH: In the canteen in the mill. All mills had canteens really.

LMI: And did you socialise outside of work at all?

CH: Only with girls! No, not so much.

LMI: No.

CH: Well, the first mill, the mill on Thornton Road, people came from all around... White Abbey, you know, further up Thornton Road and further down. But the first mill, it was a village called Stone Chair, and it was very village-y. So everybody in the village worked in this one mill. So everybody knew each other. But obviously in the evening, you know, maybe they did together, played football or... you know.

0:43:06

LMI: It's quite nice that there was a community spirit around these smaller mills.

CH: Well, funnily enough, the... as I said, we made hand knitting wool, and the guy who was in charge of balling the wool, making the balls of knitting wool, there was a department, three or four girls. And he was a cockney, or he was from Hammersmith, I think. And he ridiculed this village attitude. He said, 'I don't know why I came anyway.' But he ridiculed this village, you know. And he used to say, you know, 'I was in a pub the other night and this

chap said, "Oh, you're from London, aren't you?" And I said, "Yes." and he said, "Well I've got a mate, they call him Dave, he lives in London, do you know him?" But he was just ridiculing our backwardness, you know, but er...

LMI: But he still came to work.

CH: It was a nice community. And the managing director, Jack Shield, he lived in a house on the hill but it was still in the village. So it was all part of the, er, you know. I mean, I suppose it's had church fetes and like that. And the Shield family would officiate. And all the workers would go and enjoy themselves, you know.

LMI: Aww.

0:44:31

CH: But I lived a fair way away from the village, so I wasn't really connected in that way.

LMI: Did you drive to work then?

CH: Yes, well, no, I caught the bus. I was about 21 when I got my licence. So I started working when I was about 17, so I did about 3 or 4 years on the bus. But it was the Hebble bus from Bradford to Halifax. And at that time, the upper deck, it was made to be lowered I think for low bridges, but the upper deck had rows of four seats. And the gangway was set down a couple of foot. So you walked along in a trench, basically, and then up to your seats. It was to reduce the height of the bus, I think, but don't quote me. And so upstairs was smoking and downstairs was non-smoking. And when you went upstairs you just couldn't see one end of the bus to the next. It was just blue. Just hanging, you know. I didn't smoke but I used to go upstairs because... you know.

0:45:42

LMI: Gosh, you wouldn't get away with that now would you?

CH: No, flipping heck, no. No smoking. And then, as I say, there was a mill, Shelf Mills, that was a little bit further back. So half of the passengers got off that. And then the rest of us got off at Clough Mills. And then it carried on to Halifax, but it was virtually empty then, you know, all the workers had got off.

LMI: And earlier you told me about, you helped clear out Saltaire, like Salts Mill. Would you tell us a bit about that and what you found in those boxes?

CH: Well, yeah. I initially approached the company secretary. And he was very helpful. And he said obviously most of it was destined for a West Yorkshire archive, but I could have, you know, basically what I wanted. And I took, there were what they call guard books, which were all the patterns that they'd made, were mounted in a big volume. Which was easily 18 inches thick. They were really big, and it was leather. And as I say, they were called guard

books. And they were the reference books for the patterns that they made. And I got about 50 of those and had my father carrying them up from the cellar. And my wife.

0:47:05

LMI: And when was this?

CH: When they closed down. I can't remember, when would it be? About...? I don't know, I haven't got the reference for that. I've made notes, you see. It's when it closed down.

LMI: Yeah.

CH: And er... And then the documentation for er... the registering the trademark for the different trademarks. They had about... probably a dozen different trademarks. And so I have the document registering it in Ecuador, Panama, and so on. And really... about 1890, 1900 something like that.

LMI: Gosh.

CH: Fascinating. But obviously there were better things than that, but I wasn't party, you know, they gave me what they thought was ok to give me, you know.

LMI: That is amazing.

CH: But you know, I mean I was saying to my friend last night that there was a firm called, I don't know, you may not remember Gannex, it was a, they made a coat and it was, I think it was a rubber or plastic outer. And the inside was like a horse cloth design, a check design.

LMI: Ok, cool.

CH: Gannex. And Harold Wilson, he bought one, and he was always in this Gannex coat with his pipe, you see. And he befriended the owner of the mill, who was a Lithuanian Jew called Jody Kagan. And he was a smart operator, but he ended up fleeing to Israel after a bit of a crime involving blue dye. But anyway... And in this mill... the company closed down, Gannex, (Am I running over time here?)

LMI: No, you're all good.

