

Christine Davenport - Transcription

Audio Quality : Background noise, other interviews taking place.

0:00:00

LMI: Yeah, here we go. Can you just say who you are again?

CD: Right, I'm Christine Davenport. I'm 61.

LMI: You have to speak up a little bit, because there's a bit of background noise.

CD: Oh right. Do you want me to repeat that again?

LMI: No, that'll do. I'm sure it picked it up all right.

CD: Right.

LMI: Now, don't worry too much, but I'll ask these questions.

CD: Yeah, you ask them questions.

LMI: Yeah, yeah. So, which part of... where do you live? You don't live in Bradford, do you?
You live in...

0:00:23

CD: I now live in Hebden Bridge, but I used to live in Keighley.

LMI: That's fantastic. And when did you move to Hebden Bridge then?

CD: Erm, 29 years ago. So it would have been about 1992 I moved to Halifax...Yep, and then I moved to Hebden Bridge.

LMI: And you've worked in textile mills?

CD: Yes, from the age of 16.

LMI: From 16?

CD: Yep.

0:00:45

LMI: When was that?

CD: Oh Gawd... 1978...no, '76. '76...And I married at 18...1978.

LMI: Right. Yeah. And how long did you work in mills for?

CD: Gawd. On and off, probably about 10 years, maybe longer.

LMI: Did you like it?

CD: Yes.

0:01:04

LMI: Where were they? Which mills were they?

CD: The first mill I worked in was Hayfield Textiles. So they did all knitting wool.

LMI: And where's Hayfield Textiles? That's a new name on me.

CD: That's Glusbren.

LMI: Oh, right. Yeah, yeah.

CD: And that had multiple positions there, from spinning right the way down to... I was a baller, a packer, so a handballing machine. Yeah, thoroughly enjoyed it. We left school and went straight there.

0:01:33

CD: Myself and quite a few school friends. We all joined up. Some of my friends went into the spinning, some went into roving, and I went into the balling. Machine balling.

LMI: Can you explain what roving is? For anybody that might not know.

CD: Oh, good grief, now going back... because you've got drawing - which took the actual rough through the machines and basically pressed it through and turned it into a weft. (It's hard to explain now, because I don't remember all the jargon.) You've got the rovings - where they go through another process. They're almost like spinning, but they're going onto a big reel. So they get spun onto a bigger reel, which then go... They get hung up, and again brought back down to a spinning machine underneath rollers, clamped it down, and then there'd be a big spinner, a big bobbin. So like you've got these smaller bobbins here, you'd have the big bobbins. So the rovings were a bigger version of them.

0:02:24

LMI: The big ones that look like giant cotton reels?

CD: Yeah, big cotton reels. You normally see them in antique fairs for about £30 apiece. So they went, you know, they was drawn off onto those. And then they would then be transferred to the spinning machines, which would then spin them down to what you've got there on your bobbins. I presume that's cotton. Our bobbins were a lot bigger. And a lot softer, obviously. And then they went on to the balling machines. So they would obviously be spun into 50 gram balls, 100 gram balls. But I think they were in ounces then; they still did ounces. Yeah I think they still did ounces. And then because of the machines, and then we

went on to grams later on, you know so 50 gram balls, 100 gram balls, 200 gram balls. We did a variety of different yarns, which I really liked.

0:03:15

LMI: So you worked at, what are they called again? Hayfields.

CD: Hayfields.

LMI: And did you work in other places as well?

CD: Yep, started off there, and then I left to get married. Went to work for the Co-op. And then when the children came along, I then went to work at John Haggas's, which is at Ingra.

LMI: So many people worked there.

CD: Yeah.

LMI: So many people.

0:03:35

CD: A lot of us came out actually slightly deaf, because the decibels of the machines was quite damaging.

LMI: Somebody else had mentioned that to me, how loud it was.

CD: Yeah, so at one side...because you're going down, I was right... so I would be going down, you're walking down...that's it... you're walking down each end, so I'm left-handed...well, I'm right-handed... but you'd walk down the frame with your left hand out. And if there's a gap, you put the end up. So there might be 240 ends per side. Or was there 260? Which is quite a lot, 240/260. Times that by two. And that's how many bobbins you're looking after. You'd just put the ends back up.

0:04:07

LMI: 620?

CD: Yeah, round about. So... you'd doff off the machines, which obviously again, the bigger bobbins and them. Doff them all off and run them all up. Or you reset for new... if a new yarn coming in, you know, you cleaned down and you reset for a new one. Enjoyable.

LMI: You liked it?

CD: Yeah. Yeah.

LMI: Do you know, so many people have told me how much they enjoy working in mills. Even though it was a bit loud.

0:04:32

CD: Mm. Yeah, it made your hearing slightly distorted on that side. So even today, I'm still slightly distorted.

LMI: So it affected your hearing on one side, but not on the other?

CD: Because it's the side nearest to the machines.

LMI: Yeah.

CD: So as you're going down, that's 'ffff' going on. And that affected your hearing. So, but I hadn't worked there long enough to claim compensation for it. So if you'd been there for a couple of years, you could claim compensation.

