

## Dan Lee - Transcription

*Audio quality - very good. Phone call interview.*

**0:00:00**

**DL:** Hello.

**IS:** Hiya Dan, it's just Izzie.

**DL:** Hello there.

**IS:** Hello, how are you doing?

**DL:** I'm good, thank you.

**IS:** Oh good, I'm glad. Thanks so much for speaking with me, especially on your lunch break. So as you know, we're just chatting to people who have worked in the mills and who have experience of the textile mills in Bradford between the '70s and sort of '90s, early 2000s. Just before I start, I just want to let you know that I am just voice recording this just so I can transcribe it. Is that okay with you?

**DL:** Yeah, absolutely fine.

**IS:** Oh, thank you. That's great. And do you want to remain anonymous? I mean, there won't be any personal details shared anyway, but are you happy for me to refer to you by name in the interview or would you like me to keep it completely anonymous?

**DL:** No, no you can use my name. It's fine.

**IS:** Oh perfect, that's great. So can I just start by asking when you worked in the mills, and a brief overview of where you worked. And if you know any sort of rough dates, or years, or anything like that, that would be fantastic.

**0:01:15**

**DL:** I think, yeah, it would have been, I guess, well, it would have been 1990 to 1999, roughly.

**IS:** Brilliant.

**DL:** Probably '98, yeah. So, I actually, for seven of those years, I was working for a conditioning house, Wool Testing Services International. So, I started off working for them as a lab technician for the first half, and then the second half I was out as a sampler. Going to the various mills and processors all around sort of Bradford, West Yorkshire, collecting samples.

**IS:** Amazing. And so where was that based when you were at the conditioning place? Where was that?

**0:01:51**

**DL:** It was the bottom of City Road.

**IS:** Brilliant. Oh, that's great. And when you worked within all those different places, did you get to see then the different processes? Because obviously each mill had different stages within it and all the different processes.

**DL:** Yeah, well, it was more smell than see, to be honest! Yeah, so we would be taking samples of raw wool. So that would either come straight off the farm in West Yorkshire, or it could have been coming from South America, or the Mediterranean, somewhere like that.

**0:02:35**

**DL:** So each different kind of wool would have had its own characteristics. You know, it could have been stuff like wet salted band knife, which would have been kind of stripped from a carcass and quite smelly. Or it could have been, you know, skin wool, which they would have actually used a quicklime to rot them off, and that would have been dried out. And again that would have had its own kind of smell and texture, and so on. Or it could have been part-processed, you know, so it could have been tops or oils. Or it could have been even yarn that we were collecting samples from.

**0:03:08**

**DL:** So yeah, the various dye works as well would have their own, definitely their own smells as well. And again, wool from different parts of the world. I started off doing summer work when I was a student, for the Wool Testing Board up in Clayton... sorry, the Wool Board up in Clayton. Because although I'm from Essex, I studied up in Bradford and... it's where my family are from. My gran worked in the canteen at the Wool Board, and so that's how I got a kind of an 'in' on working - just doing summer work. What we would have done is when the wool came in from the local farms, it would have been graded in the warehouse, and then baled, and then sent off to processors. Sorry, are you still there?

**0:04:01**

**IS:** Yes, yes, I am. I'm just listening and letting you talk, sorry.

**DL:** Yeah, so that would have been - generally, it was done for four or five weeks over the summer. So even though I was kind of a bit of an outsider, being a student, and from down south, I was kind of looked after by everyone there, because my gran had worked in the canteen there previously. And it was a really great, fun place to work, you know, really... interesting individuals, you know... [I] really enjoyed my time there. And the people that [were] there, especially the people doing the seasonal work, wouldn't have been, you know, the kind of privileged or entitled people. A lot of them would have had a background and a history, but, you know, as colleagues, as friends, they were fantastic.

