

Glenn McCauley -Transcript

Audio Quality : Good

Transcript focuses on immigration from Northern Ireland and family life

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LMI: Yes, I'm talking to Glenn McCauley here. And his parents came over to Bradford from Northern Ireland in the mid '60s. And so, you were just talking to me about your parents who came over from Bessbrook, and some of the reasons why they wanted to make that move.

GM: I suppose it was... it will have been the early '60s, early to mid '60s. And Dad had to leave school, couldn't do the 11 plus, had to get employment to, you know, feed the family really, in terms of, you know, a big Irish Catholic family. And he was working in... on looms in the mill, yeah? And he used to get certain dispensations from the guy who led the operations, because this guy used to have... kept pigs. And my dad, when he was a kid, used to look after pigs. So this guy knew that if he employed my dad... you know, on a Wednesday afternoon or something, he'd say, 'Oh, can you just go in and look at my pigs for a little bit?' So my dad used to do that. And...but... you know, and it's only recently where, you know, my dad sort of said he had no great aspirations about becoming a mill owner or leading anything. He said he just wanted to be a fitter on the looms because he... they would ask him to fix looms because the machines broke down, yeah? But because of the divide, really, in terms of what roles you were allowed to do, he never really got the chance to become... even to become a fitter. So he would always... he just felt that, I think, he would always be working - if it was in the mills - it would be weaving and winding and doing the mill trade yeah, making Irish linen, he wouldn't be able to progress.

LMI: So it would always be manual labour?

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GM: Always manual labour. And he would...and that, you know... or like a lot of my family, went into building trade and working, you know, on building sites, and do that. And obviously, that bit of the world, you've got...you had the wool mill... So obviously, you'd have had a linen mill, and you'd have had building, and you'd have had agriculture, but there probably wouldn't have been very much else. Yeah? And I think that was the main driver for him coming over and joining some of his sisters, who had already come to Bradford. And they were working in the mills in Bradford. And I just thought he... I think he felt it was... would be a better environment. And, yeah... be less issues around people asking you for references. And, you know, those references being from your vicar, or your priest, you know.

LMI: Oh, right.

GM: If they didn't know from your school, you know, they'd ask for, yeah, 'Could we have a reference from, you know, someone from your religion?' And as soon as he gave them, then whoever's doing your CV would look at your CV or your reference [and] would know.

LMI: Interesting.

GM: So I think that was a driver for him coming to Bradford. And he worked in various mills around Bradford. And then eventually went to work for Associated Weaver's, carpets, on Toffshaw Lane.

LMI: So he came over in the early '60s and your mother came over in the mid '60s?

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GM: Yeah, yeah, yeah, she followed and...

LMI: And they knew each other before?

GM: Yeah, they knew each other before. They worked opposite each other in, on the looms making Irish linen in Bessbrook Mill. That's how they.... And the story goes that they... They, yeah, the supervisor, or whoever it was who led that production, ended up putting my dad's... the loom my dad worked on, the loom my mum worked on, next to each other, because my dad spent so much time around that loom, my mum's loom, that.... It always seemed to break down. And my dad always seemed to have to be around to fix it! So I think they thought, 'It might be eas[ier] if we just put them working next to each other, or opposite each other.' So that's how they, you know... whether that's how they met, but they certainly worked together in Bessbrook Mill. And then when my dad came over, he sent money back to... And they decided they would set up home.

LMI: Were they already married when, you know...?

GM: No, no, they came over and... My dad came over and then my mum's first job, I think was with Seabrook Crisps in Allerton.

LMI: A fine company to work for.

GM: Yeah, and knew, she knew the original owner, Colin Brook. And I think when she got married, she actually was working for Seabrooks rather than [in] the mills. But she then went to work for a few mills in Allerton. Star Textiles, I think, was one of them. They were living here. I think they were living *in* the same house, but... sort of under the same roof, but they weren't cohabiting. They were with one of my dad's... half-sister, who was already over here.

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LMI: Keeping them in check.

GM: Keeping them in check. And then they got married. And then they got their first, rented their first home in Allerton.