0:04:53

LMI: So did they not ever think to give anybody hearing aid?

CD: No, there were no ear protectors, at all. Forget health and safety, I don't think there was any. You know, I don't remember any. When you were putting your ends up, you used to have to learn to keep your little finger in. So when I first learned...was learning, I was always burning the inside of my little finger.

0:05:17

LMI: Because it was moving so...

CD: No, it's because you put your knee on the brake.

LMI: Yeah.

CD: Because every bobbin had a knee brake.

LMI: Yeah.

CD: So you use your knee brake to stop the spindle, pull your end, thread it underneath the wheel, let go, and it would spin it through. But the amount of times my little finger would touch into the next one.

LMI: Oh, I see.

CD: So if you think you've got one like that...

0:05:41

LMI: Yeah, so the one next to it...

CD: So you're doing that, and your little finger, when you grab that, used to catch the next one.

LMI: And it's moving really fast. Yeah. So it would burn your finger.

CD: So I used to do a friction burn. You soon learnt to tuck it in.

LMI: Yeah.

CD: There was a bit of a saying: 'You can always tell a good spinner by the state of her knees.' And what they meant was - If you've got holes in your knees, you're a bad spinner.

LMI: Holes in your clothes?

CD: Yeah. It meant you were a bad spinner. Not in your knees, but in the knees of your trousers. Because you were using the knee breaks a lot. Which meant the ends were down a lot. So, you were a bad spinner.

0:06:10

LMI: Ah, I see.

CD: So that's what they used to say. 'If you've got a hole in the knee of your trousers, you were a bad spinner.' You had to keep putting the ends up.

LMI: Ah, okay, that's interesting.

CD: Yeah, so that was one thing we learnt fairly young. Yeah, it was a fabulous community, to be honest. You learnt to lipread. Because again, the sound of the machines...you were either shouting over or you were lipreading.

0:06:38

LMI: And did you find that easy?

CD: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, you did.

[Just one second.

It's alright. Sorry, ok, Izzy is...]

CD: Mmm. So that was Hayfield.

LMI: So you learnt to lipread? That's quite interesting.

CD: Yeah, because you're shouting over the machines.

LMI: Can you still do that now?

CD: Not as well, but I do tend to watch people's mouths.

0:06:59

LMI: When you're in a crowded room, or something like that?

CD: Yeah.

LMI: I suppose if your hearing's not very good either.

CD: Well on one side it's not as good. And it comes in useful. I have a few customers in the cafe who...one has got some form of... He's very difficult to understand, he has a big stammer. And I'm always watching his mouth, so I can pick up probably 75% of what he's saying. You know, where one of my colleagues is going, 'What did he say?' But I'm able to... but I watch him all the time, you know. It's only if he constantly repeats...

0:07:33

LMI: The other sort of... I don't know if it's mythology or not... that people had sort of sign language.

CD: There was a form of sign language. We didn't tend to do that as much, you know. Apart from your good old 'tea'. Yeah, apart from when it's things like, if you... When I went to work at Midgley's, which was Dalton Mills... because I worked in a lot of mills. Dalton Mills was the last mill I worked in. And that would have been... 37 years ago.

LMI: So Dalton Mill was-

CD: Which was Midgley's.

LMI: Which was a huge mill.

CD: Yeah.

LMI: What was that like to work in?

0:08:09

CD: Again, same, you've got a lovely... I worked night shift. There'd be six of us on night shift. And the overlooker was actually the uncle of my ex-boyfriend. We were together then. And he was ex-military, so he used to cook us dinners. So during the night, when it was tea break, dinner time, we would walk in, and he'd cook meals. So we actually had proper meals.

LMI: Oh, so he'd cook *you* a proper meal?

CD: He would cook us all a proper meal. Not every night. But a lot of times he did, because he was a military chef.

0:08:38

LMI: Oh, right.

CD: He cooked in the army.

LMI: So he enjoyed doing it?

CD: Yeah. So... and he never treated me any different to the other girls. In fact, he was probably harder on me, because I was living with his nephew. So it was no favouritism whatsoever. And whilst you're having your dinner, one of the girls would go out and check everybody's machines. And if there was an end down, or one of their spindles got broke, because I was always breaking pins. If you got a big lap, you'd have these pins that are holding the bars together.

0:09:08

CD: And rather than break the bar, it would break the pin. So it would stop that section of the machine. So it'd end up with big wraps, and then, you know, the fabric would be going on the floor. The weft would be on the floor, I can't remember what they call it now, the actual yarn...the 'raw'... would be going onto the floor. So you'd stop the machine, and then you'd call the girl whose machine it was, so it didn't get any worse. So you all looked after each other, and took it in turns. Changeover machines, you all helped each other.

0:09:34

LMI: Do you think it was a special kind of community?

CD: Yeah.

LMI: The textile community?

CD: Yeah, very much. Very much. You know, they were very... I mean, you worked nights, so it was like shared everything. I remember one lady, her husband and her twin children had gone to... they'd gone to Bradford Fire, where they... football.

LMI: Oh, yeah, yeah.