CH: The company had closed down, Gannex Textile. And Kagan had gone to Israel. And Nigerian Rags sort of moved into the bottom floor and I supplied him with rags, you see. And I kept thinking about this mill, having a little mosey up. And I never did. But some years later it was bought by somebody to develop into apartments. And seemingly Joseph Kagan was a chess enthusiast. And in the top floor the demolition men or the builders had found a room full of chess sets. And there was a library and all sorts of precious metals and fabulous collections. So I was really pleased that I didn't go up, because it would have been a very serious offence, you know, should I have stumbled into this room.

0:50:04

CH: But, er, they went to, I don't know where they went, but they were, they officially were, went somewhere. But, er...

LMI: Wow. Hidden treasures.

CH: At Wormald and Walker, the mill I mentioned, that wove blankets in Dewsbury, they had a strong room under the offices. And the company secretary, he took me down in a lift and when the lift opened it was a room as big as this. And it was floor to ceiling with dusty volumes. Fabulous. And he said, 'It's all destined for the...' (I don't know whether I should be saying this), 'the West Yorkshire Archive, but help yourself, as much as you can carry.'

0:50:45

CH: So I got a fabulous, you can hardly lift it, a big book. And it's what you might call a 'due dill' book. You know, when they got orders, say for a thousand coolie blankets for an Indian shipping company; the coolies loaded the ships by hand, and they put a blanket on the shoulder, you see, so when they were carrying whatever goods they were carrying, it saved their skin. And these blankets, so, you know, they get order for a thousand, or slave blankets for America, and they were all logged down in this big ledger. And it was basically to see if the company were in a position to pay for these blankets that they'd ordered. So they were cross-referenced with the... you know, they asked around, 'What do you know about this American company?' And they would say, 'Yeah, it's a good firm.' You know. So, you can hardly lift this book, it's fabulous. And it's all in copperplate, writing, you know, in a pen. So...

LMI: Well, you've got another special book, haven't you? Because... you've got another special book because you've made a scrapbook.

0:52:02

CH: Oh no, there's 25 volumes of that, and there's a lot of mill... And that... I decided to make a scrapbook of each textile mill. Not the wool warehouses around here, but the ones with machinery. And so, everything I found... I go to antique fairs and try to buy old newspapers, you know, older the better. And then you cut out adverts, 'Cap Spinners Wanted', 'Weavers Wanted'. And then there are articles on, you know, the owners of the mill. One of them I cut out and there was a mill in Birstall, called College Mills. And it was owned by a company called William Holton. And they were woollen manufacturers, not worsted, as here in Bradford. And as I say, it's called College Mills, and the streets around it are each named after a prominent professor at... I don't know whether it's Oxford or Cambridge, but, you know, let's say it's Stanhope Street something, Mr Stanhope was a lecturer at er... But this newspaper cutting, as I say, it's William Halton, and it said that, 'Mrs Halton who has recently had a chill, confined to her bedroom, is now able to come downstairs.' And you think, you know... But... erm, they were different times, you see. That's the kind of thing I've stuck in my scrapbook.

LMI: So you've got like 25 scrapbooks?

0:53:33

CH: Yeah, because there's lots of mills.

LMI: And it's from the West Yorkshire area?

CH: Only West Yorkshire.

LMI: Yeah.

CH: And well, when I started, I started with the Macclesfield silk trade and the Lancashire cotton trade, but it just... my wife put her foot down. So I sold off an awful lot, of all the other stuff and just kept the West Yorkshire woollen and worsted trade stuff.

LMI: Oh, fantastic.

CH: So yeah.

LMI: And so I've finished a lot of my questions now, but we could talk for ages, couldn't we? Is there anything else that you think I've missed that you really want to put in at the end?

0:54:14

CH: I don't know really, I mean, there's lots of stuff, but I mean... Right, there was a mill... I don't want to ramble on.

LMI: You're not rambling, don't worry.

CH: There was a mill in Mountain, which is just north of Queensbury on Keighley Road. Mountain Mills it was called. And it was run by the Speke family. And there were three generations of the Speke[s] ran it. And they were all called Paul. So the workers, to avoid confusion, called them Old Paul, Young Paul, Paul of all the Pauls. And they had a night shift, they were weaving khaki uniform cloth for the First World War, and they had a night shift going. P And it was a custom of the overlookers when they got their mill up and running for the night, they would repair to the Pineberry Inn, for the last pint and a game of darts. And then go back to the mill, you know, at eleven o'clock, for the night. And one night they were thus engaged and there was an enormous explosion from the mill. And the feed water supply had failed and one of the boilers. They were very serious explosions. But on this occasion, nobody was hurt, but they could be... you know... you could blow the boiler plate through a brick wall, you know.

