

## **Richard Smith - Transcript**

*Audio Quality: Good, there are some occasions where the recording is scratchy.*

*Very detailed interview regarding experience of running a family mill from 1980 -2005 with particular focus on new technology, management and mill closures*

**0:00:00**

**LMI:** Thank you so much. Brilliant. So, I'll just take my pen back. I'm just going to make notes whilst we chat, so that I can transcribe a bit easier.

**RS:** Yeah.

**LMI:** But...do you want to remain anonymous?

**0:00:22**

**RS:** No.

**LMI:** So, this is Richard Smith. Hiya, Richard, you all right?

**RS:** I am, thank you.

**LMI:** Lovely. And do you just want to start off by telling us about your experience with the mills? I know that you've got a big family heritage with that.

**RS:** Yeah.

**LMI:** So, I'll let you just guide the conversation. I'm going to leave, yeah.

**RS:** Ramble along.

**LMI:** Absolutely. I'm not going to speak a lot in between. So if it looks like I'm ignoring you, it's just I'm trying to keep quiet for the recording.

**RS:** Ok, well, my background within the textile fraternity, as I call it - I'm the grandson of Edward Smith, who founded E. & S. Smiths in 1935. They were Jacquard Furnishing Weavers. And originally, they were based down in Aireworth Mills, in Keighley, just near Marley. And then in 1958 they moved to... they bought Reckley Mills which was at Odsal Top. And they changed the name from Reckley Mills to Stadium Mills and moved in in 1956.

**RS:** Then sadly my grandfather passed away in 1959 when I was 18 months old. So whilst I never talked to him, or have any memories of him, he knew that dad had continued in the male family line. Unlike my dad who at the age of six, in 1956, was shown the new letterhead of E.& S. Smith in 1935. My father at the time...E&S Smith is Edward and Stanley Smith.

**RS:** My father was born in 1929. And then Grandpa, if I get the dates right, founded E. &S. Smith in 1935. So my poor dad was destined to go into the mill. But I didn't join the family business until 1984, having been told in no circumstances to get myself a 'proper job' by my dad. And uh... I'd worked in the timber trade for ten years with a company called Arnold Lavers. And absolutely loved it. Er...

**RS:** But then my father had er... seen changes in the... in the machinery er... for weaving... Our skill set was weaving Jacquard furnishing fabrics. So we weren't a worsted or wool weaver, which the rest of our contemporaries in Bradford were involved with. We wove pattern fabrics for wholesalers. And Dad had been to this trade fair in Milan and seen a British invention, which was a computerised Jacquard machine. Which was basically a mind-blowing invention because it increased the speed of the production of fabric, or the number of picks. You know what picks are, don't you?

**LMI:** Mmm.

**RS:** So the picks is the unit of production from a machine. And the meterage production relates to how many picks you put in the fabric. So we always used to talk about 'picks' on the looms. And so we went from the loom that had mechanical readings, or cards, to read which was about 280 to 300 picks a minute, to a machine that could weave at 600 picks a minute. And coupled with that, the method in the 1980s for transferring a pattern into a woven fabric, they used to have to draw out the patterns onto graph paper which was transferred into the punch cards that the looms read. But computer aided design came along in the early 1980s, and this is what my dad had seen initially. So this time-consuming process of doing the designs suddenly, with this computer-aided design equipment, that could be done an awful lot quicker.

**RS:** And the British mills, particularly in the Aire Valley... we were very fortunate to be in the right country for the developer of the computer Jacquard invention, which... They were based in Gateshead, called Bonus Machine Company. And so, they needed to prove their invention, and what better way of trial... letting the local mills trial this new invention? So the Aire Valley, there were several mills: Ourselves, a company called Downs Coulter in Thornton. And the real pioneering company - a tie weaver, a silk and school tie weaver called Masons in Skipton, they had the first prototypes of this modern computer technology. So all this industrial revolution that you heard about from the 1980s, you fast forward 100 years and we have this electronic revolution centered around the Yorkshire and Lancashire mills. I mentioned Lancashire, they did get some electronic Jacquards as well.

**RS:** But it offset the cost of the designs. We were suddenly more competitive. Although you still have to invest in the new technology, which the government helped with grants for. It enabled us to respond quicker than the foreign mills. It was a window of about three to five years where the British mills got this leg up with the technology, that enabled them to kind

of defend their order base, if you like. And the Belgium... traditionally it was Belgian mills for upholstery fabrics and French mills for decorative interiors. They were a bit slow on the uptake in getting this modern machinery.

**RS:** So we did take quite a bit of market share. And the other thing that happened in the 1980s for my sector, the furnishing sector, is - the British government changed the law for the type of fabric that could be upholstered onto furniture. And it required... 1988 British fire regulations came in. And they required to have fabric that was cigarette and match proof for domestic furniture.

**RS:** In hotels, there was a slightly different flame-retardant test, a higher standard called CRIB 5. And that was also important for hotels and public buildings, government buildings. And so this regulation was announced in 1985. The industry had three years to get its head round 'How the hell we're going to do this?' As I say, the mills that were involved with furnishing fabrics, we all benefited hugely.

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**RS:** Firstly with the computer aided design. And then with a law that restricted some of the foreign imports. Because the foreign imported fabric had to be...they didn't weave it inherently flame proof, they had to back coat it with a flame retardancy. So the fabric... that technology was in its infancy and there was all sorts of accidents where the fabric coaters didn't... they were coating the wrong side of the fabric. So there was all sorts of accidents and happenings. So, it was brilliant for Smith's.

**LMI:** Just to go back to when you first joined with your dad...you sort of talked me through it a little bit earlier. Could you just re-

**RS:** I was told to get a 'proper job' and not go into textiles. Because at the age of six Dad had seen his destiny. He was going to go into the weaving mill. When Grandpa died, Dad...he had no business at all. And he had to start again. And it was really hard work. Tough work.

**RS:** He actually had some great help from the local mill. But when I joined my dad, his enthusiasm for machinery was unparalleled. He just could fix anything. And the idea of investing in new high-tech machinery, that really excited him. For me, I knew the basics of shuttle looms and punch cards, which still existed when I joined the family firm in 1984. We had a few conversations about 'What's in it for me down the track?' When I told my father what I was earning in the timber trade, he had to have a sit down and a whisky, I think. Because I earned more than he did.

**RS:** We had no company pension or anything. But it was a bit of a leap of faith, really. And my grandmother, dad's mother, who I was very close with, she was a very influential lady, she said, 'I know you're doing very well in the timber trade, but it will mean a lot to your father and me if you could continue Edward's legacy. It would be fantastic.' So that was it really.

**LMI:** And when you joined, you did make some changes, didn't you, to the business and how it all worked?

**RS:** Not straight away, because I was keen to find out what the strengths and weaknesses were.

Everything went through Dad. Silly little things like the poor weavers, they'd have to come and knock... So, when I joined in 1984, the mill had 12 staff. And I was the youngest by 30 years. And some of the staff, one of the members of staff, John Rothera, he'd worked for my grandfather. He actually worked for the mill for 50 years, before retiring. But everything went through Dad - like the inventory for the toilet rolls for the ladies. You know, the poor weavers would have to, [knocks] 'Mr Smith, Mr Smith!' And they're there plaiting their legs, they're desperate to go! And he got really annoyed about how much toilet paper they were using. So he changed the paper from soft Andrex tissues to...

**LMI:** One ply?

**RS:** Well, he didn't issue one ply, he wasn't that bad. But he went on to Izel. And I said to him, 'That's outrageous!' You know, this... 'They're not wiping their bottoms! Come on, Dad!' So I had an awful lot of hair pulling and, 'So why do we do this? Why do we do this?'

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**RS:** And he said, 'Why are you always asking bloody questions.? Come on, it's five o'clock, it's time to go!' He was a creature of habit. From sounding the bell in the morning... So he'd get to the mill at seven in the morning, having picked up two work people on the way to work. He'd then have his breakfast, which was prepared the night before. Bacon and egg sandwich. Prepared the night before. Along with some Mighty White bread, which he smeared with Lyon syrup.

**LMI:** Oh, very nice.

**0:13:00**

**RS:** And that was his staple diet.

**LMI:** It's quite American, really.

**RS:** That was what he had for breakfast, washed down with this pint pot. It was a pint pot, a ceramic pint pot of tea. And lo and behold, nothing happened until after tea. And then he went down and pressed the buzzer at 8 o'clock. And that's when the looms started. And then at 12 o'clock he pressed the button again and that's when lunch was. So things we used to argue about was that there was only one phone. So, Dad had a right-hand man in the offices, Alan Stringer, who was a designer. A very, very accomplished designer, who took me under his wing because he could see my father barking at me and, 'Stop asking questions.' And er, 'Oh, your father won't like that idea.' I said, 'Why?' 'Well, it didn't work when we tried it

before.' I said, 'Why didn't it work?' 'Because of this, this and this.' 'All right, well, why don't we do it this way now?'

**0:13:59**

**RS:** 'Well, that'll probably work. Well, let's try that, but you better put it to your father because I'm not.' He wasn't an ogre, he wasn't an ogre, but it got better, because I was so desperate to prove myself. And... I was telling you about the lunch time, 12 o'clock. He used to take the bloody phone off the hook. 'I'm going to have my lunch.'

**LMI:** I might be doing that myself, actually

**RS:** 'What happens if one of the people I've been seeing in London...?' 'Oh, you and your London fancy friends. Nothing's come of those trips. Bloody waste of time.' I said, 'It's not at all, it'll happen.' And sure enough, I went into the office at ten past twelve. I'd persuaded him to leave the phone...not take it off the hook.