**0:04:43**

**DL:** So, I did that for the first year, during the summer holidays. The next year I was working there, not on the grading tables, but we were on the crew that took the sheets that had been dropped off by the farmers and weighed in. And then they would get passed on to the grading tables. So generally, what happened is the sheets would be opened up, the fleeces would fall on the table, and the grader - like the qualified individual - he would go through, and each type of breed would have its own... it would be like a four digit code, four or five digit code, and the first couple would be the breed and then the rest would be the quality. And he would look through the fleeces and he'd shout out '607' or whatever it was, and you would put it in the kind of a skep, a wecker skep that was on wheels. And once a few of them were filled up, he'd wheel them down for the guys doing the baling. But one thing the English farmers would do, and the graders, is... they'd rip the dags off. They wouldn't put that through. But if it was... so back to my time as a sampler, if it was coming from like places like Sardinia, they had a habit of leaving the dags on. And that was... trying to take a sample of a compacted bale that had dags in, with a sampling tube, which is a metal tube with a cutting on the end, you know, trying to push it through all the dags was er... yeah, that was something different!

**0:06:10**

**IS:** Yeah. So you really saw things at the time.

**DL:** I'm rambling now, I'm not really prepared for this. One of the things that I did mention, I did have some of my old books lying around somewhere, where basically us samplers, we would have like a policeman's notebook., And we'd go into the office first thing in the morning, (This is before mobile phones and everything like that, you know). And we would look through... the guys in the office would have written down in a book all the lots that needed to be sampled -their location, and what type it was, and how many bales. And we'd write that down in our notebooks and go off in a van to the various mills and processes and collect samples. I tried to find the... I know I've got a couple somewhere, they're probably up in the loft... but I did try to find some.

**0:06:54**

**DL:** That would have kind of jogged my memory. But, you know, as I say, each processor had its own thing. And there was one processor up in Esholt, for example, Thomas Chadwick's. So they used to do skim wool. But on a Friday... so the skim wool would be a fellmonger's. So, they would, you know, take the carcass that had the meat taken away from it. And they would process it to get the wool and the skin, and anything salvageable from it.

**0:07:27**

**DL:** And if you had to collect a sample from them on a Friday afternoon... and it was a very strange place as well -very kind of tumbled down - and it's like very old, and it's something like, have you ever read an HP Lovecraft book?

**IS:** Yes, yes.

**DL:** Yes, it was exactly like that. It was that, you know, [a]family-owned business. Portraits on the walls that are going grey and peeling. And then you'd meet people that would look exactly like that! (You may not want to put this into the public record!) But on the Friday afternoon, they would deal with all the heads and the feet and the tails. So you'd go there and there'd be these huge big vats of like quicklime, with these big paddle wheels stirring them up, and you know there'd be these heads with eyes and stuff bobbing up out of the water. So that was definitely one of the places that sticks in your memory! But we would go all over. But I think one of the the things that you're trying to do is document the kind of changing... or decline, you know. And that was something that I noticed in my time as a sampler - just working there for eight or nine years - is every year, places will close down, you'll be visiting less and less sites. We'll be more like looking at stuff that was coming in from South America or Australia or whatever, rather than the domestic side of things.

**0:08:53**

**IS:** Yeah. And you saw a lot of the very start of the process, from like the textile perspective. And also something that's really not for the faint-hearted! Because that's very gory work, some of it, isn't it, really?

**DL:** Yeah, I mean, the people who used to work in the fellmonger's would have just been used to it. Every day, day in, day out. You know, and also the smell, I can't, you know, you can't stand the smell as well. My dad was from Bradford. And he started off living in Manningham, and then when he was about six, he moved up to Clayton. And he always used to tell me, he used to look out from the end of the street in Clayton, and he could see over the rest of the town, kind of in the valley almost. And you could see hundreds of chimneys poking up from all the processors and the mills and then the smoke pouring out.

**0:09:46**

**DL:** But it would kind of settle, and it would be like you couldn't see the town itself, you could just see the tops of the chimneys and the smoke. And then it would just be like a sea of smoke below. So, I haven't been back to Bradford for... since the early 2000s. I spoke to my cousin a few years ago who grew up in Clayton as well, and he said, 'Don't go back it's changed so much. You wouldn't recognize it.' He says he feels like somebody's ripped his childhood out of him because it's all gone and changed.

