**Dorothy’s Story**

**Summary:** Dorothy worked in Molins, a factory located in Deptford on Trundleys Road. During the interview Dorothy recalls working at Molins as a secretary, organising staff beano’s and visiting the companies sports club. Dorothy speaks of her love for her job and how she felt when the company moved making her redundant.

**So thanks very much for being interviewed Dorothy, can I just get you to say your full name please.**

**Dorothy:** Dorothy May Sinclair.

**How do we spell the name May Sinclair please?**

**Dorothy:** M-A-Y S-I-N-C-L-A-I-R.

**Great. And Dorothy? D-O-R-T-H-Y yeah?**

**Dorothy:** D-O-R-O-T-H-Y.

**Yeah, I can’t spell. Yeah, yeah.**

**Dorothy:** Dorothy May Sinclair (laughs).

**And today’s date would be, er, 17th? Am I right in thinking that? 17th? Yeah 17th of October. And we are with Dorothy May Sinclair, and we are in, where are we Dorothy? We’re in?**

**Dorothy:** Peckham

**Peckham.**

**Dorothy:** Yes.

**Battle House, which is in Peckham Park Road?**

**Dorothy:** That’s it.

**Yeah, great. And, just lastly for the formalities, where and when were you born?**

**Dorothy:** 1930. Eltham. South East London (laughs).

**So you’re not too far away from home now are you?**

**Dorothy:** Oh no. Nobody comes up here though. It’s always me…because I’ve been on my own so long, it’s me that goes to see them, you know, but erm, I’ve told them this year, my birthday’s here, and they’ve got to come here.

**Well we’re here, so hopefully this is the start of many visitors’, starting a new trend eh?**

**Dorothy:** (laughs)

**We kicked it off. So, erm, the reason as you know, the reason why we’re here, is we are doing a project researching where people worked, so we would be interested in your experiences and everything about it, but not just, you know, kinda of, where you were and how long you were there for, but really, very much in your experiences, and the things you liked, things you didn’t like. Anything, the things that you really vividly remember, maybe there was a really strong smell about the place, or any kind of funny stories, the sort of people you worked with, the kind of routines that you would have, the equipment you used. Basically we want to know everything about your experience with work.**

**Dorothy:** Yes, that’s lovely. Erm, well I started at Molins in 196…yeah 68, the year before my husband died, I’d been there a year. So I was used to going there, and I went there as a shorthand typist. My first job was with an assistant to a salesman, and he was a very rich young man, I think he was a relation of Desmond Molins that owned the company. He was very naïve as well, he was difficult to work with, but I was more like his mum than his secretary. And gradually I worked up through getting higher up to, what was he? My director, financial director. My age takes some of it away from me actually, can’t always get it out. I had a wonderful time there, they had a most marvellous sports and social club at New Eltham with a great big rugby football pitch down there. We used to run dinner and dances down there, children’s day, the whole of Molins, mums and dads and children were at the sports day every year down at New Eltham. It was a wonderful company. They had marvellous canteens in there, two for people that worked in the factory and we office staff. Because when I went there, there weren’t many women secretaries, they had always been male, it was a male orientated company. There were different messes for people higher up the ladder, and then there was the directors’ mess. But I loved every minute of being there, because I’d always worked in engineering offices, and my first job was in an engineering factory behind Moorfields Eye Hospital. And then, I had to go to one at St. Mary Cray, which was an engineering company. Ended up at Molins Engineering. So that was my fate. But it was just lovely. We had trouble, don’t know whether I should say this but never mind, with the IRA because we had a factory in Londonderry, and they used to threaten it, if we didn’t let them have it. They would blow us up in Deptford, so every so often, they would have to shut the place down and we would all have to leave Molins, to the nearest pub (laughs). But we quite enjoyed that really, but that sorted itself out in the end. We let them have the factory and we didn’t hear any more from them. But erm…

**What age would you have been when you started at Molins?**

**Dorothy:** Erm...

**Just roughly.**

**Dorothy:** Thirty, 1930, 1960…that’s…58, I think I was 58 when my husband died. 1969 I’d been there a year before he died. Yeah.

