John Penver’s Story

**Summary:** From an early age John was used to getting up early and going to work with his grandfather who sold tools from a wheelbarrow at Tower Bridge Market. During this interview John tells stories of helping his grandfather, working at Courage Brewery and for the Civil Service.

**This is Lisa and I’m here with John and it’s – I don’t know what the date is – is it the 17th today, 17th November**

Yes

**It’s the 17th November and it’s a Saturday and we’re in Johns house in Bermondsey John can you tell me your surname?**

John, Henry Penver P E N V E R – Cornish name it is

**Is it Oh,**

Yeah

**Thank you and um, where were you born?**

Ah, now I was born in Abbey Street

**Abbey street, where’s that?**

Uh, where is it now, what way is that? abbey street, I cant remember now, Abbey Street,

*just off of long lane innit*

Ah yes, just off of longlane yes

**And when was that? When were you born?**

1921 23 feb 1921,

**Okay**

So that makes me 14

**And john how old were you when you started working?**

oh now that there is really peculiar because if we go down to that, I was ten – but not working – but I used to get up – because my grandfather suffered with asthma, ---- Cornish with that---- and I’ll tell you that story - because him, because they were born in cornwall – a place called geren up in cornwall and things up there then were very very low so him a son and daughter walked from cornwall to London, and the - whatever ‘e done, he done enough and then he had ‘is own business, ‘e had his own tool business cos e was an engineer in the mines up in cornwall so e knew about engineering, and then set up ‘is own business and we lived in 22 Abbey street in Bermondsey

**So what did you do when you used to help him out?**

Well I used to get well I used - he used to knock me up about 6 in the mornin’ n I used to go ‘alf way down long lane which is just round about, what, your place? about quarter a mile is it from there to our old house, and I used to get ‘is barrow n then push it all the way back to Abbey street, n then we’d load that all up with tools n stuff and big box n god knows what, and then I used to get in the front part, and pull it, n he used to push it behind n we used to go out down tower bridge road, y’know that, near a pub called the Earns Marigold, that’s where he used to stand the tools.

**What sort of tools did he sell?**

All kinds of tools, any tool you wanna mention, he sold y’know, cos that was his job, tools, tool man. And that’s where we stayed. And when it round, when it come round Christmas – cos a lot of em in them days, they never used – I mean then, the Tower Bridge Road market was a market place, yknow it was alive and then use to------stop out?---- and then Christmas, then no one would pack up their stall, cos they’d lose their pitch, so my Grandfather used to have a great big coke fire, n e used to sit there n there was a tarpaulin sort of half way around, and a lot of the chaps down there – and they wouldn’t move, cos they’d lose that pitch – so they used to stop out all night, and they used to come round to my old grandfather and they’d say ‘Arfur, Alright’ and they’d put a jug or something on top of his coke fire to make a cuppa tea, and he’d be sitting there in ‘is alcove that he’d built and all smoking his pipe and I’d be Id be the other side y’know, with him.

**How cold was it then?**

Well it was cold, yeah it was bloody cold but when you have this great big coke fire, you know and you had tarpaulin all round

**So it was a little tent?**

Well it was

**A little tent with a fire in it**

Yeah n he was there smoking his pipe and yeah it was cosy cos blokes used to come round and say Arthur, al right? ’and put their kettles and mugs on it you know have a broil up you know. But of course in them days if you left your pitch I mean you lost it, near Christmas, so no one used to go ‘ome they used to .

**How long would they stay there?**

All over Christmas

**All over Christmas?**

Ooh yeah, right up til Christmas, night sort of day near enough and then theyd pack all up and it was all over Christmas and they used to have a booze up hen dint they? Which it was in my Gran’s house anyway, cos me n my then had a quite a big front room, and my dad, he was very good, well first of all, me grandfather owned a shop n e used to sell pianos

**Oh, did you work in that shop?**

And uh..Me? Oh I wasn’t boren then I wasn’t born then but he he owned a piano shop, and there used to be a fella who come in there n he was very good at the piana ‘e taught my dad how to play n e was e was good. Because that stopped me from learning, because I thought I couldn’t play as good as ‘im. He could go anything from classics to boogie woogie, anything, e was e was good at it

**Do you wish you could play it now?**

I, I do yeah, cos a mattera fact I aint gotta picture of ‘im. Oh yes there he is, there. That’s the piano-acccordian

**Yeah I can see it**

Yeah, yeah, that’s er On the left theres me old nan, behind me nan is Ellen, and another lady next to her is me sister, then me Dad, then me Mum, and the other chap is me brother

**So after your first job at the age of ten, what did you move into then?**

First? First job?