**0:14:48**

**RS:** 'Who is it? What? Habi what? What kind of name is that? Habitat?' I wanted the floor to open up and swallow him. I said, 'Give the phone to me, Dad. Thanks,Dad. And it was the buyer that I had been seeing at Habitat who was taking an interest in some fabrics. And then...that was the next thing he did, because we were falling over... He was a chain smoker as well, so I was inhaling 20-40 cigarettes a day. Alan Stringer didn't seem to bother too much, who shared the office. But I said, 'I need my own space.' He said, 'All them bloody leaflets and samples you bring in from our competitors, you need another office.' Anyway, I went on holiday for a fortnight. And when I came back, he'd cleared the sample room next to the office at the back. Chucked all the archive history of the mill away. Apart from one cabinet which just had the paper designs in. But all the fabric samples - gone. But I had this nice office. 'There you are, that will be alright.' I'd been with him six months and I'd decided, 'I'm going to give this a go. I quite like travelling down to London and meeting nice people.' And being a bit of a secret.

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**RS:** We had this... leg up with the flame-retardant laws which happened 3 or 4 years later. We knew it was coming. And the people I'd visited and banged my head against the brick wall because they had already got existing suppliers, and 'Who the hell are you? We've never heard of E. & S. Smith. We've never bought anything from you guys.' I was in my early 30s, so I was fairly young to be saying, 'I've got a mill in Bradford, and we can do this, that and the other, and what do you want us to make?' And the fantastic thing was the staffs' reaction. Because when I arrived a lot of them were thinking, 'What's going to happen when Stanley gets to another 10-15 years? He might never retire... but he might decide to sell up.' And so they were quite supportive. But then as the work came in, and we got these new looms arriving, and the word got out in the trade that we were capable. We couldn't cope with the order book. It was fantastic. So, to give you an example. What do they say...? 'Turnover is

vanity, profit is sanity.' But to give you an idea - from 12 people in '84; by 1994, another 10 years, we'd built an extension on the mill to house the new equipment, and the fact that we were producing four times as much as we were. So in 1984 our turnover was around about 400,000. And in 1994 it was just under 4 million. And in 1994 we started to burst out of the original building. But then we built this extension. And then it became apparent in 1994...we'd 36 staff in '94. So it was a steady growth. And we still knew everybody. We knew all the names. We knew the background of the families. And the beauty was because we were doing well, we were offering overtime and pay was better than the worsted mills. We started employing some people from local mills, one of them was Fosters at Queensberry, a very famous Black Dyke Mills there. They were fantastically skilled in fine worsted yarns and fine yarns.

**0:18:37**

**RS:** And our work, Jacquard work, was particularly fine and fiddly. It did need some attention. You couldn't just turn the loom on and make cloth. It had attention to detail. But the staff we got were absolutely brilliant, very, very skilled.

**LMI:** Obviously you had 12 in 1984 and about 36 in 1990. What was the demographic like for those workers?

**RS:** Well, being the youngest chap in the business, I was keen to make sure they didn't all retire before I was ready to hang my boots up. By 1994 we had two apprentice overlookers. So they were the first mechanic overlookers in West Yorkshire for about 10 years. One of them came to us without any...Gareth Pearson, when he graduated at Bradford Tech, he didn't have any qualifications. So we persuaded the Huddersfield Tech to take him on. And he just sailed through it all. So yeah, there were two young school leavers that we set on. And then we had...

**0:19:56**

**RS:** ...whether it was a... in the original 12 there were three sisters, er weavers. The Gills -two sisters and a relative. And so... they'd worked for Dad for fifteen, twenty years. And then... that's right, when the new machinery started coming in, the existing engineers were used to shuttles and pulleys and making sure they oiled the machine. But electronics and how to fix them was a new discipline. So the machinery supplier, the people we were buying the electronic machinery from, they introduced us to a young guy called Stephen Walker, who was a genius. He came with fantastic recommendations.

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**RS:** He lived in Huddersfield, did Stephen. And he came along and he complemented Dad's main overlooker, David Drake, who was in his...he was the similar age to Dad. And they used to go to the pub every Saturday after they were working on a...Saturday lunchtime was always overtime day, double time. And Dad always used to get bacon sandwiches...

breakfast brought in. It became a bit of a celebration of the week that was. You know, the fact that the mill was bursting at the seams. And each week we tried to beat the pick count.

**0:21:33**

**RS:** So Thursday tea time was when we went round to read all of the looms. And the target was about 14 million picks a week, but Dad aspired to hit 20. And then as we got more faster looms, we got the picks up. And that was his main thing. I remember, I think it was 1995, he'd said to me... I said, 'What's your ambition here?' 'You keep talking and selling the cloth, and David and I and Stephen will sort out how to make the bloody stuff for you. And we'll keep buying machinery.' And in 1994, I'll never forget it, a customer came up... It was a dream. It was a dream time. Everything we went for came off. And one particular customer came to see us and said, 'This pattern book you've just developed, Richard, with Stephanie, the designer...' The company was called G.P. & J Bakers. And Stephanie was my age. And her boss had been off on long term illness. And she'd found herself as the design director all of a sudden. And so she had free rein to push the business along. It's part of the big group, was G.P. & J. Baker. We did this pattern book. I'd love to show you it... but I've still got copies of all the pattern books we did. But it was really, really colourful, very, very decorative. I think I've got a picture of it here. But anyway, this pattern book was launched. And there's a term called an SKU, which is Stock Kept Unit. And Stock Kept Unit was generally the style of fabric, or the colourway of the fabric, in a pattern book. And in Stephanie's pattern book development... we'd done a couple of small books for her... but we did this book which was christened 'Jour de Té,' Days of Summer. That's not it, that's the next one we did... And this pattern book had 112 SKUs in it, and they ordered 400m of each. And the average price was £6.50 a metre. So you can do the math, it was a big order.

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**LMI:** And how long would an order like that take to make?

**RS:** About three months. And in the 1990s, the mid-1990s when we'd hit this stream, this gold stream of product that needed to be flame retardant... So it was a decorative fabric... So that's a picture of another range which Bakers did. This is called Helios. And all these styles of fabric. This was our main feature. It was a clever... without getting technical, that was a really clever fabric. It had cramming in it. That's going off tangent really. But it was very, very well received. And Mr. Fear, the managing director, who'd just been appointed - had come in on the wave of the success of this new collection... We'd met him before with his other... previous employer. And he said to my father, he said, 'I'm really struggling here because I can't tell you how busy this is going... This book is going to go really well. We need to plan the next one, and the next one after. And the summer style, because it's been received so well. But how many looms have you got?' My dad said, 'We've got 18 machines. But we can fit 24 in. But they're not all electronic. There's only 10 of them electronic, because I'm not made of money. But what are you telling me about... we *are* thinking of buying a few more

looms... what are you telling me about the meterage?' And he gave us this figure. And we worked it out, that it was capable of keeping two looms going all year. Which in our scheme, that was quite good. And so my dad said, 'Well, I'll tell you what it is, Martin, seeing as how you're going to do another collection with me. And I'll have your guts for garters if you don't place the order. I'm going to place an order for four looms for you, for earmarking for Bakers. And another two looms for me.'

**0:26:15**

**RS:** 'Oh, you won't need the other two looms.' My father said, 'Do you think I'm daft? I'm not having all my eggs in one basket - *yours*. I need to offset it. And Bugger Lugs here, will go and find us some more customers to fill the other two looms.' A loom, with a Jacquard on it, was £120,000 each.

**LMI:** Wow. And how did it work when you purchased that? Did you have to pay up front for that?

**RS:** Well, we were doing very well! So we paid up front for four of them. And put the other two on finance. But then the progression was then, bear in mind we'd just spent a quarter of a million pound on a new weaving shed extension in '92. So it was a dream job. And the amusing thing was that within the Bradford textile fraternity, the worsted weavers were still working out where the next shilling was coming from. They were like... 'What the hell?'

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**RS:** 'What do you mean Smith's bought another four bloody looms? They've got a ripping machine as well! He's nicked some staff from Fosters!' He hasn't nicked them. He put a job in the paper and they applied. And he set them on. He hadn't stolen anybody. But that... we were... Everybody was curious.

**LMI:** Well, your story is very different from most people we've spoken to. Because most people have talked about how in the '70s, '80s, the mills were shutting. Yeah. They were just struggling because a lot of the work was going overseas.

**RS:** Well, we could have shut in the '70s. It wasn't because I joined my dad in 1984 that the mill didn't close. It was the circumstances. Being in the right place. Having the nous to see the opportunities. And the bravery. Dad spending a quarter of a million pounds on the first two new looms that he didn't really know how to work. We didn't have a design system. We didn't have a designer that could do the computer aided design. Alan Stringer, who was a traditional textile designer and had fantastic skills. This is a side story... linked to the evolution, the computer age, that hit the Aire Valley. There was a company in Keighley called Calmon's. H.H. Calmon. They were responsible for a huge number of woven labels. Garment manufacturing. So they wove name tags. So, 'Made in England' 'Made in...' wherever, name tags. 'St Michael's' labels. And badges. Woven badges, that was another thing. And Mr Lee, who was the manager. Tony Lee was the managing director of H.H. Calmans. When he was a young lad, he was Alan Stringer's apprentice at the mill, at Smith's. He then went to America

and did very well in America. But Mr Calman kept in touch with Tony, (he'd worked for Mr Calman) and said, 'I want you to come and run my business.' Because he adopted him almost like his son.