**So you started in ’68 did you say yeah?**

**Dorothy:** Yeah he died in’69; I started working there in 1968, yes a year before, which was a good thing. I was established in a permanent job, you know, it worked out right for me, it wasn’t erm…

**So what was your year of birth again?**

**Dorothy:** 1930.

**1930. So yeah, you would have been about 37, 37/38 yeah. Oh so you’d been in the workplace for a long time before, by the time you went to Molins yeah?**

**Dorothy:** Yeah, I’d been doing part-time jobs, like my first was in an engineering place, I just remembered that. For a man; I worked in an engineering company before I was married. I then had a part-time job in Sandgate Street which was just the other side of the Old Kent Road. It was a man I’d worked for in my first job up in London, and he spotted me with my children when I was taking them to school and he stopped the car and he said, ‘Dorothy, I need a secretary. Do you think you could come and work? It’s only just across the Old Kent Road.’ So I said I’ll have to ask my husband. But he didn’t want me to go to work then. Anyway he asked again, and I ask, he said, ‘Look, when the children have got a day from school, you know, bring them to work, Jane can go on an old typewriter in an empty office and we’ll put Michael in with the switchboard girl.’ My children loved it. So I was used to going to work by the time he died through that part-time job. You know. So where can we go from there? Molins, Molins has got so much to talk about because I loved every minute there, and it was a shock when they shut the firm down. And we were all made redundant. That was five years before I actually retired at sixty, so fifty five. We were all, everybody from Deptford weren’t made redundant because some of them went down to Saunderton and places like that where they had other parts of the factory. But the bulk of the people went, and there were many many local people that worked in there because I think there were about seven thousand people on the site, it was a big big area. That’s, you know, from cleaners to clever people that could draw in the drawing offices, you know, making up new machines and you’ll see some in there. Absolutely incredible, it really was a fascinating place to work.

**So there were about seven thousand people working there, we’ll come back to that shortly, a bit later. Actually, maybe you could talk about how the redundancy affected you, and what the effect in the community. If we go back to the start, what, so you were working for this younger guy, how old was he and what exactly were you doing?**

**Dorothy:** He was younger than I was. Well he was assistant to the top man; he was a salesman’s assistant really. The family had got him in there, to make him do a job I should imagine. He was a rich man who didn’t need to work and his name was Adrian Fitzgerald. But I mothered him, it was good to work for him, because going into a new company it’s nice to have somebody easy like that, that you can more or less dominate (laughs) before you pass onto somebody, you know, like the boss.

**What, what would you do for him, what would be a typical day for you? What sort of, if we go through the day, what sort of time would you arrive at work and what would you do?**

**Dorothy:** Oh we started at nine. We had a break mid-morning, and the company had trolleys going round the factory, round the offices break time mid-morning. You could get tea and coffee. I’m not sure whether we paid for it or whether it was free, I can’t remember that, I tried to recall that today but I can’t. The factory stopped for their breaks morning and they had trolleys going right the way through the factory. It was a place that really really looked after its workers; it really was a wonderful place to work.

**What did they actually make?**

**Dorothy:** Cigarette making machines which people would frown on now. Making machines, packing machines, everything to do with cigarettes. And to get down on the shop floor, to see when they’d fixed up a whole area, I don’t know whether they’ve got a picture of them, the whole area in one shop was full of machinery, there were things going round with the cigarettes going on, and then another bit where they put into the packets. All machinery not hand done. It was an incredible sight to see. The whole thing right round to the cigarettes in their packets going on, being put into parcels all ready to go out. But when they sort of had to test a machine, the tobacco companies let them have a certain amount of tobacco, it had to come in under customs and it had to be weighed before the customs took it away to burn it. I mean you couldn’t keep it; nobody could make cigarettes from it, I think they put something in it to stop people doing that. But that was a fascinating thing as well; they had to test the machines to see whether they made the cigarettes. And went through the whole gambit.

**So did they have their own, effectively their own production line?**

**Dorothy:** Yes, yes. And when cigarette companies bought the machines, they bought often the whole thing to start up a new part of a factory, not just one machine. We also had a department that maintained their machines as well, you know, people went out to maintain their machines. But in that, it tells you all over the world where Molins was long before it came to Deptford. It really was worldwide.

**So what were you doing for this guy, was it dictation or?**

**Dorothy:** Yes, yes. I used to sit and take dictation and type it all back. Letters mostly from him, but when I worked up to one of the directors, he was the financial director over part of the factory. Well before that, I was working for a man that was in charge of the, all the people in the drawing offices, but the last one that I was there, he was, you know, a financial director. He had to keep tabs on how much money a certain part of the factory was using, you know, and erm, I loved it. And another thing I did for him, none of us were allowed into the room when they were having their big meetings but he was the one that took the minutes down, but I used to sit there for a whole day taking dictation. I loved the big jobs and I had to type all the minutes back the next day for him and I liked a job like that, it kept me out of mischief all day long (laughs).

**Does that mean, did you hear about the workplace secrets and that kind of thing?**

**Dorothy:** Oh yes. Yes, yes. But when you’ve been in work like that long enough, when you’re a secretary to somebody, you really do not talk about it to other people. You know, it’s one of those things.