**So you sold tools**

No, no me grandfather sold tools

**Yeah but**

No me first job, me first job. Let me think now, me first job. Me first job was in what they call the Abbey factories ummm going up towards Tower Bridge and we used to do – you know the lathe – we used to – you know the tops of a knitting needle?

**Yep**

We used to do them

**How did you make those?**

Well it was on a machine, it used to do itself, all you had to do was brush all the stuff away that come round, otherwise itd break the tool. And that’s all it was

**And what was it like in the factory? Was it quite noisy?**

Well no, no its was quite, it was quiet, the trouble was, (laught) was that well, I got the sack, well because this this bloke, he had this lathe, and I mean I’d been on lathe before cos that was my, my dads er work, and he kept on doing this tool, like and it cut in and I said to him you got it set wrong, and he didn’t like that cos all round there were all these old women, doing other things, and in the end, I said to him a bit louder, I said to him you’re doing the bloody thing wrong! Cos it kept on breaking, anyway I got the sack so…(chuckles)

*no you gave im one dintcha?*

**Yeah well, well we got – I dealt with him**

*he pushed john, the man pushed john out the way, you know cos he was only young*

**How old were you when this was**

Oh I can’t remember I was young, I couldn’ta been that old well about 15 I spose, something about there n he pushed me n that was it, I just belted him, boom, n so I lost me job (chuckles) but I wasn’t outta work for long because soon a time a friend of mine ‘e come along, ‘e see me standing there n e said what yuou standing there for n so I told him, he laughed so he said well, e says er come up to Courages tomorra, he says, I’ll get you a job. and er I went up there n see the bloke in there n he said oh wait a minute n he comes down n he see the bloke n the bloke says can you start work n I says oh well anytime you like, today if you want he says no come back tomorra and I went back n I worked in Courage’s right up til the war n then I went in the airforce then from Courage’s. And they still paid my my mother a third of my wages all through the war

**Oh wow! How much was that?**

Oh I can’t remember now, it wasn’t a lot, it wasn’t a lot I mean you didn’t get a lot then in them days I say I used to get around ten bob a week, you know

**Yeah**

Ten bob was a lot of money in them days and they paid that all while I was – during the war

**So when you say in Carriges is it train carriges?**

Train? No Courages. Courages was a brewers

**Ooh Courage’s**

Yeah, French, it was a French name, and they were very good becase they used to pay my mum a third of my wages every week, they were very good.

**Yeah? So what did you do there?**

Well I used to help to make the beer

**Ah so you have got secrets?**

Yeah, well I keep them myself. So I mustn’t let her know indoors

**So how old were you at that point then?**

Oh about 14 I spose

**So what, er how do you make the beer?**

Well you dint make it, really, I mean it was the brewers who made it

**Yeah**

But we used to er get the stuff ready cos you had barley, oats, malts hops, and you just went round with a sale foreman really cos I was only a boy then and you just go round with the chap and you used to get all this stuff ready and then when it was all ready it was err taken and all put in the boiler and it used to boil up. And then it was brought over from where the boilers was over to this side where then it was cooled down to 6, 6 degrees and then it was put in these great big vats and then they used to sling in the yeast, and then it was left, then once it all fermented then they could draw the yeast off, and then when the beer had been there for a 3 or 4 days, they used to test it, see if it was er, the right stuff, and then it used to go down, into the barrels and over to the bottle beer department. And then one minute you just be doing mild ale, and the next minute you’d be doing a strong ale, and then at Christmas they used to do a beer called Katie, used to call it Katie, with three Ks only in a small bottle, but you couldn’t drink many of them, Stronger than bloody whiskey. They called it 3 Ks. But they were a good firm to work for, cos they paid mum a bit of my wages all the time I was in the airforce. And I used to swim and box at Courages as well.

**Oh did they have a sort of Club?**

Oh yeah they had an athletic scene there, and I used to swim for em and box for them as well, and they used to giver er..pay my mum a third of my wages every week. And when they started err… finished, I went back into Courages, course I woulda still been there but then they moved up to where was it I think

*No, John, you had to leave because your breathin*

Oh yeah, yeah I started getting a bit of chest trouble so I had to leave, but it wouldn’t have mattered cos Id have left anyway cos then courages moved from London and moved up – I forget where it was now

*Alton*

Alton, Alton that was it yeah, a place called Alton I always get mixed up with Alton, and Aughton, cos ones with L A and ones with H….