**IS:** Yeah the landscape's definitely different. There's only... there are a few chimneys that you can see, but so many of them have been demolished or burnt down, or whatever. It's such a shame, because it's such a big part of the heritage and the culture of Bradford, isn't it? And for them not to be there, or at least for people not to recognise what the skyline is made of, is quite sad.

**0:10:40**

**DL:** Yeah. And I think it would have been, you know, certainly when I speak to my dad, obviously... his family were from Bingley, and they're all stone masons and steeplejacks and so on. But definitely, you know, he talks about plenty of his uncles working at Woolcombers as overseers. And obviously my gran working at the Wool Board in the canteen there. And I had aunts that used to work as overlookers, menders and burlers and that kind of stuff. Yeah, if you lived in Bradford, all of your family would have been...you know, a good portion of your family would have been in the wool trade in some form or other. But also as well, it wasn't just wool we would go out and sample. So, even though it wasn't produced domestically or even in Europe, we would go out and take samples of some of these rarer animal fibers. Camel hair and angora and cashgora and alpaca and all sorts of stuff like that.

**0:11:45**

**IS:** Wow.

**DL:** And yeah, a small bale of that even back then would have been a million pounds. Surprising, I'm not asking. But then the rarest and most valuable fiber I ever had to take a sample of was something called a vicuna. Which apparently is a very kind of timid, stoat-like animal that lives well up in either the Himalayas or Andes, or something. And yeah, like a half a kilo of that was, like, yeah, hundreds of thousands, you know, crazy money.

**IS:** Yeah. And do you think that was part of the mills diversifying as a result of the textile trade taking a hit, or was that something that they always did? Because I've not heard of that when we've spoken to other people.

**0:12:41**

**DL:** I think it was the centre... The reason why Wool Testing Services International were based in Bradford, it was because it was... I think at one point it would have been at the centre of the world's textile industry, you know. And that kind of gravity would have drawn in all the traders, you know, for all these other types of fibres. And also, a lot of the mills did actually produce some of these finer textiles as well. So, you know, in terms of weavers and dyers and stuff. So yeah, I'm sure it's something that had always happened. Or at least had been initiated by the wool trade moving there. And it was just kind of inevitable, because you had all the skilled labour. I did work for a short time when I was at college - it was an engineering qualification - I did work for a very short time for a textile machine manufacturer in the design drawing office.

**0:13:38**

**IS:** Oh, did you?

**DL:** Yes. So they were [an] Axminster carpet company. I've forgotten the name now, something like David Crabtree and Sons or something like that. And the stuff that was going out of the door there, the Axminster Carpet Looms, looked almost identical to the Axminster Carpet Loom they built that was in the museum down the road.

**IS:** Oh, wow. Wow.

**DL:** Yeah. So I would say it's not just the textiles, [it's] processing as well. It's all the associated trades, all the skilled millwrights, and the machinery manufacturers, and everything that was all in that area. I guess that's just moved on now, hasn't it? Because there's not that demand there anymore.

**0:14:09**

**IS:** Yeah. It's not just impacted the textile trade. It's impacted a lot of the engineers and the manufacturers and everything as well, hasn't it?

**DL:** Yeah, I'm sure. I'm curious to what industry there is in Bradford these days. Because I remember my great-granddad used to work for Scots, who used to build motorcycles, you know. And there was obviously... had their own Jowett car manufacturers as well there. So I think it was more than just a textile town. It was a centre for engineering. But I think having that skilled workforce brought other kinds of engineering companies into the area. Or allowed them to exist, because you had all those technical colleges and trained engineers and so on, that you needed to run the mills.

**0:15:08**

**IS:** Yeah. And when it came to... you said that you worked with some really interesting people. How diverse was the workforce? And what kind of people did you end up working with?