**How did he treat you, was he…..?**

**Dorothy:** Wonderfully. I still send him a birthday card, now he lives out, oh dear, out the other side of Essex somewhere. And I still send him a Christmas card and he does the same for me and that is a long time since I’ve seen him. But he lets me know how his family is, how his daughters are and his wife, and if they’re not well and things like that.

**Is this the financial guy at the top?**

**Dorothy:** That I worked for, yes.

**There must have been something you didn’t like about the job?**

**Dorothy:** I don’t think there were. I don’t think….I loved it. I was broken hearted when it started to close down; I mean I only had five years to go. But I had a wonderful job after that. It was a tiring job and it was very exacting, but I said to a friend of mine, but we knew we’d got to go but the directors’ secretaries were there to the last, you know, you could see, they were emptying everything out and we were still there. And then the directors disappeared, and the directors’ secretaries in the front block that’s in that picture were left there more or less our own. And they didn’t even come back the day we were going and we were quite upset about that. But some of the salesmen were still around the building and they booked up a restaurant at erm, where is it? Just going along the road…oh isn’t it shocking I can’t forget it, it’s just past Deptford somewhere, you know, Deptford High Street. It’s one they used to use, these salesmen, you know, when they were getting together. And that was the end of it. We never saw the directors, they just disappeared, they had to go to other areas, you know, different part of the company. But that was a sad day, it was sad really.

**What part of Deptford was Molins in?**

**Dorothy:** It’s in Evelyn Street there’s a big block of old council flats opposite, I don’t know if they’re still there ‘cos I don’t go that way. And at the end of the front of the building I think there was a railway there if I, a bridge there, I don’t know whether it was a small train that went down to the dock area. It might be round where the barges were I think in that, but there was a bridge there at one time. I remember them taking that away but I don’t know in my mind whether I actually saw any trains go across it. But it was there. And then, where’s the picture? I had a little piece of paper because I’ve written on it…..

**Is that it?**

**Dorothy:** Yeah, yeah. It was only a little bit. I scribbled on the back, but don’t worry about the scribble on the back ‘cos it was different things about Molins. But that is the area it was in and I’m sure you’ll know it, won’t you?

**Oh you’ve drawn a picture here…**

**Dorothy:** You’ve got Evelyn Street, down the side Bestwood Street and then right up Trundleys Road, way up Trundleys Road, they had both sides of the road. Lovely beautiful houses up there, and there was Molins either side of it. But as I say, it must have been hundreds of people within the area that went there. We had another part of it, which was down at St. Mary Cray, where they did different parts of the machines down there.

**Did you have to go there sometimes?**

**Dorothy:** Oh yes I did. Yes. Not for the last man I worked for, but the one before because he used to spend one day a week down there. So I’d get to work and I’d go down because often there were men that needed to go down there, you know, for some reason or other. So I would go down on a little Molins bus with them. And then……

**The Company had its own bus?**

**Dorothy:** Oh yes, yes yes. Oh yeah. And they had chauffeur-driven cars as well, acquired a stack of those, and then in the afternoon he would let me off about three so that the cars brought me back. And if he needed anything done I would sit in my office at Deptford and do it or just go home. I had to do that as well, I’d forgotten that, you see, you’re bringing things back to me.

**What were the company buses like then?**

**Dorothy:** Only a little thing carrying about eight or ten people, you know. Because lots of the salesmen needed to go down there at different times, and rather than all use their cars, it was much easier for them to go, ‘cos they used to have meetings down there obviously. I can’t remember what parts they made for the machines down there, but it was important. You know.

**What was your office like? Was it big? Was it small?**

**Dorothy:** It was in the front block on the second floor, and there were two secretaries in my office. Most of them had two. The top directors, they only had one because there were two levels of directors. Those on our floor mostly were the people that worked, you know, around the factories and that, and they were directing different parts. Mine financial, he wasn’t the top financial man, the top financial man was on the top floor, but we secretaries got on well together, you know, there was nothing different between us really. It was just a lovely place to work (laughs).

**Was it, what was it like? Was it kind of very, some of these modern offices are very plain or was it homely? Was it wood?**

**Dorothy:** Well it was beautiful dark wood, it was, I mean it was an old building obviously when the sails were made there for the barges, that building was probably just a shell. Because when you think of the size of those dark red sails on barges which were made there apparently long before Molins took over that particular building, then Molins built all the rest of it had the back built, the factory. I’m told, my neighbour said her mother said that sails for the barges on the Thames and further afield were made there. So it was an empty shell sort of building for that. I think they had to put them up on masts or something to make sure they were all right, you know. I think lots of the ladies around Deptford worked in there, but that’s a long time ago.