CD: She'd gone there and she was absolutely on pins because...

0:10:06

[I'll just say to her... Just one second. Thank you. To see you again, it's really good to see you. I'm sorry I've been busy. No, no. It's great being busy. It is. Are you giving a talk on Saturday? I am, at the Industrial Museum.

0:10:22

No, at the Cartwright Hall, right? Cartwright Hall? I think so. I'll text you the details. I'll check with Claire, because she's got a chip. Okay. Take care. Sorry about that. It's all right, we'll just have to edit it out. I will. I will.]

0:10:34

CD: Yes, so what were we saying? So Midgely's Mill, originally, used to be on the back of Coventry Street. And then there'd been a big fire. So that went down to Dalton Mills.

LMI: Oh, right.

CD: So there was two sections of Midgely's. So at Mill One... so as you went under the arch, the side I worked in was on the left-hand side.

0:10:55

CD: As you went under the arch, it was on the left. And then straight in front was the other part of Midgely's, which my former brother-in-law and mother-in-law worked. They worked in there during the day. I worked the night shift. So the mills were running 24 hours. But as I said, I was in...

LMI: Even in the '70s?

0:11:16

CD: Even in the '70s, yeah, they were running 24 hours. Yeah, so... But, yeah, with one of the colleagues, with the fire in Bradford, the football... she got to hear about the fire, because we're... we're looking out for her, because she's obviously anxious. You didn't have mobile phones then.

LMI: No, I remember it well. I remember it really well.

0:11:33

CD: Yeah, and she was... You know, luckily, her husband and her twins were fine. But a lot of other people weren't, so it was quite a traumatic time.

LMI: My daughter, she lost some friends who were at school with her.

CD: My second husband's nephew was Tony Bland.

LMI: Tony?

CD: Tony Bland, he was the one whose life support was switched off.

LMI: Oh, I remember.

CD: Yeah, so he was the 53rd victim of the disaster. So he was on life support for a couple of years before the courts decided to... they ruled to switch off. So that was quite a thing. But

anyway, so you've got Midgely's. Now, on a night time, it was quite eerie. There were some times you'd go out...

0:12:12

LMI: Was it quieter?

CD: Yeah, there was a funny silence from about three o'clock. It's like the dead. It's like nothing. Not a bird, nothing. And you always know when it's that time. You know, and I used to smoke then, so, you know, I'd probably nip out for a cigarette smoke, and you always knew what time it was because of that dead silence. And then afterwards...

LMI: Well, what was that about? What was...

0:12:41

CD: It was just deadly silent. There was nothing, there were no birds, the birds hadn't woken up. Then later on, obviously, the dawn chorus would start. But you'd have this total silence.

LMI: No traffic noise.

CD: Nothing at all. So you'd come out of the mill door, obviously, you opened up the mill when you're going in and you'd hear all the clatter of everything, but when you went outside for that smoke, it was that really eerie silence.

LMI: Did you like it?

CD: Yeah. Yeah, there's something rather nice about that. Midgely's Mill though, there was a... I don't know if it's true or not... but apparently when they had the mill up on the back of Governing Street, (there's new houses there now) ... apparently they had a fire there. And a husband and his wife worked there. His wife apparently got caught in the fire. He went in looking for her. And apparently, they both perished in the fire. Allegedly.

0:13:30

CD: Now there's two versions: One is that she survived, but he died in the fire looking for her. And the other one is that they both died in the fire. But when we went down to Midgley's, down Dalton Lane, there used to be times when... I remember this big lap on a machine, and we started going down and we stopped. We couldn't go any further. We got spooked. And there was just something... You couldn't go any further.

LMI: Oh really?

CD: You ended up coming back. You could feel your hair standing up on... you know what I mean?

LMI: Yeah.

0:13:55

CD: Your neck would go. I don't know whether it's because we knew about that story, or whether or not there was something there. We don't know. It used to be a workhouse at one time, did Dalton Mills.

LMI: Oh really? Did it really?

CD: Yeah, so you went down into the cellar, all the milk's missing, but it used to be a workhouse.

LMI: Golly.

CD: I've got that in a book at home.

LMI: I've not heard that before.

CD: Well apparently, it used to be a Victorian workhouse. And women was at one side, men at the other and it was for children. So yeah, so that's way before it was obviously used for mill purposes of *this* type. It probably *was* still mills, but this is what we heard about... this was after Midgley's went down there. So, a bit of research for that, I think. I think it was in the... might have been the Workhouses of Yorkshire, but it's a... there was a website, and it was on there.

0:14:36

LMI: Oh, I'll look it up. So... and everybody got on well, did they? I mean, like... there was a time when a lot of new people coming into Bradford, and Keighley as well?

CD: No, because we all interlocked. There was... the Italians were already here.

LMI: Yeah.

CD: You know, the Germans were already here. I worked at Coney Lane Mill at one stage, before I went to Midgley's. Because when I had children, obviously, I had to give up work. And then when I was able to work, you'd go back to night... to evening shift.

0:15:10

CD: So I did a lot of evening shift work, and he took them wherever the mills were, where the jobs were. So that's why I've worked in a lot of mills. I've had six children. (I just thought I'd tell you that.)