**DL:** So a lot of them up at the Wool Board, there would have been a lot of local kids, you know. But they wouldn't have been the kids that... Certainly the guys doing the temporary works, like I say, they wouldn't have been the kind of the lucky, fortunate, privileged kind of people. They would have been not really looked after by society. And this was the kind of only work they could rely on, which was the temporary work. What we call 'Watching Skeps', working behind the grading tables and wheeling the skeps between the table and the balers, you know. But like I said, I've never met a finer bunch of people really, despite all the hardships they must have faced in their daily lives and background. They were great friends and colleagues. I got a lot of respect for people that maybe were a bit less fortunate than me. Because I mean I didn't... I'm not privileged in any sense - I grew up on a council estate in Essex. But these are the people that would have been looked down upon in the kind of red top newspapers. Seen as, not... I don't want to use the kind of language they would use, but when you get to spend some time with them and you recognise them as people, they were fantastic. They were just less fortunate.

**0:16:43**

**IS:** Yeah, and very practical, very capable. A lot of the jobs within the mills, and the engineering and even the sampling, required a lot of technical skill that maybe isn't

recognised the way that academic skill conventionally is. Because it sounds like hard work for everybody.

**DL:** Yeah, definitely. So the graders as well. So I mean, I was talking about the guys doing the temporary work pushing the skeps around, but the guys that did the grading, yeah. And if you go up to sorting as well, where you start breaking the individual fleeces down. But that would be done at the processors. You'd need years of experience and skill. And it's in your eyes and your hands, and you would look at it and you could say what quality of the fibre was; what the lanolin content was likely to be; how long the staples were, you know.

**0:17:42**

**DL:** If it was kempy, it was, you know, lots of dead fibre. And that kind of thing. And they knew all these hundreds of different sort of grades, and you know, these fleeces would tumble onto the table, and they would just cast an eye over them, and just grab one and start pulling a few of the staples just to check. And then they would start throwing them at you, going, 'This is a number, this number, that number.' But funnily enough, after working there for a couple of seasons, in a few weeks, the grader that I worked with, a guy called Chris Pitts - if it was a straightforward sheet that came over and they would all kind of swell down of a similar kind, he would go, 'Go and jump on the table and you have a go. You can grade these ones.'

**0:18:21**

**IS:** Oh, wow.

**DL:** But nothing too complicated, you know. Just the basic stuff. And obviously [he'd] keep an eye on what you were doing. But yeah, it was always, for me, that was learning a different kind of skill. And respecting people for the skills that they had, that weren't necessarily, like you say, academic.

**IS:** Absolutely.

**DL:** Stuff that was learned, that needed a good eye and a good hand.

**IS:** Oh, that's amazing. And when... because you worked there, you know, for about, well, you worked within that industry for about, did you say about eight, nine years? Did you join a union, or did you hear about the kind of union work?

**DL:** No, no, because we... I guess if I'd sort of been working for one of the big mills, or the processors, that kind of thing would have gone on. But because we were as I say I was doing seasonal work at the marketing board, and then went straight on to work for the conditioning house. But I mean that wasn't heavily unionised at all. You know, we were doing more kind of lab technician work, and then going out and doing the sampling. So the union side of things didn't come into it.

**0:19:31**

**IS:** Yeah. And obviously in the '90s a lot of the mills did start closing, and you mentioned that. Do you remember any specific mill closures? Or do you remember the feelings that that community had? Because presumably, as the mills started closing, people were stressing about their jobs and the future of the industry. What do you remember about that?

**DL:** To be honest, that didn't make a big impact on me. I was in my 20s and too naive to be worried about that kind of thing. I had no definite plans myself then either, and I was taking stuff day by day. I'm sure for these people that were relying on it to support their families it must have been quite scary, to be honest. But it would just be, you would stop seeing a particular mill showing up in the book every morning and it's like, 'Oh no, they're finished, they don't work. They're closed.'