**What did it smell like when you were working in the brewery then?**

Ah it was alright, nice smell, it smelled very hoppy of course.

**Yeah**

But the point is, what they used to do some a one or one of the foreman or the under-foreman, they used to get ladies institute come round and have a nose round and show em, and well as the beer was brewing you used to get a lot of yeast and so they had all these … one boke he took em round, and one of the ladie he said oh just put your nose there then love and she got in there and its like (clap!) Bam! Like someone hit yer, cos of course if you put your head near there the oxygen is cut off, it’s cut right off, so its like someone’s hit yer. This is why when they had these big vessels where the beer used to go in first, that was all locked up, and you had all these suckers that used to draw off all the all the gas you know. And none of it none of it was wasted in the brewery, not a thing, and the gas that was coming of the beer, was drawn over to the bottled beer department, and then compressed, and then put in the bottles, this is why when you pour a bottle out its all foamy, that’s the gas. Nothing was wasted in the brewery, not a fing

**Did you get to test the beer?**

The hops….Oh yeah o’course you did, yeah – you only tasted the best (laughs) Nothing was wasted in the brewery, cos the oats that it was all dried what it was made from, that was all dried, and that went round to the horses. The hops was all dried, and that went to gardens. It was taken to the gardens, they used to buy it. And the yeast was dried off, and used to go to bakeres, and so nothing in the brewery was actually wasted, not a thing. It was all money.

**Yeah. So you left Courage to go into the RAF**

No I didn’t leave courages, no I went to the RAF while I was in courages.

**Okay What year was that?**

Oh (chuckles) that’s going back a bit now

*Must have been about 1940 john*

Yeah about 1940, about then yeah, but then course ummm, I dunno why, why they left, but Courage’s, they uprooted and went somewhere else

**Was that after the war?**

No I dunno why, why they left, Courages, I think, I think mainly I think they folded because all breweries amalgamated then. Instead of cutting each other’s throats they just sort of got together. (clock strikes) This is why you’ve got no pubs now, they just sell beer, they’ve got names, but it all comes from one brewery. Where we used to have – what did we used to have? We had Courages, then you had a Barclays, then you had ummm Watneys, Trumans,

**Where they all London?**

Well some around, oh yeah but most all in London, yeah, yeah

*Most of the factories moved out of London about at that time in the 50s didn’t they?* *Quite a lot*

Oh they did, yeah, of course a lot of factories all moved out but Courages already had a place at Alton, but they didn’t move all through the war they they stayed when they worked actually.

**So what did you do in the RAF then?**

Oh I used to fire the machine gun myself, used to fly in a wellington bomber.

**So was the machine gun at the back? Of the plane?**

Mmm

**Yeah so what plane did you say it was?**

Wellington

**A wellington…?**

A light bomber

**Ah, and where did you do your training?**

Errrrr Oxfordshire, all up in oxford. I met some nice friends up in Oxford. One there, my mate, Johnno, he err, he got to know a young lady down there, and then er we went down there and she ‘ad two brothers and they was home on leave and now I don’t know if you’ve ever been to the seaside and seen what they called a laughing policeman?

**Oooh Yeah**

No you ain’t no…Well anyway, what it is is you put your penny in n ‘e laughs like h oho hooo (deep laugh) well she ‘ad these brothers and they were like that. They were jolly, they were very nice fellas, very jolly. Big fellas, mind you, but they used to laugh and it was h oho ho – very nice people I mean and we used to go here and he used to say to Jonno and me if youre on leave, you don’t wander around about, you come ‘ere, you know? Come here. And we did and it was like a second home, and when we were on leave we used to go out and have a beer sort of thing, you know – yeah very nice people really. (To wife) We went down n see ‘em once dint we?

*No not with me*

No, no – I think it was

*Who did you go with then?*

I’m not quite sure now, I’m not sure

**How long were you in the RAF for then?**

Oh about 4 years 5 years

**Was that up until the end of the war?**

Yeah

**Yeah and did you…what point did you meet Helen?**

Oh it wasn’t long after that was it?

*No, you’d just been demobbed*

Was it? Oh I can’t remember

*Yeah, You had that terrible suit on (all laugh)*

Oh yeah when you got demobbed you got a suit, terrible.