LMI: I think it's quite interesting that. Because the story of migration into Bradford tends to be, you know, people tend to think of it...as if lots of people come over from the Indian subcontinent, from South Asia. Maybe a few from Eastern Europe. But actually, it's a much more complicated picture than that. And I think your parents really... identify that fact. You know, they... because they came to Bradford because there was opportunity here. And I think...and they had the skills, presumably, as well.

GM: Yeah, yeah. And I... I don't know what the numbers are, but I certainly know... just in and around Allerton where... off ...not far from Lee Top Lane, you know. My auntie lived just up the road. You know, she'd come over and she was working in a mill. My auntie Patsy, she came and did the same thing.

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GM: Their, um.... the sister of a brother-in-law who'd come over, and she was working. So even in my little... who I knew... there was plenty of Irish voices around. And the thing I do remember is, my dad would go up to Keighley. If we were... if we were in Keighley, yeah, just... because we live in Allerton, Keighley wasn't far. If we went up there and we were walking around and we were going shopping or something, my dad would bump into people he knew from South Armagh.

LMI: So there were people...

GM: Keighley was quite a big community, big Irish community.

LMI: See, that's really interesting, isn't it? I've never heard it mentioned before that there was a Northern Irish community in Bradford, working in the mills. It has never been talked about.

GM: I'm sure when you speak to my [mum and] dad, they will tell you all sorts of names of people. But I do remember...I remember vividly my dad bumping into... Going round Keighley...and it wasn't somewhere we ever really went to, if I'm being honest. But a couple of occasions going, and always bumping into someone. And me like being quiet, I was like, 'How do you just bump into people?'

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GM: And they're from pretty much the same village. Because you know when they're in Northern Ireland they wouldn't travel very far from... They're from out... Bessbrook is from outside Newry. So they'd have...yeah, they wouldn't have gone very far. So yeah, it was people in their same communities who'd all transported themselves to...

LMI: So do you think they move mainly for... to... because they felt it was a kind of a safer environment to live, obviously. But also financial? Was there a financial incentive?

GM: I think it was... I think, opportunity, yeah? I don't think either of them... none of them are political, yeah? So I don't think there was any sense of republicanism in them. That's not...

LMI: Or danger, even?

GM: No, no, I don't think that's... I've never really heard that...

LMI: But there was, as you said just now, that sense of... kind of like, almost like an apartheid in the employment.

GM: Yeah. Yeah, yeah yeah. Absolutely.

LMI: So something which is hard for people to understand, I think, quite often now, particularly, you know, the younger people who might be listening to this recording in a few years' time. But, you know, it's quite interesting that that happened over there. And over here in Bradford. There was also some of that going on with some of the Asian communities coming to Bradford and.... Or working the night shift for less money than people working the day shift...

GM: Yeah.

LMI: ...that also happened.

GM: Yeah. Well, when my mum... my mum will... when you listen to my mum, when she says about trying to rent her first house in Bradford... You know, she was pleading.

LMI: 'No Irish.'

GM: 'No Irish.' She was pleading, you know, to, yeah, to get, to rent a place. It's a...

LMI: So you... you were.... when you were a child, were your parents working in the mill then?

GM: Yeah. Dad was working at the carpet factory. Mum was working round the corner in... which is now the Aldi in Allerton. So the Aldi in Allerton is now, which it used to be...

LMI: Do you remember the name of the mill?

GM: Star Textiles was the one I remember, there'll have been other names. But basically, there was a Seabrooks crisp factory, on the site where Aldi currently is. And next to it was Star Textiles. And I remember my mum working there. And after school me and my sister wandering around on Ley Top Lane in Bradford and in Allerton. And walking round by the side of the mill, in round the back, where all the wool was stored. And just being hit by this smell of wool, that had either been, you know, refined and was ready to go.

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GM: Or...but these big, huge bales of wool in this warehouse, wool warehouse. And me and my sister...there was no sense of health and safety, I don't think... we used to play hide and seek amongst these big bales. In this dark room smelling of wool. And it was, yeah. So we would do that until my mum finished work. My mum would finish work and then we'd walk. And then as I got older, we could then go... we could go straight home, we didn't have to go, sort of pop in.