LMI: That's quite a few.

CD: Yes, quite a few. 17 grandchildren now. But so, I worked at Coney Lane. Now Coney Lane, there was a lot of Asian men working there, and were doing exactly the same job. But they actually... men got paid more than what we did.

LMI: Oh, did they?

CD: And I remember walking out. I'd been there for a few days, and I walked out. I never even picked up my first wage packet. We weren't treated as well by the male overlooker. He was white. He wasn't Asian or anything. He was white.

0:15:47

CD: I remember this Pakistani coming up and helping me out on the machine, because they were old machines. They had the wooden rollers and leather banding. So he lifted the lever up to me.

LMI: Very old machines.

CD: Very, very old. Little wooden rollers, they would fall off very easily. And I used to get frustrated with it because I couldn't get them to stay up. I'm not sure if that was piece rate as well, but I remember getting really upset. And in the end, I walked out and never went back to that one. That was Coney Lane. That's now flattened. I worked at King Cole's... Crikey that would be... 39 years ago.

LMI: King Cole's?

CD: Yeah, King Cole's.

LMI: Where was that?

CD: That was at the back of Morrison's.

0:16:26

LMI: Oh, right.

CD: So, it was Premier Bowling, which was a section of King Cole's, which is in Crossflats. It's Premier Bowling, and it was Cabbage Mills. And that was at the back of Morrison's. So where the petrol station is now, *that* was where the mill was. And there's still a bit of a structure there. So we were there when they knocked down the old snooker room on a Sunday morning.

0:16:48

CD: Morrison's. They didn't get planning permission to do it, so they knocked it and bulldozed it down anyway. And paid the fine. Because they got more cars in. They weren't bothered, they made more money because they got more cars parking. So we watched that being demolished this Sunday morning. There were several other mills using that. Premier Balling was one of them. Then another floor would be C.H. Fletcher's. So, it was like an extra... overflow, if you like. Because that was related to the one at Coney Mills. So, one of their floors was to Cabbage Mills as well.

LMI: One of the things you described to me here is the way people kind of almost like sublet spaces to other businesses.

CD: Yeah, they did in there. Yeah.

LMI: And I suppose if mills were closing, and somebody got an order there. They had to...

0:17:31

CD: Yeah, well this is it. I mean, so like I said, there were Coney Mills...and it was like an overflow floor. So they had a floor there. Premier Balling, which was part of King Cole's, they had a floor there. And then there was another floor. I can't remember who that one was. But we was up on the...I think we were on the second floor. We used to do weekend shift. And you were locked in on a weekend. With an overlooker.

LMI: You were locked in?

CD: Four girls and an overlooker. We could get out, you know, obviously, to the shop or whatever. But because of where we were, you had to go in through the main door, then across and over into our side. So they locked the door once we were all in. Just to stop people...

0:18:09

LMI: Because you were doing a night shift?

CD: No, no, that was a morning shift. That was a day shift, that was a weekend. That mill runs seven days a week. We worked part-time, weekend staff. So I worked there with my sister-in-law. And we were doing 'ball and packing', which was an automated machine. And all we had to do was - it would bring the cakes of wool up and through onto the balling, onto the mandarins, to ball them. And then it would automatically doff onto a conveyor. And then there'd be two workers on either side, (one on either side). And we'd be packing them into bags. Into the chute and onto the bales. And then we just kept the cakes full.

LMI: And what was this, knitting wool?

0:18:44

CD: This was knitting wool as well, yeah. And that's when I learnt that double knitting was the same as baby double knitting. They just charge you more for baby double knitting. Because we used to run out of labels, and we'd say, 'We're out of labels.' And they used to say, 'Right, well, put baby double knitting on.' You know, with colour and everything. And I said, 'Well, it's not baby double knitting.' They said, 'Yes, it is.'

LMI: Exactly the same stuff.

0:19:07

CD: It was the same stuff. So after that, I always used to use double knitting. Normal double knitting. I never bought the baby stuff again. We used to do brushing there, which again, helps to fluff it up. It's going around a big pin barrel. So you'd be doing brushing there. So that was... 39 years ago. My oldest daughter is 43. 43, 41, 39 and 37, yeah, so...

LMI: 39 years ago would be about...

0:19:37

CD: About 1986, '86, '88, '86...

LMI: Nearly 40.

CD: Yeah, so '84 and '86.

LMI: '83, '84.

CD: Because it was Wakes Week, and I was pregnant with my son. And we had Wakes fortnight and I remember...

LMI: I was a teacher you see, so I remember... at one point.

0:20:07

CD: Well, I remember the overlooker, because I wouldn't take maternity leave. Maternity was different then as well. And so, every now and then he used to throw a ball of wool into the machine as I was walking past. And I used to run like hell to turn that machine button off. The emergency stop off. If I couldn't have done it...

LMI: It would turn the machine off.

CD: Yeah, because it would get caught round the mandarins, which would then slacken, and they can break the next one on. Now of course, it did used to catch, but I used to get to the stop button before he did. And what it was is, if I couldn't have done that, I would have been made to go on maternity. And that's what he did it for.