*Tuacy suit they called it*

Aw yeah n boots, terrible, terrible.

*It was too*

Mostly come from Colliers, colliers in a place called colliers and burtons. What they used to call a fifty bob tailors. In them days you could buy a suit for fifty bob, and yeah sometimes they were good suits

**Did they give you shoes, and a hat?**

When you was demobbed when you was demobbed you was given everything, the complete outfit when you were demobbed. And after that you was on your own then. I’m telling ya, you’re on your own. Luckily I mean I still had a job to go back to cos I was in Courages when I volunteered for the RAF, so I had no problem, I just went straight back. Because Courages was more or less like a military firm, because Courage, was Captain Courage, he was in the Navy, and you had the other one, Major, Major Godfrey, he was a major in the Army, and then you had who was it? There was the other one I forget his name, he was in the Army as well, so they were more or less like a military, bit of a military family Courages. Its French, a French name really, a French name. But they settled over here years and years ago you know? But no they were a good firm to work for

**So did you go back to doing the same job after the RAF?**

Yeah I went straight back to Courages I mean the job was there it was open for me so I just went back

**And how long were you there for?**

Oh I forget now

*I’m trying to figure out ummm..*

Quite a while wa’nt I? I think I was there til

*till 1958*

Yeah. Course then they uprooted then, cos a lot of firms got out of London then and I think Courages, where’d they go to – I cant remember where Courage went. I know they moved but then, then in the end all breweries amalgamated, so although you’ve got different names, beers are all brewed in one place

**So after the RAF and back at Courages, was it the same job that you did up until 1958** **or did you…?**

Yeah I went straight back to my job in Courages

**And what was it that you were doing**

Well I just used to help the brewers, when they used to brew the beer. I mean it’s a clear job, I mean the beer used to come over and then used to come in and then you used a thermometer type thing, a secromometer, that’s it, and you used to get a long tube, you filled it up with beer, then you put the secromomrter in and that’d float up and down, and then you used to have fig.. names and figures on it and that, and you had to read that off, and if you wanted it at say um, 62, it had to be at 62. But you didn’t do that, the brewer done that. And then he’d move it up and down and then he’d say, ‘2 inches’, so you had this big dipstick, and you jad to open the valve, let in boiling hot water, or water that’d been cooled from the other side, and then you so much in and then you let it - and then you dipped it again so you come up to the mark, like that sorta thing, and then the Brewer to get another sample, hed blow it all up, let all air through, bubble it all up and then youd take a sample from down underneath, yeah, and then he’d put the secromometer in, and then hed see if it was right, and if it was right he’d say ‘that’s it’ and youd just lock it off and that was it. It was interesting. Nice firm to work for really

**What were the brewers themselves like?**

Oh they were alright. The head one, he was a bloke called Lee May, he was allied to the Lee May yacht people, the people who used to make all the yachts, or used to pocket all the yachts. Lee May, he was French. But err, he used to … He never used to say a lot but he used to come over and theyd say ‘Good Morning Mr May’ and he’d go ‘Bb bb’ That’s all, ‘Ub bb’ that’s all he done, yeah, but er, sometimes if you was swimming or doing anything for ‘em, he used to come and ‘how’d we do, how’d we do?’ And I’d say oh alright and ‘Gd gd, gd gd’ so as I say they were a good firm to work for.

**So after 1958 then, where did you go when you left Courage?**

Oh, well I didn’t go nowhere, I finished work then packed up, didn’t go nowhere then. Cos Courages moved outta London then, cos they had a place at Alton, so I suppose they mustve gone there, of course then all breweries amalgamated after that, although they keep the same name. But, tell you the truth I don’t know what happens now about breweries I know they all got together

*Oh you had to leave, John, because of your health*

Yeah I had to leave in one way, cos my old chest started (coughs) started playing me up, and the doctor said to me ,he says to me he said its no good to you, that cold and gas – cos you do get a certain amount of gas coming off the beer.

**Was it quite physical work as well? Was there a lot of lifting?**

Sometimes, well sometimes, sometimes, when you were brewing, you had to go into the cold store and I mean cold store, and you used to get pockets of hops miles taller than me – you couldn’t even get your arm round ‘em. You had two hooks, and you had to hook em in, to heave em out, and then you put em on a two wheel trolly and you pushed em outside outta the cold store, and then leave em there til the brewer come over and then he’d stick a thing inside and pull ‘em out and take them over more or less up to the Chemist and he’d see how strong the hops was and then he told the brewer and the brewer knew if they used two or three pockets of hops, or not yknow. So… We had chemists up stairs as well. Yeah it was a good firm to work for.