**0:20:33**

**DL:** And then you'd be just going to the mills or the processors that were open, you know. So that side of it didn't impact me. But it was noticeable, you know. As you drove around, you'd see more and more sites being demolished. At the time they weren't being demolished to build something new. I think they were just reclaiming all the stonework. Because these [were] all clad in stone with valley guttering with stonework on it as well. And so I think the fabric of the building itself was more valuable than...

**IS:** So they were left empty then, presumably, for quite a long time?

**DL:** Yeah, yeah. At the time, and this is kind of the mid to late '90s, yeah, you'd see a lot. There wasn't a lot of redevelopment. You could see stuff being pulled down, and like I say the stone being carted away and possibly all the cast iron and so on. But I think they were not looking at it as a site to redevelop, they were just looking at it as salvage materials.

**IS:** Yeah, it's really sad, isn't it? Because it's still the case for some of the mills, and the mansions associated... that they're sort of left empty. Or if they burnt down they were just left there. And it's a big shame because it has massively altered the landscape of Bradford. I know that you won't have seen that, but it is, yeah, it is really sad.

**IS:** One thing I want to ask you about is just your pay packet. How did the payment work for your seasonal work that you did?

**0:22:06**

**DL:** So, you would sign in and out. Well, you'd actually clock in and out every day. And then at the end of the week you would get a little brown envelope with cash in it. And you'd get docked if you were late. And if you wanted to work over, you'd maybe get a bit of bonus. But that was it, brown paper envelope with the cash in it at the end of the week. Yeah, with a week with a week in hand.



**IS:** Oh, lovely. Because you'll have worked on an hourly basis presumably, as opposed to pay by piece, like if you were working in other aspects of the textile process.

**DL:** Yeah, it wasn't piecework for us, no. I guess some of these kind of more skilled people would have been doing stuff like that, but it's not something that I ever witnessed, or was involved in.

**0:22:54**

**IS:** Brilliant. Thank you so much for talking with me. So, when you left the textile industry, was that because you'd sort of finished studying and you were moving on, and moving away? Or was it because of the lack of opportunities that came from the fact that a lot of these mills were closing? It sounds like you had different plans and different options out there.

**DL:** No, that's an interesting question. So, while I was working for the conditioning house, we had a maintenance guy in there, and he was a proper old school mill boy. And he, a guy called Chris, Chris Mullen. And because we had very busy periods (depending on whether the clip was coming in from South America or, you know, the UK,) we had downtime where he used to do all the maintenance on things like the Shirley analyzers and the scouring machines, and bits and pieces like that.

**0:23:57**

**DL:** And he just said, 'Do you want [to give me] a hand?' You know, 'Do you want to get involved?' And so, I got him... I used to help him, used to love helping, you know, strip down these bits of machinery and build them back up again. And any bits and pieces, kind of maintenance that needed doing around the office, or the lab or whatever, we would do it together. So it got to the point where I was kind of thinking, 'I want to move on from this.' You know, because the pay wasn't great, to be honest. And I started looking for other things to do. And I saw an advert for an apprentice air conditioning engineer, in the T&A. And I went to Chris, and I said, 'Do you think you could give me a...' (Actually no, Chris was his son's name, sorry, what was his name, now?) Chris was his son's name, who I went to work for. So I went to Peter, Peter Mallon, [and] I said, 'Would you give me a reference, you know, if I wanted to become this air conditioning engineer?' He said, 'Well, if you want to learn another trade, my lad, he works for himself, but he works for a security company, they put in CCTV, and bits and pieces like that. And he's looking for a lad to work with him. And so that's what I did. I started working for Peter's son, Chris, installing CCTV all over the country.

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**IS:** Wow. So that opportunity came from the fact that you had met these people and made these connections through your initial work within the textile industry, which is amazing.

**DL:** Exactly, yeah. And so I stayed in the security industry. I kind of got...as and when, you know, I've done various BTEC qualifications, either sponsored by the company I was working for, [or] I've done them in my own time, and so on. And so I started doing that in 1999. And kind of roll on 2022, I ended up as the operations director for a big company down in Luton, well, near Watford, Hemel Hempstead.