0:55:43

LMI: They were quite dangerous places were mills, weren't they, really?

CH: They were dangerous. So, the boiler man was one of the party in the pub. And when he heard this explosion, he grabbed his coat and ran out of the door of the pub. And he was

never seen again. And he left his wife in a tithe cottage in the mill yard. A friend of my father's went, and he got the job of an office boy at Paul Speke. And in his first week or two, I don't know whether [it] were Old Paul, Young Paul, whatever...

LMI: One of the Pauls.

CH: It was his custom to go to the Wool Exchange. They were worsted manufacturers, they were weavers, but I think there were about 10,000 spindles as well, spinning. So he used to go to the Wool Exchange on... Tuesday, the main day, I'm not sure. And he took a release of samples with him. But obviously he didn't carry it, this office boy came in for that job. And they walked to the station in Queensbury from the mill, which is quite a walk. And then caught the train into Bradford. He didn't use his car for some reason, didn't Speke. And this office boy, you know, lugged this suitcase and he put it down on the platform at Queensbury station, wiped his brow. And Old Paul reached in his waistcoat pocket and said, 'Now then lad, when you get back to mill, make sure you put this in botany waste.' And it was a bit of yarn. I thought it was going to be, you know, pipey.

0:57:20

CH: And er, but textile waste was traded profitably, you know, it was a very big business really. Not in that quantity, but er...

LMI: Every little helps.

CH: I mean there was the worsted shoddy, which is entirely different to Dewsbury and Batley rag shoddy. But that was from underneath wool combs and carding engines. And it was broken fibre and dust, a little bit of vegetable matter maybe, sheep pooh, or something, you know, a little bit... And that was all swept up and baled up. And it was sold to the farmers in the Rhubarb Triangle - Wakefield, Morley and I don't know, the triangular set. You know, you've heard of it.

LMI: Yeah. What did they use it for?

CH: It was manure.

LMI: Ah, ok.

0:58:08

CH: Yeah, and it was, I think it was one of the reasons for the success of the crop. You know, it was a forced rhubarb crop. They grew them in the dark. In sheds. But they used this shoddy as manure. And then there was 'brush waste' as well, that was... Well, lots of waste, but brush waste came from worsted spinning. And that was the sweepings from the floor, so they were longer fibres, and that had to be cleaned. My friend John, his father and father's brother, his uncle, they traded as Cosway Brothers. And they were in Gracechurch Street off Lumb Lane - Cecil & Douglas. And they had a 'Willy' which is a Bradford machine, and a willy is a corruption of willow, the springy wood, you know.

LMI: Oh yeah, yeah.

0:58:59

CH: So they were all made of metal, and they called them the Bradford Willy, but as I say, it was willow. And they put this brush waste in. And, you know, the machine revolved and all orange peel and cigarette ends dropped out like onto the floor. And then the clean product was baled up and sold for remanufacture, you know.

LMI: Gosh.

CH: But they also blended carpet wools as well with the same machine. But I don't know if I... now... but did I mention when my father went to this... before he left for the RAF from the Little Germany company?

0:59:41

CH: Cuddon Hughes, the people who worked for China?

LMI: Yeah yeah.

CH: They didn't own the building; they rented the warehouse. And it was a Little Germany warehouse and the offices at the front and then maybe four-storey warehouse behind. And the landlord lived in a suite of rooms in the Midland Hotel, like Frank Sinatra would have done, you know. And every Friday morning he went down to the motor garage, and he kept a bicycle there. And he pedalled across town to East Parade. And round the back of the warehouse was a little hut. And in it was a brush and a shovel. And he took the brush out and he swept the pavement at the front of his warehouse. And it was a big warehouse with a lot of pavement. He swept all the tab ends and matchsticks into the gutter and then he put the brush back in the hut, peddled off to his next property. And in his mind, this Friday morning's effort justified his fabulous income. And the rest of the week he smoked his cigar and read his paper.

LMI: Well, I'd do that job!

1:00:50

CH: Yeah.

LMI: Oh, that's fantastic. Thank you so much. You've had so many amazing stories. And also, all the factual information that you know from working in the industry for so long is just so helpful. Thank you so much for chatting with us. And I'll come and have a look at all your artifacts as well.

CH: Yeah, you'll be very welcome. Just give me some notice and I'll bring it all down.

LMI: Thank you. And er... Lovely, and we'll wrap it up here then. Thank you.

1:01:28

CH: Right, ok, yeah, right.