**Did you have your own desk?**

**Dorothy:** Oh yes, oh yes. Definitely…our own telephone as well. Yeah. It was good if you got a good pal in with you, which I always did, I was lucky. Although I did share a room once across the corridor, and a beautiful Indian girl came to work in my office, Anita, and, but she’d had long hair and she’d come in with it wet and I used to have a long mirror next to my desk, and she’d stand there going like that (laughs). But do you know, she used to annoy me intensely but she is one of the only ones that actually rings me every year on my birthday, she never forgets. And I used to smoke as well, and we were allowed to smoke in the offices, obviously working in a place where they made cigarette making machines (laughs), they weren’t going to stop you having a smoke, I mean I haven’t smoked for years but I did then, I think it was the thing to do (laughs). And I was standing by the lifts one day, and my boss came along, he said, ‘Dorothy what are you standing there for?’ I said, ‘Well Anita doesn’t like me smoking.’ So he said, ’That was your office a long time before her, if she doesn’t like it, let her go for a walk.’ (Laughs). And that was that. But I didn’t, I mean I never said anything to her.

**So did you get cigarettes cheaper or free?**

**Dorothy:** No, no, no. You never got them in the company. No, none of the cigarettes that were made there were for human consumption, whether there was something in the tobacco whereby you couldn’t smoke it I don’t know, I wouldn’t be surprised. But the tobacco companies supplied us with tobacco, especially if it was their machines we were working on you know. And you’d get machines that needed mending, our men used to go out to mend them. And then of course there was a point when Molins was going to go into one of the Middle Eastern countries, which has been at war since then. But they went out there, they’d got a site, they started to build places for the people that were going to work there to live in, they started that before they even put the factory up. But then something went awry in that country, and that was, you know, a waste of time really. But everything was so interesting. Once a year we had a wonderful dinner and dance down at our, oh no, where did we use to have that? Not down in New Eltham? I think they used to hire a hall somewhere, it was a really big function because it was office staff, factory people, anybody that wanted to go, you know. And that was all put on for us, it was lovely, that was in September every year. I can remember that.

**Was that the only social event where you’d get everyone mixing?**

**Dorothy:** Oh no because the sports club had big sports days down at New Eltham, oh no. And they had football teams in the factory and cricket teams. Because all that was played down there. It was right next to Charlton football ground where they, you know, go down and practise, it was next door to that.

**And would the bosses come to the sports things as well?**

**Dorothy:** Oh yeah, on special days, especially the family sports day because everybody went to that, it was tug of war and all those things and lots of races for the children. No, it was lovely. And the dinner and dances were gorgeous as well, I mean nothing was spared and we didn’t have to pay for them; the company set that up. And I erm, lots of the directors had lots of meetings up in London, and when I first went into the offices there, I wasn’t in a position to go to them, not working for the people on the floor underneath, but once I got upstairs, we used to, they needed the secretaries up there to sharpen their pencils, make sure they’d got their blotting pads, and make sure they’d got everything. You know, we were just there to make sure everything was all right. But then we would have a lovely meal afterwards, you know, that was put on for us. So I enjoyed it, I thought what a lovely job I had. What a lovely place to work.

**And what did they need you to be really good at? Was it typing or was it listening or was it writing? What were your kind of strengths?**

**Dorothy:** Well you really did everything, I mean if they weren’t there, you had to man their phone, you know. They were usually somewhere where you could contact them if it was urgent. But they expected us to look after them, work hard for them. But then it was a lovely place to work, you knew what you had to do. I’d worked my way up from when I was young in an office to the position I’d got there and I loved it.

**And would they ask you to do personal things, like can you send my wife some flowers or things like that?**

**Dorothy:** Um, yes. Yes, definitely, yes. My boss used to forget things terribly, his wife would ring me up and say, ‘Dorothy, remind him so and so and so and so,’ you know, oh it was lovely. He was lovely, his wife was lovely on the phone, and she was nice when ever she came there, she’d always come up and see me. No, it was a friendly, lovely company to work in, it really was lovely.

**And were you in a union?**

**Dorothy:** They did have unions there. I can’t remember whether we had a union in the offices. I doubt it very much, I doubt it…

**Where there ever any strikes?**

**Dorothy:** No, no. I’ll tell you what, thousands of people worked there but they were all happy, they loved Molins, they really did.