LMI: Oh, right, so he was like testing you?

CD: He was testing my reflexes. And it was quite funny because when we were going... we broke up for the Wakes Week fortnight and us overlooker turned round and he says, 'Oh' he says, 'I'll see you when you've had the baby'

0:20:51

CD: I said, 'No you won't. You'll see me after holiday' Lo and behold, the weekend after the holiday, I was missing, because he were born eight weeks early. And then weekend afterwards, I went back in in my normal jeans. And I'm back on the machine with my sister-in-law. And he walks through, stopped, walked back again, looked at me. Baby's in special care and I'm back to work.

LMI: How long was it since you had the baby?

CD: He was probably about two weeks old.

LMI: My word!

0:21:18

CD: So you were straight back. You see my partner didn't work; he wouldn't work. So I was the breadwinner. So obviously I went back to work you know. So, when you look now at what goes on today, parental, you know, parental leave, maternity leave and this leave. We didn't have that. You know, you had maternity leave, which was so many weeks, and there's benefits paid you. Then we got a little book, and that was if you were entitled to it. You went back to work after that was finished. Well, I just carried on working. I had a mortgage to pay. So, I went back to work straight away.

LMI: Was that a struggle?

CD: With a few kids, yeah.

0:21:56

LMI: Physically, if you just had a baby, you can't... You're on your feet all day long.

CD: Yeah, looking after the kids. He was doing whatever he wanted to do, meaning that, you know, he was a lazy bugger. He was a lazy bugger. And eventually I ended up with an emotional breakdown. So I actually did take an overdose. And that's where we broke up in the end. And I think that was more or less the end of working in the mills. And I ended up going into retail, back into retail. I worked at Laxton and Crawford's in Silsden. That's gone. In fact, I feel like a jinx, because every mill I went to work in, after I left, they closed down.

LMI: I think maybe it was more to do with the economic climate.

CD: Probably, but you start beginning to feel you're a jinx.

LMI: Were you aware of the whole kind of industry shrinking?

CD: Yeah.

0:22:37

LMI: And people moving away from it, I guess?

CD: Yeah. Well, a lot of things had been imported in as well. Down at Midgley's we used to do khaki which was a really, really, very dusty wood yarn. Obviously, it's uniforms and things. The one that we used to all dread, all those ladies dread was Gregior. It's a form of yarn. And they actually use it for tampons.

LMI: Oh, really?

CD: And it's really silky white. It's beautifully, really silky white is the rovings for these. But once they're spun, you need a knife to cut them.

0:23:12

CD: You know, you couldn't just snap them with your finger, like you could with the others. So when you're doffing, you used to use your fingers. Pull up, use your fingers. You couldn't do it with that. You had to use a knife to cut the thread.

LMI: It was so strong. Was it artificial fibre?

CD: I don't know what's in it, to be honest. But it was like cotton wool. When it was on the rovings, it was like cotton wool. It was beautifully soft. Once it'd been spun, you couldn't snap it. You had to use... we had a ring knife. So you used to have a little, a ring.

LMI: A ring knife?

0:23:41

CD: So you had a ring, and it had like a little blade on it. And that's what you used to cut it. So you put it on top of...

LMI: Oh, I've never heard of those.

CD: ...yeah, there was like a little ring with this little tiny blade in it. And you put the thread that way, so you're pulling it that way. So yeah, so that was another thing we used to have. I worked in... Oh God, now what was it called? The one in Coling, Ideal Carpets. And again, I was upstairs, top floor. Because the raw used to come up to the top, hank to cone, winding, whatever.

0:24:12

CD: So you're doing the drawing, it would then go on to the hanks, down to the next floor, which then went to hank to cone. So we used to open them up, and put them up, spin them out onto the cones. Then they used to go down the stairs to the weaving shed.

LMI: So the whole thing happened in one building?

CD: Yeah.

LMI: From the raw wool?

CD: Yeah, the raw coming in from the top, so they were lifted into the top. And then they would go out as a finished carpet.

LMI: So did they have a dye house there? Did they dye it?

0:24:38

CD: No, they did colours. They actually had... So they will have had a dye house, but I never saw that. That wasn't my part. But what you did... you've got all the colours, so you're... obviously doing all these, you know... you might have two days of doing black, which is a very, very difficult thread as well, because it's recycled other threads. All merged together, all recycled together, then dyed black. It's really coarse. So when you were opening the hanks, you'd have burns on your wrists where you've been opening them up.

LMI: Oh, wow.

CD: So you put your hands through and you're opening them up to lay the strands. Put them on the creel, take your thread across, onto your bobbin. And then let it connect. And it would then... like a shuttle for a needle. Can you imagine a bobbin for a needle? And that's what we're doing, across until the whole hank had gone. And then you doffed them off and you did the next one. So you might have 16 ends. And you're just literally going up and down. So you're going up and down. By the time you got to the top end, the bottom ones are coming empty, so you doff the cheese off, and you put the next one on.

LMI: So was it physically hard work?