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**RS:** So when he came back with all these new ideas for America, he'd seen this computer aided design. So, we are talking 1982, so it was really in its infancy. It was called a Weavette design system. And Alan at the time was 63. And he said, 'Richard I'm going to take you to see an old friend of mine. Well, he's not so old, he's older than you but he's younger than me. He was my apprentice, Tony Lee. And he's got this tie weaving machine. He's got this fantastic new computer-aided design system. I've read a lot about it, but I want to go and see it.' We went to see it. And Alan was just...it was like seeing somebody's blood flow away from them, because he could see that the hours and hours he'd hand-painted all these designs... And then, things like cut and paste was literally *that*. You cut out and pasted a mistake. Or you had to start again. But this Weavette computer was 10 times quicker producing a design. I still argue whether the person controlling the programs in the Weavette computer design was bright enough or experienced enough. Alan would have seen them off, because he had all the compound weaves in his head. He knew what worked and what didn't.

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**RS:** But he was visibly shaken. But... encouraged that... 'Wow! Well, if we had this...' 'Well,' Tony Lee said, 'you don't have to have one, I'll do all the designs for you. I'll do them. You come over here and bring us lots of pictures.' We were using his spare capacity. Because there are only so many 'Made in England' labels you can design. And so we tapped into this software, this design system. And it enabled us to take on doing larger designs. They were hugely expensive, doing the designs the traditional way. Like £2,000 or £3,000.

**0:31:42**

**RS:** To design something like that would be about £1,500, this design. Using the traditional methods with a public designer, who produced the punch cards. Do you know what punch cards look like? Do you know what I'm talking about?

**LMI:** I don't think I've seen a punch card yet. I've heard them talked about. Have you seen a punch card?

**LM12:** No, I don't think so.

**RS:** So that's the binary punch card, that goes on to the loom. So, the traditional way of... I'll just go and get a prop to show you... Something we got earlier... So in here is some original [?] paper designs. This is this is how designs used to be drawn up years ago. Bear in mind these are hand painted. And each...

**LMI:** Gosh, God forbid there was a fire. Which obviously, there was a lot of in those days.

**RS:** So this is from 1940s. And the designs were drawn out, pen and ink. And then, because this was a big design, you needed to draw it out twice. So you see the scale of this. So each column relates to the warp thread, that's the vertical thread in the fabric. And each row relates to the weft thread. And the dots are the interlacing points of the junction of the warp thread and the weft thread. And so in this pattern, in the length of the repeat, there are 202 weft picks. So there's 202 rows here. But the reality is, is that actually, that's only half of the number of cards you'd need to do the full design repeat. Because this pattern... Read all of these rows manually. So that red dot there is the third square on the 202nd weft thread. And that red square would have a hole in the card on the 202nd card.

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**RS:** So that was Alan Stringer's work, that's what he did. So there's about 20 hours there, just to draw it out. 20 hours. And then you had to cut the card, which was probably another 6 hours. So the cards physically were... This is a modern card here. This is a flexible card, on a machine that read the instructions quicker. So, in this loom's situation in 1940s, late 1940s, this machine would have read 90 of those rows in a minute.

**LMI:** Gosh, that's not bad.

**LMI2:** [A lot of mistakes.]

**RS:** Well, I hope there isn't, because there's 300 columns. There's 300 warp threads of the pattern. And  $202 \times 2 = 404$ . So 404, 300s. There's 120,000 squares on that piece of paper. And if you got one wrong, there would be a stitch in the cloth. So that was Alan Stringer's job. Now then you imagine he comes along to Keighley, in this design studio. When you open the door it goes 'tch tchhh'. There's a bright screen, it's not as fancy as the screens now, but it's an old big computer box. And the designer's got a sketch, that's been drawn to repeat. You have an overhead scanner. And then on the screen there's the bloody design! From that bit of paper!

**LMI:** That's incredible.

**RS:** And then they overlap that with the grid. And then they decide on the shades, on the screen what the weaves are going to be. And they press a button. And we don't have a set of cards! We don't have a set of cards! We have a floppy disk! It wasn't a floppy disk straight away, it was a blooming great big electronic circuit board called a modem. It... ultimately, it was electronic. And then as the '90s arrived, the designers were pressing a button to send the design to the loom, by Bluetooth. And sending it abroad. To Abdul... In China, Mr Wu, Abdul, are receiving the design work from the British design studios. And some of the British mills who were weaving offshore.

**LMI:** That's incredible.

**RS:** So we started... we were weaving with an Indian mill. We were developing the prototypes in the UK on our looms. Proofing the business, getting the orders. And then, for

the high street retail people like Next and Marks & Spencer's, we were then phoning the cavalry to say, 'Get me that base cloth from India.'

**0:37:12**

**LMI:** So you could offshore sits with cheaper labour costs.

**RS:** Yes, but it was our designs. It's only the same theory as Dyson's, who's kept all his R&D over here.

**LMI:** That's another way in which you diversified then, I suppose...

**RS:** We did.

**LMI:** ...and moved into a more modern age when it came to fashion and fabrics and everything.

**RS:** Well, one of the funniest things... we were talking about the staff, who were a wonderful group. It was like a close family. Nobody left. I think it was six years, nobody had left.

**LMI:** That's amazing staff [retention.]

**RS:** And they were all saying, you know, 'Oh, can my mate come and work for us, you need a driver.' So, 'Why do we need a driver? We'd have to buy a van.' 'Oh right, well.' So anyway, we'd leave it a bit. But anyway, so we got our staff through recommendations. And it was quite clear that if they introduced somebody that was bloody useless, they'd soon find out. So it was... getting staff wasn't a problem.

**0:38:14**

**LMI:** And did you have, I know you mentioned the two sisters and the relative that were women that were weavers. What was the split like between men, women? Were they British? Or did you have some...we've spoken to quite a few people from Bangladesh that moved over.

**RS:** Yeah, we didn't have any Asian... we did have a couple of Asians in the early years, on the weaving side. Men. But generally... I'm not a racist...We basically...we were based at Odsal Top. And our main catchment area for workforce was from Wibsey, Wyke and Buttershaw. There were a couple of Polish fellas, really good - Joe...

**RS:** In the late '90s we expanded. So we bought in 1998...I'd been weaving for a company, a sister company of Bakers, who told me that Arthur Sanderson's had a weaving mill. Which I, I knew them. BST Silks, they were called. They were at Shearbridge Mills. But they were they were going to close them. Because they had another sister company over in Lancashire which was a bit more modern. But they had... they wanted to sell the business. But they

were taking... they weren't taking the looms away, but they were going to take the order book away.

**0:40:08**

**RS:** And the looms - they could make the style of fabric that I wasn't making. Which, rather than me spending £120,000 on a new loom, if I could get access to the old looms, with staff that could weave the old looms (which is important) then that would open up a new area of business for me that I wasn't currently doing. So we approached Sanderson's (who were down in Uxbridge (who happened to be a customer of ours)), and said, 'What are you doing with BST Silks? I said, 'Wow, I want to put it on the market.' And so this opportunity came to... because we were expanding, I needed a bigger warehouse for all of the yarns. And a preparation area. And Shearbridge Mills fit the bill. But it had these 24 looms, fairly old looms, still using cards, that had fabric sets that I wanted. We struck the deal and got the building for £200,000. And we shook hands on buying 20 old clapped out looms for £20,000. On the condition that I set on the 8 members of staff that had been made redundant by the Sanderson Group, and they didn't want to transfer over to Burnley to work. Which I did. I didn't have any orders for looms. I didn't have any work for these 8 people. But I knew somebody that might be able to help me. And I rang him up and said, 'You know that cloth you sent me the other day, that you were struggling to get hold of?' I said, 'I can weave it for you.' 'You haven't got the capacity. You can't weave our other stuff.' I said, 'I know.' And I told him what I'd done, he said, 'You've done what?!' I said... 'You're not wrong in your head, are you Richard?!' 'No, no, but I need your help now more than ever.' And he basically, we wove this base cloth for printing on. It's called bark weave. And the staff, these 8 staff, they couldn't believe it, because the 20 looms... I said, 'How many of these looms work?' They said, 'Well, they all *will* work, but they need a bit of investment putting in them.' And they were old timers, they were close to late 50s, coming up to retirement.

**0:42:37**

**RS:** But Joe the Polish weaver, he didn't want to retire. He was a single man, he just wanted to work, work, work. 'I would like to work nights.' I said, 'We don't have a night shift, Joe. Sorry.' 'But I'm telling you, I want to work nights.' And he was overheard by Gordon, the twister, 'I'd like to do nights.' I mean, we were struggling with capacity, so we started a night shift with the only two people that readily wanted to dive into it.

**LMI:** But you managed to provide good enough conditions that people were 1. Keen enough to stay with you and such long employment... [?]

**RS:** When we put the extension on, I put a shower unit in.

**LMI:** Did you?

**RS:** It was rather selfish because I liked going out running to keep fit. But no, the staff would... we'd got split shifts at the time. And then we got the night shift. Well, they'd be going out 6-2,-2-10. 10 o'clock on a Thursday night when we finished work, they're having a shower, getting all glammed up and going out.

**0:43:43**

**LMI:** On that note, did you... did your business ever host any events or parties? Or did you do any community-based things aside from work?

**RS:** We had Christmas parties. We had...there were a couple of times when the lads went off to Blackpool. I wasn't invited... But they were, you know, they were socially engaged. The younger people, let's say the people in their 30s, they all got on really well. And they socialised in the pub at the weekend and got on well. Whereas the older overlookers, they came to the Christmas parties. And you could always see who was going to sit with who. But I think they were proud of the work and working for Smiths. And when our fabric was featured on TV, it was a massive... our fabric was featured on BBC, the Terry Wogan show, the guests all shuffled around on a fabric woven for a company called Jamasque. And then the GMTV sofa, the red and yellow sofa, the fabric on that was from us. QE2, furnished the QE2.