**0:26:09**

**IS:** Oh, that's fantastic.

**DL:** Yeah, yeah. It's surprising, you know, where you end up!

**IS:** And I guess it comes back to that sense of community as well and people wanting to help you out and make you feel included. And it seems as though it was a very friendly environment to work in, and that people really did...

**DL:** It was. Like I say, it wasn't the best paid work, you know. And some of the people that had to do, especially the kind of the grimy manual kind of side of it, weren't the most privileged and lucky members of society. But they all looked after each other.

**0:26:49**

**DL:** And, yeah, so when that opportunity came along, and he said 'No'... In fact, actually going all the way back to my time at the Wool Board. So I was just doing... I'd dropped out of college. I needed work, and that's why I came back in the second season. And I was just working on the gang that were taking the sheets once they'd been weighed in to the tables to be sorted. I'd been doing that a few weeks, and one of the guys there who ran that gang... that took the sheets to the tables... a guy called Mick Dixon. He just said, 'This conditioning house that come in, they get their samples coming in, they're looking for a lad to help out and, you know, to take on a role in their job. So I think that will be good for you.' So that again that was somebody...

**IS:** Word of mouth.

**DL:** You know, looking out for you, helping you on that next step of your journey. Even though it was a small thing, you know, just a little helping hand when you needed it. And that kind of set that chain of events in action, you know.

**IS:** Yeah, that's amazing. Just really quickly, because you've mentioned the Wool Board, can you remember your typical hours that you worked there? So, because I know that sometimes people started really early. And you said they had a canteen, which not every workplace had. Did you do just the day shifts... you won't have done nights and things with the sort of job you were doing, would you?

**0:28:04**

**DL:** No, no, it was... the Wool Board had its own, it was the British Wool Marketing Board, they'd have had all their posh offices on one side, but they also had a grading warehouse where the wool would have come in from the local farms in sheets. And it would have been graded, baled and then sent on. So the kind of canteen was almost in between the two. So we went from the warehouse to the canteen. But we would never go on to the posh offices where the marking had come from.

**0:28:43**

**DL:** But they did, round the back, they actually did have a pen with some sheep in. I think they were Jacobs, you know, like a rare breed. So yeah, it was, yeah, that was an interesting place in itself, but I think that's gone now as well.

**IS:** I'll have to have a look at where that was, where that was situated.

**DL:** It was up in the middle of Clayton. And I believe it's a housing estate now.

**IS:** Ahh, because as part of this, we're making an interactive map on Google to show the locations of all the mills and workplaces and everything within Bradford, and what happened to them. Because obviously so many have been demolished and renovated into other things. So I'll definitely... nobody's mentioned this yet, so I'll make sure to add it to my map. Oh, thank you so much. Is there anything else, any anecdotes or anything that you can think of? I don't want to hold you up because you're on your lunch break.

**0:29:41**

**DL:** Yeah, yeah, I should get back. Look, I don't mind chatting again at another time. If I can turn up any of these sample books where I've got all the sites we went to.

**IS:** Yeah, that'd be fantastic. Thank you.

**DL:** And, yeah, I'm not a great writer, but I might be able to jot some stuff down. But, yeah, I've no problem talking to you again. If anything comes up, and if you speak to anybody else who works at the Wool Board or at Wool Testing Services and they come up with something... if you want anything referenced, you know. It might jog my memory.

**IS:** Oh, thank you so much. Yeah absolutely. And as I say, if you do happen to stumble across any of your sample books it would be amazing to hear about them and things. But thank you so much, you've told me so many amazing things. And it's a part of the process we've not heard a lot of people talk about yet. So it's really nice to get that full rounded picture of the entire industry and all the different jobs that are required to do what you guys did. So thank you so much.

**0:30:27**

**DL:** No problem at all.

**IS:** Enjoy the rest of your day. Thanks so much, Dan.

**DL:** No problem, cheers, bye.

**IS:** Bye.