CD: Yeah, yeah, but it was enjoyable. You know it was enjoyable.

0:25:46

LMI: Was that because it was a skillful kind of job?

CD: Once you were trained to do it it was easy, but yeah, there was some skill involved with that. I think the piece rate.

LMI: You weren't just on a production line sort of watching... packing stuff?

CD: No, no, no, no. As soon as you'd finished, you know, once your tub were full, the lads would take it downstairs onto the next floor. That would then go onto giant shuttles for threading. So you'd have your pattern for your carpets, because it was a carpet company, this. And it was fantastic to watch, because every spool had each colour, the colour that's required. And then they would go onto the weaving machines. And they'd take a bit off and move forward, take a bit off and move forward. So all these spools are all moving, but it was creating a pattern.

LMI: And that was all computer controlled?

0:26:37

CD: Yeah, it's all computer controlled.

LMI: Did they use punch cards, or did they use... ?

CD: I don't remember the punch cards. Now, the men in Silsden used to have punch cards, because when we were kids we used to play with them. They used to throw them out at the

back, and we used to... big streams of cardboard with holes in. And we used to play with them and the little dots that came out of them.

LMI: Yeah, the jacquard looms.

CD: That's the ones, yeah, jacquard.

0:26:58

CD: And we used to play with them when we were kids, the confetti to us, you know. We got into a lot of trouble. Because Silsden had a lot of mills as well.

LMI: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

CD: So, um...

LMI: So did your family work in mills before you? I mean, your parents?

CD: My mum did. My granny did. She was, Steeton, so she worked in the old bobbin mill at Steeton.

LMI: So your mum and your granny, so how many years back would that take you then?

CD: Oh, good grief. My granny would be, if she were alive today she'd be about 128, 129. She went into the mill when she was about 16.

0:27:25

LMI: So that would have been...

CD: A long time ago.

LMI: ...the turn of the century.

CD: Yeah. But she married my grandad, whose family owned a mill on Manningham Lane. So he was part of the family, there was two partners. So there was George Simpson, which was my grandad's father or grandfather. And I can't... I don't know the partner's name. Now the problem there, I can't find it on Ancestry anymore. Because he married my grandmother, who was a mill worker. And in them days he married beneath his station. So he was actually cut out. So she'd always tried to...she always had airs and graces, because they come from gentlemen. They were, you know, the gentry type thing. You know, the big houses on Manningham Lane. They're all prostitutes, and student lodgings now. But he lived in one of those when they were courting. But he married her and he was, what was it, El Catherine.

0:28:22

CD: Yeah, so he ended up being a master of all sorts of things, jack of all trades. So he'd sell ice cream from a wheelbarrow down in Devon, to mending cars. You know, he...

LMI: So he really didn't have any of the mill business for himself at all?

CD: No.

LMI: As soon as he married a mill girl?

CD: Yeah, he was beneath his station, and of course that was it.

LMI: And that was your great-grandma?

CD: That was my grandmother.

LMI: Your grandmother.

CD: Yeah, but it would have been my great-grandfather's mill.

0:28:47

LMI: Right. Oh, ok.

CD: It was my grandad who married my grandmother. So when I'm doing the Ancestry I can find a load about my grandmother, and where they've come from, and everything. But I cannot find anything about my granddad, siblings or anything. I can't find anything.

LMI: Even though his family owned a mill?

CD: Yeah.

LMI: That's strange.

CD: Yeah, so I can't... The nearest I got to was we went down to Bodlewood Castle many many years ago and I actually found the book. I didn't buy it. I should have done but I didn't. I had my kids with me. They wanted other things rather than this book. It had the coat of arms in it as well. And I really wish I'd bought that book. Because it had... it was either Sir George Simpson, or Lord George Simpson... I can't remember which it was now. And I wish I'd bought that book, because that was my ancestry. And I didn't buy it. Hindsight is a wonderful thing.

0:29:33

LMI: It is.

CD: So, there's that one. Where else have I worked? We've done... John Haggas'. I worked there twice. Again, between children. Evening shift. Riverside Mill. It was like... again, you've got Springfield, Springvale Mill, bottom end. And then you've got the next one up was Riverside. I always found the women on Riverside were very, very bitchy. They weren't as

nice as the ones that we were in. I don't know why. The Italians, fantastic. We had a lot of Italian people working in...

LMI: Yeah, there's a couple of Italian women in Bingley, I'm going... in Shipley rather, I'm going to interview. And somebody was telling me, today, in fact, that there used to be Italian church services in Shipley as well.

CD: Yeah.

LMI: So in... the local Catholic Church had a special Italian service once a month.

CD: Yeah. Because again, Italians are Catholic.

0:30:32

LMI: Yeah, exactly.

CD: So we had them. Um, what's that one now? British Mohair Spinners.

LMI: Oh, right.

CD: That was another one. I applied for a job there, and my lazy partner at the time wouldn't look after his daughter. This was before I went on evenings at Haggas's. Wouldn't look after his daughter whilst I went for a job interview. So I had to take her down in the pram. Parked her up outside, went in for my job interview, into the office. And this chap comes in and he says, 'Who's is that baby outside? I says, 'Mine.'