**0:45:00**

**LMI:** That's amazing for a northern local business, isn't it?

**RS:** You see, I'll tell you a funny anecdote, a weaver called Margaret Missett who was one of the twelve weavers when I joined. What a bloody star she was! Potty mouthed as well, dear me! But Margaret... she used to run rings around Ken the overlooker. She did not like him. But if she couldn't sit on a buffet with her six looms running, it wasn't her fault, it was the bloody overlooker who hadn't sorted the loom out. And she made Ken Willis's life a misery. But she was a damn good worker, a good weaver. Anyway, Margaret, when I entrusted with the sample weaving, which is quite important... And in a weaving shed you can't communicate particularly well. So when the designers who were... socially, they were totally different backgrounds. They'd come from London or the Southwest, or they had university experience. They had been in mills in France and Germany but coming up to Bradford with its dark satanic mills and being housed in a local bed and breakfast (we soon sorted that out, we used to put them up in Haworth.

**0:46:23**

**RS:** So they felt a little bit better, the designers that came to work with us. And then eventually we got a designer suite, so the designers that used to visit us and stay over, they had somewhere to work, so while we were proofing fabric on the looms, they didn't have to go down there, they could carry on and do the work.) But Margaret Missett, this particular

day, I'll never forget it, with Stephanie Jebbett, the designer of this big range... And I could see the way this project was going, and I was thinking, 'I can't believe this, I can't believe this, it's going to be a quarter of a million-pound order, this.' Anyway, Margaret was charged with cutting up the blankets to try and make the selection of the picks with Stephanie. And they got on really, really well. In a kind of a, [Broad Yorkshire Accent] 'Alright love, how are you doing, Stephanie? Do you want a cup of tea? Or a back bacon sandwich? Are you alright love?' you know. Or, [Posh Voice] 'Where are the nearest shops, Margaret?' [Broad Yorkshire Accent] 'There's not bloody shops round here!' Which there wasn't round Odsal Top. But so, it was that banter. Anyway, I used to pop my head in and say, 'Is everything going alright?' 'Oh yeah, don't you worry, Richard, don't fret yourself.'

**0:47:39**

**RS:** Anyway, [I said] 'Stephanie, this looks fantastic.' She said, 'Yes, we're getting a bit stuck here. What do you think of this fabric then, Margaret?' She said, 'Well, I've got to be honest, I think it's crap. I wouldn't have it in my house.' Well, Stephanie... I wanted to strangle Margaret and, you know, sack her immediately. But Stephanie thought this was hilarious and said 'Well, it's not designed for your house, with respect. Do you like...'. And she pulled this other fabric out, this chenille fabric and different styles. And she said, 'I bet you like this, don't you?' 'Oh yeah. Oh, that's lush is that. Oh, I like some of this.' So that was Margaret. But most of the staff used to take a deep breath when Margaret was asked for an opinion. But she used to give her opinion freely and then get into trouble. And my father used to play pot with her.

**LMI:** Did you have any other sort of memorable occasions of any like disagreements? Or you know... obviously it's a really intense environment to be working in. And it's physically hard work, it's noisy and...

**RS:** I think the hardest thing was knocking the double time off on the nights. We did the nights to try and get over this hump. And to incentivize people to say yes... we needed more than two people to say yes. So that was, [hard] You had to set it all out, say 'Well, look, you know yourselves.'

**0:49:17**

**RS:** And the older guys said, 'Yeah, let's not be greedy.' And eventually they all wanted a bit of it. So it was a rotation. It wasn't fixed nights. It was a rotation to kind of spread it out and make it fair. So that was a very interesting HR issue.

**LMI:** And did you have...

**RS:** I had another HR issue, I'll tell you about that one in a minute.

**LMI:** Oh, my other question was just going to be about unions, so if you want to start with...

**RS:** We don't have a problem with unions.

**LMI:** Did you have people that worked for you that were part of them?

**0:49:48**

**RS:** We had an issue with... the work... The unions didn't have a problem with Smiths because we were setting on loads of people, we had apprentices. But in terms of laying the law down and saying, 'You're not doing it this way...' So there's some working practices... for instance, twisters. Do you know what twisters do? They have a machine that they set up at the back of the loom, to tie all the warp threads from the old warp that's just woven out, finished, to the new warp. The new automatic knotting machines would be set up on, let's say, anything from 5,000 to 10,000 warp threads to tie. They'd sit there and diligently watch it going along. And if the machine stopped or they had something out of the least, they'd take it up and... That wasn't the major skill bit, in my opinion. And in Europe, less skilled people were actually overseeing the machine once it had been set up. So we used to have a lot of warp valves. We specialised in shorter runs. So in our weaving shed with 24 looms, in a week, we'd have 40 to 50 warp changes. And physically that is quite a lot of work. The labourer gets the old warp out and puts the new one in. Then the twister, they comb it up. But while they are sat on their buffet with the machine, tying the knots, if another loom has felled out, you've got down time. I told you we'd got a second mill. They were totally anything goes. 'Yeah, flexibility.' So the warp twister down there hadn't gone through technical college. Hadn't been a member of the union but could do the job. He'd set it up and the lady would sit... or the labourer would sit and watch the machine and then put his hand up to say, 'Can you come and help me out?' So their efficiency of loom changes would have a lot better.

**0:51:58**

**RS:** Now putting that to the... Dougie who knew where I was coming from but said, 'I didn't like it. You're trying to put my trade out of work.' I said 'I'm not. I'm not devaluing it. I'm asking you to work for less.' 'You've got people that you're paying less down the road.' I said, 'Yes, but they can't do everything that you can do, they can do a part of it.' 'I know you're right, Richard, I know, but I don't like how you're going about it.' I said, 'How should I go about it?' 'Well, he should go to night school and learn what I did. Because it's a good wage that he's getting.' I said, 'Well, okay.'

**LMI2:** [?]

**RS:** Well, people talk about pay, yeah yeah.

**LMI:** What was the local pub?

**RS:** Well, the hardest thing... the local pub that we... was the... on a Saturday it was the Top House. Not the Top House what was it called? It was in Wyke, Main Street.

**0:52:45**

**RS:** But the the local pub...that we used to... that the staff went to, was...that was the Top House, which is at Odsal Top. Or a bit further down the road, I forget what it's called. I've got a picture of it, where my dad's retired at 65. We took all the staff out. We sent a letter to all the customers to say, 'Don't ring us on Wednesday, blah, blah, blah. Because we're down the pub celebrating my dad's... thing.' So all the staff came. It was great.

**LMI:** And can you remember what the wages (like Polly was saying) can you remember what the sort of average wages were for things like the weavers?

**0:53:24**

**RS:** Oh blimey, I've got it written down. I'll have a wage book somewhere. But yeah, the labouring wages was kind of...There wasn't such a thing as minimum wage. You know, like it's £10 an hour now. They started off at about £15,000, £16,000 a year. I'm going over kind of 30...20 years of trade. The mechanics, they were on £35,000 to £40,000.

**LMI:** Wow. That's amazing.

**RS:** But it should be. They're dealing with a quarter million pounds worth of machinery, with fabric that's 8 pounds a metre. And they could destroy a hundred meters on a shift. [It wasn't beans?] In apparel trade they have burlers and menders, who sew the cashmere suiting back in. Our fabric was at such a price, kind of £8-£12 a metre, that we employed burlers and menders to mend our furnishing fabrics.

**LMI:** Oh wow, so that you didn't have as much wastage?

**RS:** We didn't have any faults. You have a fault of 3 metres at £8, that's 25 quid. Which is three times more than your burler and mender's earning. And she can repair it in an hour. It's worth doing,

**LMI:** And then...

**RS:** And your reputation is better. You're not... they're not sending short lengths, or lengths with faults in. So our... we had a... was it...? Of our production we had, our seconds accounted for something less than two percent. Seconds.

**LMI:** Gosh, that's good, isn't it?

**RS:** It was. And we had a mill shop to get rid of it. We have a brand called Stadium Mills. eBay. Had a student. She's a teacher down at Beckfoot School, bless her.

**LMI:** That's one of the schools we're working with on this, actually.

**RS:** Is it?

**LMI:** Beckfoot, Heaton? Or did you mean...?

**RS:** It's the one at Cottingley.

0:55:32

**LMI:** Yeah, it's one of the groups that we're working, I think.

**RS:** Well, she's involved with the... she does textile courses. Her name will come to me. But she came to work for me as a placement. We used to set on... We used to give mill experiences to design students as well. So, we had designers from France and Germany, (and all over the UK) that came. At the time we had a... opposite the mill I bought an end terrace. And that's where the design team worked out from. They were originally down at the Shearbridge Mills, but sadly the first... The first designer I set on, Louise, who was my...we were on telepathy, it was fantastic.

0:56:32

**RS:** Everything we were touching came off. And she was very, very...she was just brilliant. She could have been a member of the family. Working all hours to get the jobs done. Travel at four in the morning to get to see a client. Come back in the day, do the weaving, go back. Absolutely fantastic. But she was the first person I set on to help me with the design side. And then Louise...we'd realised we needed another designer, so Louise interviewed Jackie who was Scottish. She came to work for us. And then we set on the young students that came in for work placement, and what have you. We had a design studio of six by the time... the late '90s. And then I had a thing called Queen Bee Syndrome. I headhunted a designer. I did headhunt them. Because people wanted to come and work for us. So I was getting letters from my weaving rivals.

**LMI:** You'd got the choice of them...?

**RS:** Well, there's a weaver in Silsden. Have you discovered the weaving mills of Silsden, yet?

**LMI:** Yeah, yeah,

**RS:** Absolutely just fantastic. One called Weave Style, which is C.H. Fletcher's. And Weave Style supplied the high street retailers, so people like Marks & Spencer's, Next. We weren't in that sector. So that's when I got involved with Indian mills, because we needed to upscale and get bigger capacity. And be seen to be a larger entity. Because we still...even in the early '90s, we weren't known to the mainstream.