**So was it a big part of the Deptford community then?**

**Dorothy:** Oh yes, there would have been people from all over the area, sort of in and just outside London. A lot used to come in from Kent and that, but I bet you a lot of people were local people, yeah. I bet when they get to see some of this, that they will say, ‘Yes we were there.’ Yeah.

**How far did you live from work, where you worked?**

**Dorothy:** I lived here. Yeah.

**How far is that then?**

**Dorothy:** Well first of all, when I first worked there, we had to walk over Canal Bridge and round down into, well it’s the area of Bermondsey I suppose, just to get the bus, because it only came as far as that and stopped. And then, after my husband died, we had a motorbike with sidecar which was parked outside. We all had them, four families had them and we used to go out nearly every weekend, ‘cos we all had a couple of kids, you know. I’ve had a lovely life since I’ve been in this area, I really have. And Alf next door said, ‘Dot, I’ve taken our spike,’ he worked for the Post Office, he’d got a Post Office van to come and take the motorbike and sidecar away, he said, ‘ I’ve sold it for you,’ and that was that; and I didn’t take much notice. Then he came home about three weeks after with a little car for me. I never wanted to drive really, I mean I was scared stiff (laughs), I was alright on the back of a motorbike (laughs). Anyway he took me out a few times and showed me what to do, and then I had some lessons. And in the end it was good because if the children, well when they got into their teens were sort of, Camberwell Green or somewhere like that late at night, they’d ring me up, ‘Mum, come and get me.’ And I used to, now in those days you couldn’t do it now, I’d go out in my dressing gown and just my bed socks on, you know (laughs). You couldn’t do it now (laughs). But no I’ve had a good life since I’ve lived in this area. I love it.

**So you used to get the bus to work, and then you used to drive to work?**

**Dorothy:** Eventually. My daughter loved it when I drove. The only thing is, coming back one day, because the buses did come round in the end and we could get it, you know in this road, like they do, should come now but there aren’t another routes at the moment. Yeah for about seven weeks I think, which is awful. And she, she was, Jane was very shy and embarrassed easily, and we were coming home one day, and I’d got to the first of the roundabouts, and the lights had always been green, I never saw them red (laughs), they must have been red this time, I’ve gone through and it was on the roundabout not far from when you come from Molins coming this way, and suddenly a policeman on a motorbike came round the front and stopped me. He said, ‘Wind your window down.’ So I did. He said, ‘Do you know what you’ve just done madam?’ I said, ‘No.’ He said, ‘You’ve come through the red lights.’ Yes that’s right, ‘You’ve come through the red lights.’ I said, ‘Well they’re always green normally’ (laughs). My daughter got down in her seat. When he’d gone she said, ‘Don’t you ever do that again to me Mother.’ She said, ‘You’re a real embarrassment.’ And the next time, she actually left me. I was coming up the slope to get to Canal Bridge and the car went tuk, tuk and it wouldn’t move. So she got out and left me. And there used to be a paperboy there that sold papers every evening to the people that were coming up the hill in their cars, and he said, ‘I’ll help you push it.’ So we had to push it to the top of the hill to get onto Canal Bridge, and then he left me ‘cos he was trying to sell his papers, and I’m going over the bridge trying to steer it walking along the side of it, and a man said, ‘You’re having trouble love?’ I said, ‘No (laughs). I always go over it like this’ (laughs). And I still laugh at myself now (laughs). So I pushed it and there was a cinema up there at that time, I pushed it round the road where the cinema was. Meantime my daughter had got home, my son was nearly up there, and he’d gone in and it started straight away (laughs). So you know, I have had fun. Really.

**How long, when you had to walk to the bus stop and then get the bus, how long did it take you to get to work in those days?**

**Dorothy:** Oh god that’s going back a long time …

**Was it a long walk?**

**Dorothy:** No. It’s just down to the end of Peckham Park Road, cross the main road which is Canal Bridge, there was a canal there but they’re not canals anymore, they’re walks, you can walk where the canals were, and just go round the corner into the main road there and get it. It just used to stop there, turn round and go back again.

**Would it be full of people working at the factory?**

**Dorothy:** No, because they started at eight, we didn’t start ‘til nine. No, the factory hours were different from ours, they mostly are in factories, but um…..