0:31:02

CD: And he turned round, and I always remember him saying, 'Don't you think you'd better be a better, you know, a mother to it, rather than come into work.'

LMI: Oh, my word.

CD: And like, clearly I never got the job. So I went to Haggas's, I got a job at Haggas's instead. But *that* was the mentality then. Women were in the home, looking after the children.

LMI: It was your job to look after the children. Even though you were the breadwinner for most of the time? It's hard work...

0:31:30

CD: Yes. One of the reasons why we broke up in the end. Because I worked all the time, and he didn't. He worked long enough to get a mortgage together, and then he got made redundant and never bothered working again. So, hence why I had an emotional breakdown and took an overdose. Because everything was too much, you know. So... You live and you move on.

LMI: You do move on. You do move on.

CD: Yeah, but, um... Yes, there's quite a lot of mills there.

0:31:54

LMI: I think it's fascinating actually, the way you kind of... I mean, what really is quite incredible is how much you remember of the actual processes you were involved in.

CD: Yeah.

LMI: Some of the people we talked to don't mention the actual physical processes, the job, at all really. But you've got the detail of it there.

CD: Because you can almost see yourself doing it. You can almost see yourself getting the big wooden rovings and putting them on. When they fall they hurt. Because you clip them up and sometimes the clips are a bit weak. Or if you don't put them up right, and they'll fall down. And the amount of times they've hit me on the shoulder. And they *hurt*. You know, so you're popping it back up. I'm only 5 ft 1, so I used to have a duck board. So, just before the bobbins, before the edge of the machine, there was a duck board. And I used to stand on that. But you had to make sure you had nothing flapping. Because otherwise the spinners... the bobbins would suck them in. And a few times that happened. You'd pull them back, and you'd end up snapping the end. And you've got to then put the ends back up, you know. Which is a bit frustrating when you've got them all running. You know, 'Oh my God don't!' But yeah, so you can almost... you know, I could almost walk down, put the roving up, bring it down and through. Lift up the rollers, pull the ends through, snap it down, pull it down, separate the weft... the soft... (I forget what it's called). Because they run two ends. They run two bobbins. So one roving fed two bobbins. So you brought it down underneath where the rollers are, and then you separate the two, put them under each individual roller, and down to each spindle. So, as I said, two for one.

0:33:31

LMI: If I put you in front of one of those machines now, could you still do it?

CD: I could still do it. I probably would burn my fingers. But yeah, I could still do it. Because I can still see myself doing it.

LMI: That's incredible.

CD: You know, so yeah, I can still see it.

LMI: Even after... however many years it is.

CD: Forty years. Yeah, you can still see yourself doing it. Hank to cone, if you notice I'm doing that. Because you had to put the hank... Do you remember the days of your grandmother?

0:33:52

LMI: Yeah. Yeah, exactly.

CD: You went like that, and she's going like that.

LMI: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

CD: You had to stretch it.

LMI: Kind of breaks it out. Yeah.

CD: ...find the end. So you put that on the creel. The creel was like a spool with so many spokes on it. And then the hank would then rest over the top. You'd find the end, there were two ends. Bottom end, you don't want that. And then the top one.

0:34:19

CD: So you'd pull it out. Pull it forward. And if it suddenly went underneath, you'd got the wrong one. So you took that back under. And then you'd look for the right end. Pull that off. Straight up onto, you know... You'd thread it back through and onto your cone. And then pull the lever and it would go onto the rollers. So there'd be these big rollers at all times.

LMI: I'm going to have to see if there's a video of this on YouTube now.

CD: There will be. There will be. If you go to Halifax Industrial Museum, have you been there?

LMI: I haven't been to Halifax Industrial Museum.

CD: Go and have a look there. Because we went there a few years ago, and they had a machine there. And it was just like one which we used to use. And we were talking, you know, to them, you know, they asked if I could ever come in for a demonstration. Well, I couldn't at the time, because I was working.

LMI: Have you been to the Bradford Industrial Museum?

CD: No, I've not been to that one yet.

LMI: Because they're partners in this project. And they've got a lot of equipment there. A lot of mill machinery there.

0:35:09

CD: Yeah. So there's.... Gibson's Mill. I'm still in slight dispute there, because they were making out... I mean, obviously you've been to Gibson's Mill?

LMI: No, I was going to do a big project there, but then Covid happened.

CD: Yeah. Well, they maintained that the weaving machines were on the top floor. And you know, you can see where they are, because of where the wheels had been coming backwards and forwards. And I said, 'They can't have been.' They would have to have been spinning frames. And they would have been belt driven, because it was a watermill as well. So there

would have to have been belts and pulleys. And all of them, you know, really adamant about it. But when you came downstairs it was a stone floor. And I said, '*That* would have been where the weaving machines would have been. Because of the weight of a weaving machine.' I said 'And also, they take the raw up to the top floor, and then they bring it down. And then the finished cloth is then put on the cart, or the wagon, and taken out from the ground floor. They're not going to take it up and hoist it from the top. I mean, he was *adamant*. And I said, 'Everyone I've worked in, the weaving machine is always on the bottom floor.'