0:58:08

**RS:** We were people's little secret. And they'd rather us kept that way. We never showed anybody in the weaving shed if we were doing prototypes for other companies. And sometimes we deliberately didn't show people in the weaving shed. Just to enforce the situations that, 'What you don't see, you won't know about.' And actually, they used to assume that we were doing a lot more things than we actually were. They were being done at Thornbers Mill at Clitheroe, but I didn't tell people. But this mill at Silsden, they had a designer who was well in with the buyer at the main furniture supplier to Marks & Spencer's. And she wanted to move. So I offered her a job. And she brought a million pounds

of business with her, in the next year. I may wish you to turn the mobile off now! But she was...because she'd come from a larger company, her idea of going to London was going down the day before, staying in a nice hotel. Seeing the client and coming back. And charging me for the privilege of being away overnight. Because that was the mentality of the Courtaulds companies.

**0:59:22**

**RS:** So it didn't fit with the previous ethos. So things changed. But she wanted to be...she was important, she was getting me all this business. So I had Louise dealing with the traditional companies and businesses. And I had the new designer, Deborah, who came to work for me who had the main high street retail accounts. And Jackie who...talk about employees and members of staff. She was more talented than the other two. She could do it quickly. She was prolific. But she wasn't put on this earth to be...for designing to be the be-all and end-all. 'I've another bloody life. It involves partying, working behind a bar and riding out horses.'

**LMI:** Wow. Do you know, though, it's nice to have a life outside of work, but it's a shame when someone's clearly so talented.

**RS:** I used to go into the design studio and ask, 'Where's Jackie?' And they all looked round a bit embarrassed She was fast asleep under the bloody desk. Because she'd been out on the razz the night before.

**LMI:** Was that your other HR story?

**RS:** Well, and I'd dealt with it. Well, she was brilliant.

**LMI:** Yeah.

**RS:** She'd come in...she'd come in and in two hours she'd just nail it. So she had three or four accounts that she looked after, and did the job. Brought that business in so I could evaluate her worth. And juggling with the fact that, you know, Louise, bless her, she had to work hard. And she did... Well, she was very studious, it wasn't spontaneous. She was talented but she thought, you know...She didn't go to nightclubs on a work night. She didn't...she might have wanted a horse, but... you know. But Deborah had two kids. And they were the be-all and end-all and 'I want more money, I want,' you know, 'This is what I need. If I'm going to be away from my little darlings, then...' You know, and I was thinking 'Bloody hell fire, just...' But that evolved, she wasn't like that initially. But there we are. So that was hard.

**1:01:25**

**LMI:** So what happened after the '90s then? So, obviously, you said that your dad retired at 65, what then kind of happened...?

**RS:** So I bought this BST silk weaving business. Then another... we looked at the high street retail business. There was a company over in Dewsbury, called Armitage and Rhodes who had been recently taken over by the managing director at Weave Style (where Deborah came from), who knew me quite well, did Simon Ashton. But they were supplying to upholstery manufacturers who supplied the high street retail. A very different market route to the interior decorator market, (which is very much selling in design boutiques through pattern books) the upholstery manufacturers, British upholstery manufacturers supply to high street retail that was... they weren't all selling to Marks & Spencer's, but the House of Leather... I know it sounds odd, but they didn't just sell leather. But Next opened up Home. Marks & Spencer's developed more into Home. And so that sector was very different. There was a definite mentality, different seasons. But the fabric wasn't an awful lot different. So yeah, they had to separate these designers. Literally. Louise worked up at Odsal. And Deborah and Jackie and the other designers worked down at Shearbridge.

**1:02:58**

**RS:** But they used to argue like mad about whose samples were more important than the other. And it was unfortunately, I had a meeting with the three designers and my operations director. And I took them out for lunch at the Hollins Hall with a view to banging their heads together and saying, 'Look, you're all adult ladies, I want you to get on and stop this bickering.' And of course, they're all in denial. They're all as bad as each other. They weren't all as bad as each other, by the way. But anyway, it was one of the most uncomfortable meetings I'd had. And Louise left. She got headhunted. The Arthur Sanderson's, where they closed the mill at BST, they were weaving in Burnley. And they needed a designer. And they offered her a lot more money than I was paying her. Which hurt me, because I felt that she might resent the fact that... It wasn't a question of unless somebody knocks on the door you don't give them an extra wage. It was just how things evolved.

**1:04:15**

**RS:** But we did start to lose... people were moving on, and other mills were coming in for our staff. And the fact that somebody had worked for me for 10 years and they'd got to a level where I couldn't offer them anymore. And there's a new promotion coming along, that was new to me.

**LMI:** Because you felt... [?].

**RS:** Well, I felt almost betrayal. 'Get off my employee! If it wasn't for me giving them that employment, they wouldn't have any...' When I look back at it, it was natural reaction, but unreasonable really because everybody has the... should have an opportunity to better themselves. And if it isn't with the particular firm that started the training... Then we had a couple of people come to work for us to learn particular things, to then move on. But er...

**LMI:** Yeah. It's business, not personal.

**RS:** It is.

**1:05:02**

**LMI:** I think when you know people so well and you've worked together for so long, and it is a family business...

**RS:** Yeah, but you asked me a question which I roundabout answered. So the High Street retail, I went out and I bought this other company when it went into administration. And bought the order book. It was 1998. And they had a slightly different machine setup. So the night shift came into its own. So, the deal I struck was that I bought the goodwill of the order book which... And I put an advert in the paper for certain jobs that I advised the people that were working there. But we were working with the administrator, who basically... We were weaving the order book out on the machines to exhaust the yarn. And then as we were in a position to start weaving the order book in Bradford, the staff... he'd make them redundant, and they'd have a job offered to them at the mill.

**1:06:09**

**RS:** So it wasn't a seamless join. But that's when we had a lot of the... I employed a lot of... My overlookers were traditionally trained. It was the staff that came from Dewsbury, particularly the twister, he'd learnt how to do it on the job. So they were in the factory down at Shearbridge Mills. And the Odsall Mill was the traditional one.

**LMI:** What was it like managing different mills? Because you must have felt like you were being pulled in all kinds of directions.

**RS:** Well, my father died in 2001. But in '98 when we took on Armitage and Rhodes, he'd had this major heart attack. So he wasn't in the business but kept visiting. He says, 'Your job's changing. You're not the salesman with a waggy tail that's going out to see all the customers. You're sat in your office barking about, 'This hasn't happened and that hasn't happened.' Which was true. And I said, 'Well,'... He said, 'You're in danger of getting too big, where you can't manage everything. And it's not about your passion and excitement for dealing with new customers, because you've introduced things in the mix that aren't compatible with a steady easy carry on. You've bought that business which has... only went bust because it wasn't working. And you didn't buy the best bits, you took it all on. And you've got to deal with it now.' So it was quite interesting. Lynn would tell you I should have stayed small and not gone for it.

**1:07:29**

**LMI:** So what ultimately happened then?

**RS:** We went into administration in 2005. Because I'd finished with my global - 'Trying to conquer the world globally.' So we bought Armitage and Rhodes which added another... so

turnoverwise, notwithstanding what I was saying previously, we made profits year on year on year, right through the '90s, up until 1998.

**LMI:** That's interesting.

**RS:** And we then we didn't make any money in 1999. Or we levelled out. So I'd absorbed... I'd spent half a million quid on this acquisition. And it had pulled me into different... in fact, because everybody wants to talk to the owner of the business if they haven't got the fabric on time. And I was drawn into that because I wanted to be everybody's friend.

**1:08:47**

**RS:** *And* at the same time the traditional companies – G.P. & J. Baker and Monkwell and Skopos Fabrics, each of those people had spent a million pounds a year with me, for the last three years. And another company called Designers Guild in London, another million-pound sales company. They were... by 1997/98, their section of the international business was shrinking. Because it was being affected by the out-of-town retail experiences. Where people go and buy a sofa off the floor, with interest free credit. So DFS, World of Leather and everything, that was eating into their traditional sector of market, which had always been made to order. You had the 12 weeks to wait for your furniture to arrive. So it was really interesting times that we were dealing with. And I was chasing the turnover to keep supporting my staff. So we had 80 staff by this time. By '98 we've got 80 staff. It gets better than that. So then, the things would settle down late '90s. And in the year 2000 the high street retail became more important because of the *volume* of business. Not necessarily the better margins of the smaller bespoke stuff that we'd made our money from. And that sector actually, the flame-retardant decorative fabrics, other people had jumped on the bandwagon. They'd learned how to do it.

**1:10:31**

**RS:** So we'd seen some of our business going to other UK weavers. We'd been... not been overtaken, but good luck to them, you know. But actually, when I was looking at our order intake I thought, 'Bloody hell, I'll have to get some more orders. Where is that going to come from?' I decided to have a go at the larger volume business. And to make that work... we were colour-woven threads. The main bulk business was fabric that is piece-dyed for the high street retail. This thing called 'shabby chic' for upholstery covers. And the fabric needed to be dyed, piece dyed. So you weave it and dye it. At the time I was spending about a million pounds on dyeing yarns and finishing. And when a dye house called William Denby's, at the bottom of Hollins Hill. If you're going up Hollins Hill on the left hand side there's an industrial unit. And William Denby's was formed in 1824. There's a few staff stories about William Denby's. So we put a bid in for William Denby's in 2000. We didn't win the bid initially. Because our bid was for the business and the land. I then got rung up by the winner of the bid who was a property developer who wanted the land because he was a house builder. And it was a master stroke for his ambition to buy the rest of the land.