LMI: It's interesting quite a few people have told us about going into the mill when they were little, when their parents were working there. And just sort of sitting around, you know, waiting for them to finish their shift. And like in, you know, where the spinning and where the looms were.

GM: Yeah, we weren't quite in there because all of the... this building had about, I don't know, maybe three or four, four or five floors. But the lower level, quite a tall ceiling, and a warehouse where they keep all the bales of wool and things. And so we would be in there. It was like this musty...

LMI: It's a very evocative smell, isn't it?

GM: Yeah, yeah. Amazing. And I remember it being dark, very few windows. And it was, it was otherworldly, really, just this place...

LMI: Did you like it?

GM: Yeah. I thought it was fantastic. It was like... I mean, there was no mobile phones. We weren't sitting there, you know, on Instagram or anything like that. Or looking at, you know, whatever kids look at these days. It was a... we just played around. And yeah, ran around this place and er...But all the mills were upstairs. So

LMI: Were there mill workers there? Kind of...?

GM: There'll have been the supervisor and the...

LMI: And they were quite happy for you...?

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GM: ... Yeah, yeah. And obviously they get, you know, they got used to...got used to us coming in. And I suppose it was either that, or my mum saying she wouldn't be able to work for them. I mean, she was a great worker. And she was very skilled in terms of that. And then... And then the other thing I remember... I suppose, before then, was, my mum used to do burling and mending. So she used to take pieces of fabric in. And so that's like piecework...

LMI: And do it at home?

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GM: And do it at home. So I do... I remember that, as a really young boy, mum doing that. And she would, yeah, you know, when we went to bed, dad might do... work night shifts. We would be in bed. And my mum would take these big pieces of Bradford worsted, put it on the table and work through. And she was an absolute expert. She's fantastic in terms of needlework. And she would go through and work under... with a light, you know, through... late into the night with a little light on her, moving these pieces of fabric over the table and picking out these imperfections and fixing them. And then there was a... then obviously, she'd roll them up, and they'd be down our corridor in the, sorry, so in the hall in the... So, it was a... it was a terraced house in Bradford. And from the front door there was like a little vestibule. And then there was a hall. And then the men who came with a... with the fabric, would basically haul it in, lay it down the hall. And I just remember as a boy, the stairs... the staircase upstairs was at 90 degrees to the hall. So, you know, I'd end up sort of jumping down and landing on these bits of fabric. And my mum sort of sat shouting at me how expensive those things were. But no, that's what... that's what she did as er... pre-school.

LMI: They would have been expensive, wouldn't they? Because otherwise they wouldn't have been bothering to mend them. So they would have had to have been the finer fabrics.

GM: Yeah.

LMI: And I have seen... I worked in a mill in the '70s over one summer, and there was a guy doing perching. Which is the same thing, except it's done in the mill where they... the cloth just runs past them. And they keep checking it. It's on a machine. And they just keep checking. And they stop it and fix it. And it carries on.

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GM: So yeah, that's what... while my mum... because I'm... there's two years between me and my sister, so... I'm sure my mum will be able to tell you the finer details, but I remember pre-school, *that's* what my mum would have done. And then when we were old enough to go to primary school... I suppose it would have been... I would have remembered when I'd gone to school, and my sister hadn't, probably coming home from school and seeing my mum working. And then whenever we were both old enough to go to primary school my mum went back to work in the mill.

LMI: And did you have kind of... um, Christmas parties or trips out? Or anything like that with the mill?

GM: No, no I don't remember any of that. Don't remember any of that.

LMI: Some people have told us... Some mills did it, and some mills didn't.

GM: Yeah, yeah. No, I don't think... I don't get any sense of that, um, the sort of, yeah, big trips out anywhere. It... no, there was none of that. It was quite small... it was quite a small place, but very much, you know, it was in, as I say, the main street in Allerton, really.

LMI: I'm really looking forward to meeting your parents now. I really am. I'll turn this off. But that was nice. Great bits of remembering mill life in the... '70s, would that have been?

GM: Yeah, that would have been the '70s, late '70s, early '80s. I think, yeah, I think my mum left textiles in probably early '80s, something like that.

LMI: Thanks Glenn.

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GM: That's all right.