0:36:09

LMI: Who said that? One of the guides? One of the volunteers?

CD: Yeah, one of the guides. Yeah and then of course back in the Victorian times they turned it into a tea room, you know.

LMI: Yeah.

CD: And of course, you know, the ladies had to be pale. So they would sit on the opposite side because the sun didn't come through. And it wasn't the done thing to have a sun tan. It was always pale.

LMI: I did a whole project, just before and into lockdown, at Gibson Mill. Which was a big, was supposed to be a much bigger project. About the 20th century story of Gibson Mill. And there's a huge banner that now hangs in the stairwell there, of all the different activities that happened in... not in the mill, but in the whole valley.

0:36:57

CD: Yeah, yeah.

LMI: Have a look next time you go.

CD: I will, I will because I'm a member of the National Trust anyway. So I'm going to close my cafe for two days a week. I do seven days at the moment. So I'm going to close it as from next week. So I *can* do this tourism thing and I can...

LMI: You're closing, you're retiring?

CD: No, no, I'm just closing for two days, because I'm open seven days a week and I'm getting tired now.

LMI: Where is your cafe?

CD: Silsden.

0:37:17

LMI: Oh right.

CD: So, because I grew up in Silsden. And I moved to Keighley when I got married. [So... am I the only one left now? Looks like it.] Yeah, so... And I'm a town councillor as well for Hebden Royd.

LMI: Oh, are you?

CD: So, when they were talking about, um... they were discussing about bringing in a spinning machine, and something else. And I can't remember if it was for the ground floor centre. But they were talking about it, but it never happened. And I said, 'Today's mills you need an NVQ. But I'm somebody... (and a lot of older people like me)... could train somebody. Because we didn't need to go to university, we trained in the mill. We became... some of us became stars. Now I was a star for Haggas's. And a 'star' is somebody who can do every job.

0:38:02

LMI: Oh, really?

CD: So if somebody's off, you can do their job. Yeah, so... Because you got trained on everything, you know. Which, you know, it was nice. Yeah, it was nice. If you could bring the mills back, I would be back.

LMI: Would you?

CD: I would be back, yeah.

LMI: Well, that's a quote of the week.

CD: I would be back. Because it was, there was just something so special about it.

0:38:23

LMI: Yeah, that's very interesting.

CD: Bad for your chest, and some of the stuff.

LMI: And hearing.

CD: Oh, definitely hearing. But I was asthmatic so sometimes on some of the yarns we were using I had to wear masks. Yeah. Used to come out and you'd have dust in your pocket, and, you know, pulling it out. You'd blow your nose... Talking of which, did you know that's what snuff was used for?

LMI: No.

CD: Well apparently, town criers, I did a town crier judging competition in Halifax a few weeks ago. And I can't remember if it was Shrewsbury... but one of the town criers anyway, who was doing the cry, he came from a town where again it was a big cotton industry or mill

industry. And they started using snuff so that they could sneeze and get the fluff out of their nose.

LMI: Oh really?

CD: And I said, 'You're joking!' (Afterwards we were talking.) I said, 'You're joking, aren't you?'

0:39:08

CD: And he says 'No', he says 'That's what they used to do. They used to sniff up the snuff, which made them sneeze, and it cleared the sinuses of fluff.'

LMI: Oh, my word.

CD: And I never knew that.

LMI: No.

CD: I thought that was really interesting.

LMI: That's a new one on me.

CD: Yeah. Yeah. Now, is it... Lancashire was well known for the cotton.

0:39:24

LMI: Yeah.

CD: Because it's such a damp place as well, isn't it?

LMI: Much, much finer dust.

CD: Yeah. Hebden Bridge was corduroy.

LMI: That's right. Yeah.

CD: So, corduroy, which is why we've got the Fustian Needle in the middle of the square. So, we get a lot of tourists, you know, who can't quite work out what this thing's for, you know. They just think it's a sundial.

0:39:44

CD: Yes, it is, but it's actually a fustian needle, which was used in the textile industry. And I live in one of the over-dwellings, which they call 'upside-down houses'. They're not. Mine's an over-dwelling, which is three floors, four bedrooms.

LMI: And they'd have one underneath.

CD: Underneath, there's a one bedroom.

LMI: Is that on the Keighley side? Yeah, I know the road.

CD: So, as you drive down you get to a traffic lights and you look up, mine's the one with the dead ivy up the wall. That's mine. I've cleaned my windows probably about three times in the last 29 years, because I'm scared of heights. But yeah, bring up the mills, they're a good community. Steam room.

0:40:12

LMI: I'm going to draw this to a close now. That was great. That was great. I'm going to say thank you very much and put it on pause.

CD: You're welcome. I will have a look and see if it's on the workhouses, Yorkshire Workhouses. And it will tell you some of the ghost stories on there.

LMI: Oh, yeah, now that'd be interesting.

CD: It used to be a workhouse as well. So when it was mill and then they lived underneath but they were separated. Hebden Bridge used to have a workhouse as well and they came from all over the place to be there. Not through their own choice, obviously.