**1:12:11**

**RS:** 'You've bloody put my bid price up! I've paid more for it, but I know what it's worth long term. But this dye-house, young man, what's it worth to you? Do you still want it? Do you want to be my tenant?' This chap was called John Ogden. So I named a figure. And I said 'I've no cash. My cash backer is only interested in buying the property.' 'Well, he would be.' But I said, 'If you want to rent it, I'll give you first year. We'll come to an arrangement.' It was 180 000 square feet, this dye-house. It was massive. And the idea was that we'd consolidate, we'd move the weaving mill down to Baildon which wasn't too far away. And there were two other family businesses. One called Downs Coulter at Thornton, and another one's called Reuben Gaunt's. And they were trapped in the family-wants-the-property-asset-value. So they needed to relocate. And the idea was that it would all go down into Baildon. But it was my capital that set it all up. So that's what we said to Mr Ogden. He said, 'Well, yeah, be my tenant. I don't care who's there, as long as you pay my bills on time.'

**1:13:35**

**RS:** And I...to buy the machinery, I mentioned [previously] Arthur Sanderson's mill, which we'd bought for £200,000, £220,000. I said, 'Well, I've got a property in Bradford that's a valuation of £250,000, John. You can have that.' 'Where is it? Yeah, all right.' And spat his hand and said, 'Right, we'll do it.' So he got the mill at Shearbridge Mills. And I got the machinery.

**LMI:** It was a pretty good deal, wasn't it?

**RS:** Well, it was a good deal. Bear in mind this is true...a true story. It was a bloody nightmare, the noughties for me, honestly. Chasing turnover when you've been so successful. You can see the wheels are creaking and might be starting to fall off. Your favourite employees have just left. You've got other staff members going because we are not doing the overtime. There is a bit of short time working. So we were chasing this turnover.

**1:14:45**

**RS:** So the dye-house, its traditional business was apparel fabrics. And it would wash and steam 300,000 metres of fabric a week. For 19 point whatever the highest number to 9 you could get for it, from the existing customers. But that wasn't our core business. The furnishing sector business was ours, where we could piece-dye cloth for Next. But it only represented 15% of the turnover of the business. But the capacity was there. And ultimately, we could then start investing in yarn dyeing equipment, to offset the million pounds worth of dye we had. So that was our master plan, which the bank said, 'Fantastic' for. Because I had half a million pounds in the bank to pay for it. And then we financed the other bits that we needed from the bank. So they were just, 'Oh, fantastic, Mr Smith, that's great business.'

**1:15:46**

**RS:** But the apparel business... you'll have heard of Leeds and Castleford being very well-known sewing rooms for apparel, which.... It all started to go offshore. And the London high street retailers needed their garments at a particular price. And so we started to be faced with filling a container, a 40 foot container. Let's say 20,000 meters, which was made up of 20 dye batches of fabric. To fill the container on a Friday (because it was being shipped to Bulgaria or Estonia or North Africa or wherever these sweat rooms were), I mean, the fabric was then... went to the garment manufacturers. And then the retailer received a suit with matching trousers and jackets. Or they should match. In a race to get the container full on Friday, because you didn't want to default on the LC for the export, you'd have to fill the container. And sometimes the black wasn't black enough. And although it was all written up saying, 'Do not mix batches, you silly cutters and sewers. Do not mix batches.' We were starting to get... as a consequence of exporting container loads and dealing with inefficient cheap garment manufacturers... And I hold my hand up, the matching wasn't perfect, but it was within commercial tolerances. But the suits and the jackets weren't. And we were getting these massive debit notes. Not for our 19.5p per metre finished fabric. We'd ruined somebody's £2.50 fabric. And the garment cost came back. So it was a bloody nightmare. And so after about 9 months we decided to call it a day. We were losing money hand over fist. So it was a great idea but... it wasn't just the fact that we couldn't get the finishing things. The business Down's Coulter, he was into the upholstery manufacturing. He was dyeing fabrics in Ireland, and he had a similar problem with his dyer. And he went bust. So he took me for 60 grand. And the Rueben Gaunt's people, they never came. They never arrived.

**1:18:28**

**RS:** And the boiler broke, blew up. So I had about half a million pounds worth of unexpected issues that happened. So we decided in August 2001... or we decided in the June, July. My financial director, who'd come to join me in '98. He'd seen the last bit of my great success, he was financial director... And we were just trying to put plasters on things that were going wrong. I had to get him out from underneath the desk. He had a massive nervous breakdown at work. Collapsed. He was in a foetal position. 'I'm sorry it's all gone, Richard. It's my fault.' I mean, he was older than me, he was crying his eyes out. It was awful. It was terrible. I laugh about it now, but...

**LMI:** It shows how many lives get ruined by businesses like...

**RS:** Oh, it can do, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. But that's what happened. Yeah, it was... I remember that moment. And then having to stand up in front of the staff after they'd just come back from their annual holidays, (probably spent all their bloody wages) to say... 'I'm sorry...' We had a hundred staff at Denby's, so I had 180 people in 2001. So to stand in front of a hundred of them and say 'I'm sorry, I thought was doing something worthwhile but it's not worked out.' Made them all redundant. That was... then the sale... remember I've got this friendly landlord, who wasn't so friendly because he lost his tenant. And he demanded his rent. And I defaulted on the rent. Because I couldn't afford to pay it until the sale of all the assets. And the asset sale should have realized... The valuation of the machinery for my

asset financing was £620,000. And we'd only had this dye house less than a year. But the evaluations have to be six months old if they're going to be upheld.

**1:20:37**

**RS:** Remember the date, August 2001. There was a major event in September, wasn't there? Our sale for the assets was on the 13th of September, 2001. It didn't happen. So my reserve price of... I needed £430 000 to get out of the dark, pooey stuff. The sale didn't happen. The landlord put a distraint on that the... 'cos I hadn't paid him. And when the sale eventually happened four months later, we got 60,000.

**LMI:** Is that all?

**RS:** Yeah. So Yorkshire Asset Financing... [What? Tell me about it!] Yorkshire Asset Financing... I'd got machinery finance at the mill at Odsal, where I was paying £8,000 a month. I honoured that. That was going on. But I'd used the same outfit to finance some of the design machinery. And they came on with lead boots on. Because, you know, all the banks were being very bullish at the time, because the world had gone to rat shit. And they made all sorts of demands. Thankfully I had a friend who I... through... I did have a social life. So, I was in Roundtable...

**LMI:** I don't know how you had time!

**RS:** And the rugby club was a salvation. I've always been involved with the local rugby club. And Roundtable was really socially. And Brian who lives just up there, was an accomplished accountant. He knew his way around floating businesses and big banks. And I'd kept... 'How is it going? How's it going? Ooh bloody hell. How are you with this bank?' I said, 'I have to pull the plug on the dye-house.'

**1:22:28**

**RS:** 'Oh bloody hell.' And then I told him what else had happened. He said, 'Oh bloody hell, do you want some professional help? I said, 'Do you want to come in and have a look at it? He said, 'It's not as bad as you think. It's not the end of the world. You'll be able to get out of it. But you need to drop the lot. Close the lot. Go into administration.' I said, 'I can't do that, Brian.'

**1:22:48**

**RS:** I said, 'I've just been to the Textile Society dinner at Huddersfield as a guest and sat on the same table with four people who I owed in excess of a million pounds to. So dropping the lot would mean that they'd be left with the egg on their face, so I can't do that.' He said, 'Well, it's your face, you've always... I've told you; you've strapped the Bible to your chest, you're a fool. There are two ways of doing it. And I thought you'd be doing that way, but I don't any part of how we get out of it. But this is what you need to do now. You need to ring fence the mill.' Which we did. We raised money on the mill to come to an agreement with the banks. And that was 2001. The bank I did my initial lending was Nat West where we were

friendly with the with the bank manager. He was fantastic, just anything we'd asked for. Ian Foster, his name. He understood the product and the people. And he'd seen this rise and... nice account for him to have. But then they got taken over by the RBS. And they didn't want, after 9/11, they didn't want anything to do with manufacturing. And if you're in the textile manufacturing sector, 'Ha ha! See you later!'

**1:24:07**

**RS:** They basically said... when I'm finally, three years later, working my nuts off to get the debt down. And the four customers that were sat around the table, I actually went to see them and say, 'Look this is what I've got to do. Can I freeze your debt? Because that will give me some working capital?' And out of the four of them, three of them said, 'Yes.' One of them said, 'We can't afford it, because we've been stung as well. But what we'll do is we'll let you pay us back this much.' So we managed to find a way. And over three or four years I managed to get all the debt down.

**LMI:** That is really honorable though.

**RS:** But to trade out because they needed me to keep trading on.

**LMI:** Yeah.

**RS:** But it was getting harder and harder and I'd lost some more key staff. And it was 2004, I think, when we were struggling with a VAT bill. And I'd got a little warping business that should have been at Baildon. That came back.

**1:25:11**

**RS:** And I defaulted on the rent, so I decided... I wasn't so well either.

**LMI:** I can't imagine why!

**RS:** It started to get to me, a bit stressed... So I had hoped that I would be able to sell the business as a going concern. And that was the hardest thing, was feeling fairly bullish that friends in the trade... somebody in Scotland had expressed an interest, somebody in Clitheroe had. The people in Clitheroe shafted me. They said yes and kept me hanging on for two weeks. And then unbeknown to me they had been doing a deal with somebody in Cumbria. *And* the administrator decided... still to this day, I'm sure I could have sued them... but they sent my full order book out with a list of all my customers, selling prices, contact details, the lot.