**But your doctor advised you not to stay there because of the gas and?**

Well it was the cold as well, it was getting – the cold and I had a bit of bronchitis then, and he said to me then, he said, well, in a way it didn’t matter really cos then they moved outta London anyway so…and I couldn’t gone with em, well I I coulda gone with one but they booted out the country altogether weren’t it . I could gone to Canada. But err couldn’t go because I had her old mum here mine, family, forget it y’know?

**So what did you do then?**

I retired

*You never retired.*

Oh no, so what I’d do then then?

*Sorry. You’re on the civil service/*

Oh that’s right yeah I got that

**I was thinking that!**

Oh yeah, I went out and I went/

*There for twenty years!/*

Oh year I was working civil service then

**What department was you working?**

In the stationary department

**And whereabouts**

It was up in the borough. That was in borough. But er they had freshies all over the place really sometimes I go even to Harrow pick up stuff from there and they all round London and places and you had to go to…but Harrow.. speak up I can’t hear you

*Houses of parliament*

Oh houses of parliament yeah

**Did you go inside there?**

Oh yeah I used to go all over up inside and see all the ministers

**Oh who were the ministers in there?**

Oh yeah, yeah I used to go different ministers and you take em in whatever they were most of what you call Handsard a thing called Hanasrad I should take em over and you used to have to go on up a different offices. And used to go up and out sign for it.

**Is Hansard a type of**

Well it’s a book. Everything that goes in the houses of parliament. Anything goes on in the houses of parliament goes in Hansard.

**Is it…**

You can still got it today. You still get it today. If you go to a stationary office. I don’t know if you can get it in Strikers or anything like that I’m not sure but they had a big shop over um Holborn and that’s where I used to hang out a lot you know Holborn in the shop and they get Hasnard in there and get a lot of other stuff as well

**Was it mainly deliveries?**

Yeah, yeah only in the civil service yeah

**Did you have a van?**

Oh yeah used to have a nice van, very nice van.

**What sort of van**

Ahhh.. I think they were mostly Fords. They had a well more or less they get a contract and well you might stay four to five years whatever. That fleet a go. The whole lot would be wiped out. and when you go in Monday morning you’d find a brand new flock of vans.

**And where there any models?**

Fords, mostly all Fords.

**Fords.**

Yeah all Fords. Mostly all Fords. That’s why they got a good deal from Fords. Yeah mostly all Fords.

**Did you ever deliver out of London?**

Oh yeah used to go out of London. Goes to uh goes to Wembley. Places round that area. But the Houses of Commons I used to a lot. Well I used to do a lot. But then I got taken off a that and I was put on this job over the press, what they called the press. And that’s where all the hansard and everything else was done

**And was that where it was printed?**

Mmm a just off of of a..what’s that bloody road now. Just up in the borough weren it?

*Just off a Southwark street*

South..yeah..I can’t remember the name…I think it was called Suffolk street weren’t it? Yeah Suffolk Street

**Great…Great…**

Yeah Suffolk Street. There. And that’s where our garage was. Cos round the corner was were the press was.

**So what did you do on the press then?**

I didn’t do nuffin on the press. I used to just go round and…pick all the Hansard up. And take it over to the House of Commons

**Yeah**

And then I come back and then the bloke could a give me a round and I might have to do it to quite a lot of offices in London. Mostly government

**Was it quite easy to get into the Houses of Parliament?**

Me it was…cos I had a van and I had also I had a pass as well. Special pass

**So were you allowed to../**

Also we had a uniform you see that had up there you had SO SO on it. Station Office.

Stationary Office

*HMSO*

HMSO yeah. HMSO

**Her**

*Her Majesty’s Stationary Office*

**Ahh.**

That’s what it was. But I didn’t have the ‘H’ on it. It just said ‘SO’ Stationary Office. But it was known as HMSO really. Er up in the borough. The press up there. They had one at uh Wembley and Harrow.

**Did you like it there? You were there for about 20 years?**

Well err that point I was a free agent. I mean once I was in that van no one could give me any orders. I was on my own. Do what I like.

**And what did you do?**

Well I used to go all over the place. And and if you finished a if ya finished or done you didn’t go back I used to on up home and have dinner up at me mum’s (laughs).