**Did you ever feel like that was a privilege that you could work a bit later?**

**Dorothy:** Well no because once you start work doing a nine o’clock start, I mean the one I worked in was, I was still at Eltham then before I was married and I’d never ever been on a train on my own. I was scared to go on a train. I’d been with my parents obviously to the coast and things, but never on my own. And I’d got the choice of Mottingham or Eltham station. I went all the way to Moorgate on a 21 bus which used to come from Sidcup, and then walk from, um what’s it? A square up there, to Bath, I had to walk along to Bath Street, that’s the road I worked in. And then, in those days the fog used to be thick and yellow, if you’ve never experienced it you couldn’t understand how dense it was. And I’d sit in the office there typing away, thinking oh how am I going to get home? How am I going to find Finsbury Square, that’s right, how am I going to find my way to Finsbury Square? And I was so scared one day, there was a young man going down the tube, he said, ‘Come down the tube with me.’ And again I didn’t like going down the tube (laughs), but I did it. And then he said when we got to London Bridge, ‘Look why get a 21 bus? You can get the train here, you can go either to Mottingham or Eltham, you know, you are so silly.’ And so I started a different pattern, but for a long time I did the 21 bus.

**When was that?**

**Dorothy:** Which took about two hours to get there.

**Wow. When would that have been? What sort of era? The big fogs were the fifties weren’t they? The pea soupers.**

**Dorothy:** Yeah, yeah. Dreadful, dreadful. You could not see a hand in front of you. No.

**And people used to get really ill didn’t they?**

**Dorothy:** Well yeah. You were good, you really couldn’t breathe if you went out in it unless you covered a hanky over you or some people had the things they could put over your ears you know. But they were, I mean until you’ve experienced it you wouldn’t realise how dense it is. You cannot see anything.

**So did the factory, the place you worked, did it smell of cigarettes?**

**Dorothy:** No. No. Because they only used cigarettes to test the machines. Nobody, nobody anywhere in the office or factory really smoked, they weren’t allowed to. And you couldn’t, even the men who were testing the machines, they had to have their cigarettes for testing, they knew that the tobacco in them really wasn’t the sort that you could…..No, nobody would’ve done that, they weren’t allowed to anyway. But we were well looked after, there was a medical place there if you weren’t very well you could go to, you know, with a nurse or two at times.

**And where there, were there any characters? You know every workplace has a character doesn’t it?**

**Dorothy:** Yes. Sometimes I was a character I think…

**Oh yeah?**

**Dorothy:** Well I used to like a laugh. No I’m just trying to think of….

**Did you ever play jokes on people?**

**Dorothy:** Eh. Gosh I can’t think now about that. Maybe we did I don’t know. ‘Cos working where I worked you had to be a bit careful what you did you know because my boss was really lovely and easy to work for, all the directors on that floor were. But you had to mind your p’s and q’s a little bit probably much more than you would these days. But having said that, I had five years to go to work when I was made redundant, and I said to the girls, ‘I am not going to do a full time job for the last five years, I’ve had enough of it.’ So we were allowed a few weeks off I think, you know, before you started work without having to go to the labour exchange where you went in those days I can’t remember. And I said to them, ‘I’m going to sit at home and enjoy it.’ After two weeks I was bored out of my mind. So I said that I’m going to find a job that is easy. So they said, ‘Well get the South London Press, there’s lots of jobs in there for secretaries.’ And I opened it up and it said, ‘Is your shorthand rusty?’ in a thing that big right in the corner of the page. Well I said my shorthand’s not rusty but if they want a rusty shorthand typist I could….And it was Garrards, the Crown jewellers in Regent Street. I phoned them up on the Monday when I read the paper, I had an interview on the Friday and I started the job the following Monday. And I had a ripping time there for five years. It was gorgeous. We had free coffee and tea in the morning brought in to us ‘cos I worked in the clock and watch repair department so you’d got all the Arabs’ really expensive watches there, you’d got me sitting there making, mending clocks, but also there was a man there and I don’t know what book it was in but I’d got a picture of something he’d made by hand. Cut all the metal, it’s like brass, it’s a castle and he made it as an automaton to work on its own, but a Chinese man, very rich man, ‘cos it cost a lot of money when it was finished, bought it and he wanted music in the bottom of it where it would have had like ding dong bells or something. But do you know, it was fascinating to see men work. They just sat there, you know, yeah….(laughs).

**So erm, there must have been I suppose when you were at Molins, there must have been a dress code especially for your job?**

**Dorothy:** Oh yeah, yeah. You had to be, yeah you had to dress up, and I’ve never stopped dressing up since even indoors (laughs). No um, you had to be smart especially in those days, they were much more strict with secretaries in those days than I think they are now, you know. But when I was a secretary at the jewellers, the men were paid piece-work. Well as I’d been in a factory with big unions I knew quite a lot about that because obviously we had to have meetings with the unions, the directors from time to time. And I used to go, there was a canteen there, as the doors were unlocked you could go up to the canteen, we’d got free coffee, tea or whatever we wanted, we’d got free meals lunchtime and free tea in the afternoon. But you had to go up to the canteen.