**1:26:07**

**LMI:** Do you want me to give that now?

**RS:** Unbelievable.

**LMI:** That just wouldn't...

**RS:** Anyway, so yes, that's how it ended. So then in 2005 I'm out...they're left on my...It's probably not a lot to do with textile/mill stories, is it? But the mill then... We had an order book. I had a friend in the trade who was involved at Arthur Sanderson's when we bought their mill. Then he went to work for a Laura Ashley where I was selling him fabrics. And then he got headhunted by Burberry. I don't know if you know, but Burberry is woven at Cross Hills? The Burberry mill. And he rang me up to say, 'What are you doing? Sorry to hear the demise the business. Will you still be able to make warps for me?' Because we were making warps? I said, 'Well, I'll sell you the warping machinery, I'll carry on making it, but I've got an order book that I need to finance.'

**1:27:11**

**RS:** He said, 'Well, I think we should be diversifying into home furnishings. What's the situation?' I said, 'Well, you could probably buy all the looms for £100,000, because the market's just gone flat. So these £120,000 machines, 16 of them...you can pick...' The oldest was 12 years old. And the youngest was 6 years old, out of these 16 looms. £100,000. So he put a bid together to buy the machinery. I wove the order book with the skeleton staff who were all made redundant by me, but we had to find a way around a thing called TUPE. TUPE is a Transfer of Undertaking. You can't drop a company and start up again and employ the same people. Legally you can't do it. So I had to find a way of paying these staff. A friend of mine had a job agency. So they all applied, got registered on there and they were all contract workers employed by my thing. Which I felt was a bit naughty, but it's legal. And they were all happy because they were still working. And they all then eventually got jobs with Burberry down at Steeton, awaiting the arrival of the looms that they were going to put a bid in for. So the time period was May when we hatched this... no, it was January. It was... it was...yes, I was weaving still at the mill under the administrator's watch. Because he couldn't do anything because I owned the mill. I had a distraint on machinery that was equivalent to the rent, that the mill hadn't paid *me*. It was a quirky thing... So I'd built up a lot of rent debt which I couldn't afford to pay myself rent. But it was in the books. So when the administrator came in, I used that landlord's 'owed rent' as a means of saying to him, 'You can't come into this business unless you recognize and pay me back the rent I'm owed.' And instead of rent I took machinery and yarn. And that's how I was able to start up again.

**1:29:42**

**RS:** So the administrator was more than happy for me to be weaving. Because ultimately, he knew this Burberry deal was on the cards. At the 11th hour Burberry pulled out.

**LMI:** Oh!

**RS:** Ha Ha! The looms went to Egypt for £80 000. I was a bloody landlord, having to oversee...my boys, my looms, I'd sweat blood for, be broken up and dismantled and taken to Egypt.

**LMI:** That is gut-wrenching.

**RS:** That was gut-wrenching, yeah. I'm alright now, though.

**LMI:** Oh wow. But it just shows the highs and the lows of the industry. Because Bradford being the textile capital of the world, to then have so few textile businesses within the city now. I mean, the entire landscape has changed since all the mills have been demolished and re-purposed. And it's sad isn't it, really?

**RS:** But in the history of... The Times history of Bradford textiles, E&S Smith, albeit they traded for 70 years, its glory years was the '40s, late '40s, after the war. And then our, my dad and I, experiences... and thank God he wasn't alive when... he died in 2000... to see the demise of the mill. But those were fantastic glories. It was only 10 years, 10-12 years.

**1:31:08**

**LMI:** It's amazing that your high points actually were when a lot of mills were closing down. You are the first person I've spoken to has actually said, 'I loved the '70s and '80s.'

**RS:** Yeah, Yeah. Well, no, the late '80s and '90s for me were absolutely fantastic. But in the noughties, other mills like Thornburs at Clitheroe, who bought 40 of these Jacquard machines, they imploded. Herbert Green's, they closed in 2002. Which is before I did. And they'd done really well in the '90s.

**LMI:** It's just how the industry changed, I guess that really helped.

**RS:** Yeah, it is. But if you're not getting the orders at the right price and you're not generating profits, your profits aren't going to last forever. Some... Downs Coulter, Robert Downs, bless, him, he hawked everything. Because he had a family that wanted the share of their asset value. But he had 80 looms weaving lining fabrics. They all went to Lithuania, did the looms. Robert ended up basically having to get a second mortgage on his house to keep the kids in school. And nearly lost everything. Touch wood, I mean, whilst I on paper I lost a lot of money, I didn't lose the house. I came close to it. I did say to Lynn, I would never ask her to sleep in a tent in a field.

**LMI:** That's very good of you!

**RS:** Yeah, it was. And we didn't have children, so we didn't have those pressures. And I was always at work, I loved it.

**LMI:** Did you... Looking back at the time, especially when you were *so* busy, do you look back and think, 'actually my life *was* at the mill?' I know you said you were happy and things but... was there any part of you that...?

**RS:** I loved it! I was having a brilliant time! Everything we touched came off. It was going really well. And you know, you can't... I to this day still seek out, 'Oh we wove that fabric, we gave it...'

**LMI:** It's a little legacy, kind of...

**RS:** In hotels and everything, 'Oh, we wove that. We wove this.' And that's the aspect, you know, about the archive of Smiths, E&S Smith's. It's, albeit 70 years old, and I've got archives going back to my grandad.

**1:33:43**

**RS:** But they are halcyon, the brilliant years of the '90s. And the reasons for it. It was fantastic. And I'd like it...I've got an archive that I'd love to be celebrated, somewhere.

**LMI:** Yeah, absolutely.

**RS:** But I don't know how...

**LMI:** I've got some contacts within different museums and library archives that I'm happy to pass on to you. Because I know a couple of people in a similar position to you and it seems such a shame for them not to be shared with the local community. If you're willing.

**RS:** My little hobby business, the Point Paper Art Company. When Dad built me an office and did away with the company's archives, I had nothing tangible to show any customers to say, 'We can weave you something like this.' Because that was our job, to develop ideas...

**LMI:** It's a shame he got rid of those, really, isn't it? When that was...

**RS:** 'I knew about that. That was for so and so. He's out of business now. It's a right load of crap, was that, I don't know how they ever brought any.' But it was old hat to dad but to me it was a construction of fabric. If you could change the colours, you could change the design on it. You could use the weave. You could learn so much from how the cloths used to be made. But that's our little hobby business, where we've taken old designs and done wall art. But this is from France, Germany, all over Europe, the point papers. [Looking at samples?] At Salt's, maybe. Or Sunnybank Mills? Cartwright Hall. Yeah. They took some of the technical weaving notes from Bradford Technology... Ernest Waterhouse, where they've got all the little plans of weaves. So, this is my hobby business which I... this is just a small section of the artifacts I've got. But I've collected them from mills all over the place.

**1:35:45**

**LMI:** That's amazing. Can I take a picture of this?

**RS:** You can have it. Take it.

**LMI:** Thank you. That is incredible.

**RS:** That's my promotional... Would you like one?

**LMI:** I've got one. I know we've been chatting to you for ages, and you must be desperate for a drink...

**RS:** Well I was just wondering, do you want to use the restroom? You're not plaiting your legs and thinking, 'When's he gonna stop bloody talking?'

**LMI:** No, honestly. This is a bit random but because we're going to do some events later on to celebrate this project and the legacy part of it, one of the things that keeps coming up is the music and soundtrack to the work. Because whenever people think about the mills they often think about Victorian times, and the music associated with that. But were there any particular artists or albums, if you were a music person, that in the '70s, '80s, '90s, that you loved listening to. Not necessarily that had anything to do with the mills, but just that time of your life. Can you think of anything we could use?

**1:36:44**

**RS:** Well, it was a great release to shout at some music when you're driving down the M1. U2 I used to listen to. Bloody Sunday. Shout my head off on it. Because it was generally Sundays when I was driving back. Full blast. Born to Run? Oh, I've got the tune in my head, [diddle diddle do dur...] it'll come to me in a minute. So yeah, there's all sorts of... Born to be Wild, yeah. "Born to be Wild."

**LMI:** My dad's a big 80s, 90s music lover.

**RS:** Yeah, well, the '70s was the era for music.

**LMI:** Yeah.

**RS:** I'm going to see a Genesis Tribute group on a Saturday. That's in Bury. They're called Mama. But they're covering Phil Collins's era. But also... Peter Gabriel. Brilliant music. And we've just seen Steeleye Dan, the tribute band. So yes, it's '70s, not so much the '80s and '90s. I like all the silly... what's that song? 'Pop Music,' that electric one, would go with a weaving loom. Do you know the one I mean? 'Let's talk about pop music.' [Sings] 1980s. Not Pet Shop Boys, but... Lynn'll know. I don't know where she is. She's probably earwigging.

**LMI2:** Yeah, it'll be the synth in that as well.

**RS:** Yeah, it does. The synth, yeah. Have you met a lady that's involved with South Square?

**1:38:31**

**LMI:** I don't think...

**RS:** Because she's done music related to textiles.

**LMI:** Fantastic. Do you know, we've got one person who's friended me and sung about the mills, but I'm not sure if that's the same person. But I'll add it to the list because that is something that would be really neat.

**RS:** And do you know Queen Street Mill in Burnley? They've done a nice book on people's stories in the mills. Just one second... I'm going to get...

**RS:** I can show you some more. So that's the punch card.

**LMI:** Oh, look at that!

**RS:** That's the old punch card. That's from the 1912 machine that is still weaving madras lace in new mills in Ayrshire. A company called Morton, Young and Borland. So I think that...that's the perforated paper for the modern loom. So that loom weaves at 120 picks a minute. And this weaves at 320. And the reason... it's an odd number is 320, isn't it? Why can't it go quicker? Why do you think? Do you know what happens? There's needles that drop into that. So there's 1,200 needles in the engine, in the jacquard, that relates to the point paper I showed you earlier. The little squares.

**1:40:18**

**RS:** And so where there's a painted dot, there'll be a hole in the card that signals the needle that is attached to the cord, that's attached to the warp thread, to lift up.