**Did you take the van with you?**

Oh yeah because uh where me mum was then you could get a drive straight in to where she lived, right into the flats. And where I was I could get round put the van so any one passing it couldn’t even see the van so that was out the way I say. Sat there for a couple of hours actually. Then I’d get in the van and go back.

**So you’d have to take the van back overnight?**

Oh yeah. Take the van back to uh, where it was, ---. Sometimes I felt I should pick you up din’ I?

*yeah*

And I’d get my own car outta the bay and go round and wait for Helen to finish and then uh… used to come home.

**So when you were, when you were doing the deliveries was there quite a lot of lifting there as well?**

No, ah no no. Well, not really. Not really call it lifting. Some of it was heavy but not a lot. Mostly when you was… when a was.. mind you I was what they call a press. Standing press. All you had was uh little rolls of hansard. Little rolls of packages. You know might have oh fifty fifty to sixty of them to deliver, different places, some were private houses somewhere re, factories. Things like that y’know and some of these be in the museum. Cos they had it there as well. Used ‘ave to go round all different places, you know. That was alright. So once you was out, you was your own govnor.

**Yeah**

And no one tell you what to do, you’re on your own.

**Can you remember what ministers you might have met there?**

No never met a lot of them

**No?**

Never no. didn’t meet a lot of them at all. Used to see ‘em you know, b, b but didn’t, didn’t talk to them. We just went up and more or less see their secretary and just a give them the hansard and they say ‘oh thank you very much’ and then you come down and that was it y’know

**So what was actually in the Hansard?**

Oh. Every all business that went on during parliament. Anything that was discussed in parliament had to went in, went in, in, in the Hansard.

**All typed out?**

Oh yeah it was all in print. All printed. I had a little booklet. Well oh, about, about 64 something like that, yeah yeah. Cos then they had a shop over Holborn where you could go buy it as well. You could buy all kinds of stuff in there. Government stuff. Over Holborn. And that’s where I was put. After that. Put over there. And that was a nice little job, that was.

**Yeah. How did you travel to work?**

Oh I had me own car then.

**Oh, so you’d drive through central London?**

Yeah I used to drive, used to drive and I used to leave our car outside in the main street and then when it was ready to go, used to put it, get in our van take the van out, park it round the corner, get in our car take it back where the van was and then we come out get in our own car, van and go where we’s supposed to go?

**And when you were driving your car to work over the years did you see that there was an increase in traffic did it get busier?**

Well you didn’t bother about it really. In it so much you didn’t bother. I mean one minute you get a lovely clear run the next you’re up to your eyeballs in traffic so it didn’t bother you really. You just waited till it all cleared or you got through. Nuffin you know. It’s only summat times that it used to help you out cos it helped you out with other times you know. Cos I mean the bloke that might be waiting there and you’d be late and he’s knows wha’ts happened cos you know he knows what’s going on and if you came say from Harrow for instance, cos that be one of the big presses, and if you was coming from there and there might be on the radio about a bit of traffic he knew full well, you know, that you might be late, so when you went he, they never said nothing they just used to clock off, and home you go you know your card was written up, they see there on there what time what time you’re there and then you get paid for over time

**Did you have to use one of those clocking in machines or was it just..**

Oh yeah first thing when you went in the morning and at night so I clock in when I went in and end of the day

**And what sort of time..?**

Oh I forget about that well I dunno, I can’t, must a been about six I think it was it was all cos I what I was doing. If it was the Houses of Parliament it might a been early cos of going over getting the stuff an then taking it over to the house. So most days I be in work by about half six. Then round and round the press by about seven. And about half past seven, quarter to eight I be running over Houses of Parliament. Then come back and then they give me another job then then they might out me over to Holborn book shop where I was mostly and then used to have to run stuff over to the private houses and firms. That was that

**What sort of time would you finish on a normal day?**

Well it’s all – really. Umm. Sometimes if you had to go to the houses of parliament sometimes you could be a bit late but I was never too late was I? Really. what was the latest I ever came over to you, half six?

*yeah, bout that.*

Yeah half six. Never went beyond that. The only time they might do a bit more a sometimes on a Saturday when you had to go in but then when you went in you cleaned all your van down, checked the oil, checked the petrol, getting everything ready for Monday. Make sure everything was okay. That was out on Saturday. And of course sometimes if something was going on Saturday like the book shop for instance like I used to have to go over the bookshop and take stuff from the press cos they worked all Saturday and bloody Sunday that lot.