**Sorry is this the jewellers or is this Molins?**

**Dorothy:** The jewellers, no not Molins. The jewellers yeah. And yeah that’s right, they had to lock the door to let you out, not everybody went up there but I used to like a break and so did the men doing very exacting work, you know, on mending watches and things. And I got talking to the men in my part and they were paid piece-work. Now some of their work took a long time to do and they weren’t making any money, I mean they were skilled men and being as I’d been in a union company, I said to them, ‘You men, you know, really ought to do something about this. You really need a salary for doing your job, so that you know what you’re getting, not what you’re going to get for what you do.’ And I think not long after I left there, they actually achieved it, you know, so I was pleased.

**So even when you were at Molins, did you have to do, did they say you always have to wear a dress or was it a skirt and a smart blouse?**

**Dorothy:** No as long as you were smart, clean and tidy it didn’t matter. I mean they wouldn’t know, women wouldn’t have had trousers in the offices in those days, I think they would now. And I’ve never really very much liked trousers so I mean I’ve always worn long skirts anyway so it didn’t affect me. But I think they were a little bit strict because you never knew what big company were going to come visiting and you’d obviously have to get their coffee or tea and everything for them. I don’t know what it’s like in offices now but I enjoyed it, I really did.

**And how did you get on with the guys on the shop floor, like management and workers?**

**Dorothy:** Ah famously, famously. Yeah. Yeah well I knew a lot of them personally anyway,

**They didn’t kind of see you as management, them and us?**

**Dorothy:** No it wasn’t a company like that. They could come up; if they needed to see somebody, they would come up and see them. They’d probably ring on the phone first and he’d say, ‘Come up at such and such a time.’ No this is what was so nice about it, there was no ‘us and them’ in the company really at all, no it was lovely.

**Great.**

**Dorothy:** I mean I could, when I got into the sports and social club, I used to do all the posters for when we were having dances down there, and when I was doing the coach load of people going abroad for a week, I used to go down on the shop floor and talk to them all, yeah. Or my boss would say, ‘Go up Trundleys Road and tell so and so and so and so this,’ rather than phone him up. And I’d go up there. No, there was nothing like that at all. Nothing at all.

**What was the coach that you organised? A holiday was it?**

**Dorothy:** Yeah a holiday, yeah, yeah. I did that for quite a few years.

**Who would go? The whole company or just?**

**Dorothy:** No just, I put it on the noticeboard and the first, what, thirty or forty or how big the coach was would go. And usually it was the same crowd. We all got to know each other.

**And you’d gone on holidays as well?**

**Dorothy:** Oh yes, yes.

**Oh wow. And you’d organised all that?**

**Dorothy:** Yes, yes.

**And where would you go?**

**Dorothy:** Well I did quite a few of the countries in the Mediterranean when they’d still got dictators in them…erm…er..

**Spain?**

**Dorothy:** No, no, no we went further afield than that. Er..

**Greece used to be a dictatorship didn’t it?**

**Dorothy:** Yeah we went to Greece when it’d still got Papadopoulos there. And there were military soldiers, because he had a place, we were far, quite a way from Athens but we had to like come along the lower coast road where he had his place where all his soldiers were, and that’s where he was of a night, and every morning, even though we were going into Athens or somewhere else, you’d get so far in the coach and you were stopped. On the hills there were all his soldiers and their guns, and you had to wait for him to go to Athens before you could use the road. Yugoslavia when it was still under, you know?

**Tito.**

**Dorothy:** Yes Tito. We went there. Lovely. It was lovely. I liked it better when he was there than when we went when they’d gone back to their own bits; it was not nice. We found the people in the north of Yugoslavia were lovely, but as you got further down they were completely different in nature, completely different. Tunisia we went when it was, I didn’t like that but, you know, that was in the days when countries really weren’t used to coachloads of people going and that….

**Would you, would you, as well as the holidays, would you socialise with people you worked** **with outside?**

**Dorothy:** Oh yes, oh yeah, yeah.

**Did you all go to the pub on Friday night?**

**Dorothy:** We used to go Friday lunchtimes (laughs). And as I say, when the IRA were being tricky, that’s where we’d go because they used to say then they’d put a bomb somewhere in, and so everybody, everybody had to go. You got this special warning and quietly everybody walked out. I suppose you were supposed to stay somewhere in the street outside because they did that a lot ‘til they got what they wanted. And in the end you just couldn’t keep doing it anymore, and every time the pubs got full up half way through the mornings. IRA been[[1]](#footnote-1) on again? You know, so it was a joke down there, ‘cos some would go further along to where the shops are, to the pubs there, and that. We used to go in the one on the corner; I don’t know whether it’s still there on the corner of Trundleys Road…

**Claire: It’s a restaurant.**

**Dorothy:** Is it? Yeah. Well the building’s there. Yeah, but that’s where we used to go, it was easy. Because when we were called back our bosses expected us to get back pretty sharp, you know.