**LMI:** Right.

**RS:** So in that black line, that's *one* weaving instruction for *one* row on that point paper. And so, 320 is the maximum speed in which the needles, the thin needles, can get in and out of the card before it rotates to the next thread.

**LMI:** Wow!

**RS:** Because if it doesn't rotate quickly, it can't go at 320 picks a minute. But any quicker and it can't get in and out. And it tears the card. So that was the finite speed. So Jacquard... it tells you in there, Jacquard's machine, his invention moved the speed of the Jacquard loom from 4 weft picks a minute, with 2 weavers, (usually small kids, in the bottom of the loom) being shouted at by the master weaver, 'Lift! Lift!'

**1:41:29**

**RS:** 4 times a minute. Jacquard's machine, by 1804, his machine was weaving at 48 picks a minute, with one weaver looking after two looms.

**LMI:** Gosh!

**RS:** You've heard of the Luddites? They had the same in France, breaking up the machines. 'You're putting us out of work! These machines are coming!' It was 180 years before the British invented the computer jacquard. Which is basically electronic signals on magnets to say 'Yes, no, yes, no.' And a pulley that lifts the threads.

**1:42:07**

**LMI:** Imagine if your grandad could see the transition.

**RS:** I know, I know. The story I told you about Alan Stringer, my dad's designer - almost in tears when he saw his computer-aided design... sorry, the future of his craft that he'd been in since a youngster.

**LMI:** It's probably what we are now doing with AI as well, the idea of jobs and things being taken from people because they're doing the work for you. Oh, honestly, this interview has been incredible. And I know that you've probably got so much more to show us, and to look at.

**RS:** I'm conscious of the time. And you've probably... well, you've got homes to go to. So this is, that's the mill. And then these are... that's Jackie, the Scottish designer. That's Louise. I'm still in... after 15 years I made contact with Louise again, who... It was a very sad... and we had, we shed a few... The two of us said it was upsetting what happened. It was upsetting as well.

**LMI:** It's nice you've got these pictures.

**1:43:17**

**RS:** Yeah. This is the winding department. That's the ladies, Eileen and her daughter.

**LMI:** It's so amazing to see colour photos of the mills!

**RS:** This is Eddie, Fast Eddie, he was the best worker, best warper. We called him Fast Eddie because he was, he was quick. [But] He was the worst timekeeper; he never turned up on a Monday because he used to go to the working men's club on a Sunday after his cigarette run. Because cigarettes across the Channel... it was a big thing. But he didn't turn up for a Tuesday once. And we found out he'd been in Crown Court for smuggling tobacco. But Fast Eddie, what a character he was. And that's a section warp. That's the warper. There's the warp before it's knotted. So lots of pictures. Oh, yes, and there was a picture of the twister, Dougie Thorsby. But he sadly died three weeks ago, so I had to picture to his wife, that picture to his wife. Widow, should I say.

**1:44:23**

**RS:** But yeah, they were quite atmospheric.

**LMI:** It's just incredible seeing them in colour. It's so striking.

**RS:** Yeah. I still bump into Stefan. He was total barmpot, he was. He was such a character. So when mum and er... I'm sure he had Tourette's. And he wasn't the brightest in the bunch. And he used to charge around everywhere and want to please everybody. And... Paul was his name. And you know the sack carts?

**LMI:** Yeah.

**RS:** So he helped out in the warehouse on his sack cart. So he got about 40 or 50 kilos on this sack cart. And it's like this, and he's running towards the loading bay. And George, his

manager... I was stood next to George and George could see what was happening. Because he was going to run it off the end of the loading bay. And all the cartons would have been spilt into the back of the van. 'Paul! Stop!' And Paul tried to stop. And the weight of the sack cart propelled him *over* the sack cart. And the van is on the loading bay, but the top of the van is there. And he went, ploompf, head first, right into the top of the van and collapsed in the heap in the back of the van. And there's blood pouring out of his head. And George and I went over and said, 'Paul you bloody idiot, what do you think you're doing?'

**1:46:01**

**RS:** 'I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I haven't hurt the van, have I? I haven't damaged the van? I know I shouldn't be doing that, I'm terribly sorry, I'm terribly sorry.' And another time, my mum and dad had been away in South Africa and I couldn't... I should have picked them up. I said, 'I can't. I'll send Paul.' My dad said, 'Oh really?' I said 'Yeah, it'll be alright.' And so I said, 'Right in three days' time, I want you to do a job for me. I want you to go to Manchester airport and meet my mum and dad.' 'Are you serious? Oh, in your car? Oh, that would be fantastic! So he came to work and he'd got a chauffeur's hat. And he'd got a sign, 'Mr and Mrs Stanley Smith for the airport.' And we were all pissing ourselves laughing and everything else. Anyway, my father wanted to see me straight after coming back, so Paul brought mum and dad back to the mill. And I said, 'Oh, did he turn up?' Yeah, he did, silly pillock.' I said, 'What do you mean?' He said, 'Well, he turned up in a chauffer's hat and a sign.' I said, 'Well, that's not so bad, is it?' 'No, it's not that. It's the way that he greeted your mother. "Mrs Smith, welcome back!" Yeah, funny, lovely stories. Lovely memories. There's stories about each one of these people.

**LMI:** Amazing.

**RS:** And this was, these photographs were taken by a German, a lady that came to work for us from Germany. This is the... that other little picture... This is at my Dad's 65<sup>th</sup>, with all the staff. So that was '65... '70... probably 1999, no... 19... 94. It was '94. We were going well, but they were long serving staff. John Rothera had worked for Dad for 50 years. And when it came to his retirement he said, 'I'd like to stay on.' He said, 'Right you can stay on as long as you want.' So he worked for another two years. And then we said... er... we said, 'Look the firm is doing well, John. Is it a question of the money that you want?' He said, 'I just like the work, the routine. But my wife wants to see a bit more of me, so I'm going to retire.' My dad said 'Right, well I'm going to pay you, carry on paying you - as a retirement present. I don't want to give you a lump sum. But I'll pay you your weekly wage.' 'For how long?' He said, 'Oh, while I'm alive.' Anyway, when Dad died John came to see me and I said, 'I'll carry it on, don't worry.' So we paid John for 10 years after his 62... So that was a nice thing to do. But he was the only one left with my dad when my grandad died. And they just worked their nuts off basically, trying to keep things going.

**RS:** That's a funny story, story of Brenda, there... So we used to get fish and chips on a Friday and Brenda was a mender, she was bloody useless at it. Brenda the Mender. So she was good at measuring cloth and putting labels on. She was a lovely lady, but she lived with her

mother still, down at Oakenshaw. So she was slightly simple. It sounds an awful derogatory thing to say, but she was...you know...

**1:49:39**

**RS:** She wasn't going to set the world alight, Brenda. But she was always given the job to go for the fish and chips. So where the mill was, you used to have to cross a fairly busy road and then the fish and chips shop was just there. And Friday at about 10 past 12, Margaret, the aforementioned weaver comes in. 'Richard, Richard! It's Brenda, it's Brenda! She's been knocked down!' I said, 'You what?' 'She's been knocked down!' I said, 'Oh bloody hellfire!' So I rushed out there, and there's Brenda laid in the road.

**LMI:** All the fish and chips everywhere!

**RS:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. But somebody'd pinched the bloody fish and chips!

**LMI:** No! So insensitive!

**RS:** Somebody had pinched some of the fish and chips. But Brenda, by the time she's lifted and put into the ambulance, and... She's been hit by a car and Brenda's gone straight through a windscreen and nudded the driver who's away with the fairies, doesn't know where the hell he is. So he's sat in the ambulance, with Brenda. And I said, 'Right, I'll go to the hospital with Brenda.' And so, Brenda said, 'Oh dear, I don't know what's been happening. And who's this young man?' I said, 'Well, he's the driver of the car.' 'Is he dead?' I said 'No, he's not dead, Brenda.' She said, 'Oh dear, will you tell me mother?' I said, 'Yes, we'll go down to see your mother, don't you worry.' And she was... Margaret, Margaret was *incensed* that her lunch hadn't arrived, she hadn't got her bloody fish and chips. It was hilarious.

**1:51:24**

**LMI:** You can't deal with an emergency on an empty stomach, can you?

**RS:** You can't, but it was funny.

**LMI:** Margaret had the [?] Oh, honestly, that's amazing. I will send you an email with the information that I get from the archiving team and everything.

**RS:** I'll think of some songs, as well.

**LMI:** Yeah, absolutely, anything else. And what we can do is if you think of anything, or you think, 'Oh I'd love to chat again,' we can organise a follow up to discuss things like the archiving and [?]

**RS:** Well, certainly the archive... The records of these...the point papers, there's 5,000 of those. And that's E. & S. Smith's.

**1:52:11**

**RS:** Then I've got Armitage and Rhodes, 3,000. And then I've got my other private collections. There's loads of archive. And instructions for fabrics. This just has lots of... I'm conscious of the time and babbling on a lot. Have you another one of these to do?

**LMI:** Not today. I did have a meeting this morning about it. But I did about 4 or yesterday. We must have done about 35 interviews, that we've done now.

**RS:** Well, there might be one or two of my staff. John Fallows. Yeah.

**LMI:** That would be brilliant.

**RS:** Well, they're still in the trade, is John. He's slightly older than me, but he worked for Smith's. He was a brilliant overlooker, technician. But he's worked for lots of other companies as well.

**1:52:50**

**LMI:** Would you ask him if he's interested? One of the areas that we don't have a lot on now, is people who still work in the industry. Or businesses that are still running within the area. Obviously, I mean, there's no obligation, but if he either knows anyone that's interested, or wants to talk himself, that would be fantastic.

**RS:** Well, they'll all have little anecdotes. Yes, you can turn that off now.