**Did you ever have to work on Sundays?**

No I never did did I? never did work on Sunday

*no.*

Mostly Saturday I had work but not Sunday but the presses did. No, they had to go in. that was a good job I used to get good money then. In the print. If you got in the print you got good wages. A good job to get in the print. A lot of people like getting a job at print. And like newspapers things like that. Good job. And that was souper they used to call it

**And what was**

Nat Souper was it? Anyway… yeah yeah they they had a lot of unions about then.

Well I was. Yeah I was in the transport union. That was. Well you you had to be in that anyway so. That was automatic once you got in…

**And how did that work, did you have to pay a subscription?**

Oh yeah you paid a small subscription. That’s all. More or less they, more or less if you got into trouble or something like that then they stood by you like a lawyer (chuckles). It never happened.

**You didn’t get into trouble?**

Nah, you couldn’t get into trouble if you done your job. It was an eee easy job really.

**So you like your job?**

Yeah cos there nothing about it cos when you were out you could go somewhere. The only things is, the only thing is you had to be careful. People. People. You wouldn’t believe it. You won’t believe that some people think, that when they’re paying their taxes they’re paying for that bleedin’ van. And you’re sitting there, idling there, taking your time having a cup of tea! You’d be surprised at people.

**Did people tell you off?**

No no it was never me. No, no, not me. But we have known when they gone back and the foreman’s come up and he said to one bloke ‘be careful where you park because you’ve had a phone in and you're…’ so people who think they’re overdoing their taxes sort of thing phone in and say ‘oh this bloke’s sitting down there, he’s havin a cup of tea and all that. I’m a tax payer.’

*even on your lunch break*

Yeah and he’s on a lunch break

**And what did you have for you lunch, did you take sandwiches?**

Oh yeah I take sand..yeah mostly sandwiches. Trouble is you couldn’t eat --- on your fingers when you’re driving, it’s not really… so you’d have sandwiches and whatever cup of tea and then I have my dinner when I come home didn’t I? We'd all have our dinner together didn’t we? You, Michael, Elaine, all together then. Yeah I just took

sandwich, cup of tea.

**So you used to eat in the van mostly?**

Yeah

**Did you have anyone else with you in the van or was it just…?**

Uuuhhh… The only time I had anyone in the van was when I was a seconded to the uh Customs and Excise

**Ahh so when was that then?**

That was oh, when I was working, when I was working,

**Yeah**

Sometimes, they’d want a van. Well, we had three vans and I was taken off the job I normally done and they put him with me and two other fellas and they put us what they call Customs and Excise. And we used to go round to all (coughs) all places that needed Customs. Like all the whiskey places and breweries and tea factories and coffee and all that kinda stuff. Used to go round there collect samples and that used to go all back to Customs and Excise.

**What were the…?**

Even Dunlop picked up

**What would they be checking for then?**

Nothing, they just a went back to check it was authentic or whatever it is

*mostly things that were confiscated*

Most the stuff was all confiscation stuff down like Thames Street Customs. Cos I bought back motor bikes before now. And guns. From the Customs and Excise.

**So it's what, things that people have been smuggling into the country?**

Yeah they do. Yeah but a daint do it on my own because you used to have a man with you you had a Customs man with ya. So he’s sitting beside ya so you used to have a chat and one another er sometimes you say you know ‘we got time for a cup of tea now haven’t we?’ and I’d say ‘yeah you’re right’ and so we’d put up somewhere have a cup of tea, a sandwich or a cake or something like that and then off we go again.

**And did you like having the company in the van?**

Yeah, because yeah because cos they were glad to be out as well you know. They was only too pleased to get out, have a roam around sit and have a chat. You know they was alright, not bad. Yeah

**How long was that secondment for then?**

Oh I forget. I dunno how long I was in that now

*Couple of years weren't it*

couple of years yea, couple of years. And then uh, I retired didn’t I? Got fed up. No I didn’t realise I was fed up, you know, retired before I should you know.

**How old were you when you retired?**

mmm….going back a while now innit? Uuuhh, how old was I when I retired?

*62*

62 then was it?

*yeah*

yeah. Must be about then. Yeah. Although I needn’t have retired. Still stayed there really.

**Yeah. Would you have wanted to…?**

No I got fed up. Fed up with it. fed up with driving around everywhere. Fed up with traffic. Idiot…

*chest, chest, breathing*

yeah and the breathing got the better of me as well.