**Would you have a drink, like an alcoholic drink?**

**Dorothy:** Oh yes, oh yes. Why not? (laughs).

**Or two?**

**Dorothy:** Wouldn’t go in there for a cocktail, well they didn’t sale things like that in pubs in those days, did they? No, well no, not too much because you’ve still got to do a day’s work (laughs). So there we go, it was just a lovely, lovely place.

**And you’d work nine ‘til five?**

**Dorothy:** Yes, yes.

**Nine ‘til five yeah?**

**Dorothy:** But we had a break, you see, mid-morning where a tea trolley came round and ladies, probably lots of them lived in the area, used to come in mid-morning to do that. There were big canteens for everybody, you know, it was lovely.

**And so, what time would you go home on an evening?**

**Dorothy:** Five. Nine ‘til five. Those were the hours in those days.

**And did you get holidays?**

**Dorothy:** Oh yes, yeah. You had two weeks off a year. Yeah. That’s when we used to get away abroad, you know, and that’s when I got to know the Mediterranean.

**So you’d work with these people, and then you’d gone on holiday with them…**

**Dorothy:** They were mostly people that worked in the factory that used to go. A few were office people, but um, and once we all got to know each other, used to say, ‘When you’re going to start, you know, doing another holiday next year?’ And it was a regular thing, it really was. Lovely.

**So Molins was a big part of your world then?**

**Dorothy:** Absolutely, absolutely. And all those hundreds and hundreds of people that worked there because it was a big company, it really was. And that was only part of it, I mean, I think it was an American company actually, and it stretched all over the place. That is quite an old thing that you’ve got there with all the detail in it, but it’s interesting to see where, how many factories they had all over the world.

**And how did you think you were paid? Good? Bad? Or?**

**Dorothy:** Er, pretty good really. I mean, I’d had quite a bit of time off when my husband was dying but it didn’t matter at all. Directly the hospital needed me, they would get a chauffeur to take me up to King’s, and he had to wait if I was going back, but if it was too rough I had to stay there. The chauffeur would come, but they’d say, ‘Dorothy if you’ve got time to come back and do a little bit, you’re better working than sitting at home thinking about it.’ They would send a car out for me. No, they were absolutely brilliant.

**And how did you feel about your job?**

**Dorothy:** I loved it. I loved it. It was really a heart breaking day when we all had to say goodbye to each other although we kept up things afterwards, you know.

**And did it affect your health at all, your particular job?**

**Dorothy:** No. No. When you love doing the work and love the people where you work, it’s a joy to go to work. My daughter, my daughter, she worked there as well, she wanted to be a telephonist. But sadly Jane was born here and she was too Cockney for them; oh they were pretty….when we first went there. They thought her speech wasn’t good enough to be a telephonist so they put her in the telex room, and my golly her typing was far quicker than mine, she was brilliant as a telex operator. She loved it too. She loved it there.

**Just remind me what a telex was…**

**Dorothy:** Well they’re like typed telegrams, they go from one place to another, you put them in a machine, they go on a tape and they can be in America in, well as you’re doing it, it’s going over to another country. I don’t know how it worked, but she was a better typist than I was (laughs).

**You did a lot of typing?**

**Dorothy:** Oh I did a lot of typing.

**And was it those old ones that are really clunky?**

**Dorothy:** Oh to start with, to start with, oh yes, yeah. And then we started to get the electric ones. And when you’d been used to using what we called an ‘old plodder’, which you had to do like that, when you got your electric ones, you didn’t press them too hard, and sometimes you’d do that, and the carriage would go flying along. It took a while to go from a sort of static one to an electric one, but there you go……

**So do you think there’s anything, did Molins leave an impression on Deptford and the people?**

**Dorothy:** Oh yes, definitely. I’m sure if you find people there, they’d be Molins people and I know they loved it. I know it was a wonderful place to work. I couldn’t have been happier, or luckier. And of course it gave me an opportunity to work up to, you know, something better. There we go (laughs).

**What do you think Claire? I think we’ve covered a lot there, haven’t we?**

[[2]](#footnote-2)

1. Intergenerational project 2012-2013. From Docks to Desktops interview Dorothy with Simon. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)