**Yeah**

Yeah. That was a bit too much. So uhh I packed it in really

*so I kept him for three years.*

Laughs

*well their not suppose to retire are they till 65*

**What was that like?**

Well a I think really I just a , well luckily I had a car when I was at home and when it come time to Helen’s finished I used to pick Helen up and bring her home. And it was handy really, cos I had a … what was it I had a

*one up there just one the end*

yeah just down the bottom there I had the car cos I used to have another garage across the road didn’t they? But the leaked didn't they? and that was when I got up there and that had one yeah. But uh no it was a good job, you got round to knowing people

**Was that your favourite job then that you done over the years?**

Well the docks was yeah because you had a good run round and see different people

Used to go used to go where is it? London Docks, Millwall Docks. Oh what’s the other one now? Can’t remember that one. Oh there’s four..

*Surrey docks*

Surrey docks. Used to go 4, 4 altogether

**What a ..**

Oh they’re factories oh Da—and Rothmans’ we used to go to

**And what kind of goods would come into the docks then that you had to …?**

Anything rifles, bloody motor bikes. Anything. Confiscated stuff. Yeah. Bits of private used to come in. even we used to get stuff off there that they used to bring in some of these chaps used to come from abroad. Used to bring in a sort of, a what was it he had that time? Stunk, meat or something they had? They bought something over

*they bought in drugs wasn’t they?*

Yeah something --- smell. And one of the Customs men he sort of a sort of thought one day you know “Corr this stinks” so then you know I suppose up in there being a devious mind that a lot of Customs men have got you know he said alright you know, he cut it open and there’s loads and loads of drugs. So after that anything like that they were tested.

**So you’d go along in your van and/ collect it**

Pick it up with the man with me, you know they used to call a watcher with me the customs man and he’d sit side of me.

**And where would you take it?**

Customs Down Lower Thames Street. That was Customs House down there

*all locked up*

Oh yeah all locked up even my van was all locked up. That is … is…is you left for a cup of tea you had to lock everything up back and front. But normally you didn’t normally stop for a cup of tea. Normally where we used to go we used to get a cup of tea (laughs)

It was a good job. A good job. You used to meet different people, have a chat you know and not only that the best thing is on your own. Being your own govnor no one had to tell you anything y’know. If you wanted to stop and have a cup of tea you stopped y’know, once you’re there. That’s good job done. Cos after that it uh, even the printing works that all uh finished. And it all went to people like Strikers, you know Strikers there called? Went to them people.

**Is that a company?**

Oh it’s a big company innit? Strickers, do all kinds of stuff big like uh stationary stationary place

*It was like a lot of government offices, all privatized, sold off*

**Would that of been in the early 80s?**

Oh I dunno, when was that? When you packed up it was then weren’t it?

*end of the 80s beginning of the 90s cos that’s what happened in, well, with the firm well offices that I worked in by time I retired it was all privatized.*

Yeah cos your govnor was a good nice --- went down your govnor’s place he invited us down there. He was I think it was a birthday, wedding or something

*no I don’t know what it was*

well I know we was invited down to his house, I had the car then we went down there. Was that the one that had them pink flamingos? What was the one that had them flamingos?

*I dunno. You’re talking about Buckingham Palace now. That’s where they were*

Oh right. Yeah. Been in there for a cup a tea more than once.

**With the Queen?**

She was…indisposed at the time

She said ‘I’m sorry John, but these state affairs..’ and I said to her ‘don’t let it happen again’.

**Did you deliver there?**

Oh yeah yeah I used to go Buckingham Palace every day, but not through the main gates. Yeah, go to the side

**Trades mens’ entrance**

Yeah you had to go the side

**So that was Hansard?**

That was all Hansard yeah had to do Hansards and some other stuff. Parcels and that used to take

*toilet rolls*

oh yeah yeah

**Toilet rolls?**

Oh yeah yeah yeah stage knowledge used to that as well you know, anything like that they used to do. Course you didn’t know cos they were all packed up properly but that’s what they were. Go back there and down the side turn in side/ all big gate

*was that something at the door?*

**Post**

You had to round the back and they show you a cup of tea there as well.

**What was it like? The bit that you saw?**

Oh well you know a bit posh you know? But you know you didn’t go nowhere inside the palace not really but you know it was alright there, round the side it was in the forget the name of the street really yeah but it was alright in there, people was alright. Yeah it was a nice little job you got around.

**Well, I think we’ve come to the end thank you John.**