Len Hatch

**Summary:** Len Hatch worked in the Docks for 34 years. During his employment he witnessed changes to the employment of Dockers, machinery and containerisation. Len describes the Cargo he handled, how each Wharf had their speciality.

**This is Megan Vine and it is the 21st November 2012, and we’re at London Bubble and I’m here with Len, could you spell your surname for me please.**

Len: Len H.A.T.C.H Hatch

**And, could you tell me where and when you were born?**

Len: I was born in 1929, er, where I was born (pause) possibly St Olives ‘ospital, lived in Seven Step Alley which was off (pause) just been showing her the photographs of it, right

**And could you tell us about your work, what sort of job you worked in?**

Len: Well I started when I was fourteen to an apprenticeship shoemaker (long pause) then I left when I was (pause) round about eighteen, nineteen because my father died (pause) and (pause) I had t’get more money and (long pause) the shoe repair factory where I worked, never offered me a great deal so I went to work then I went to work, left there and I worked in the steel and stock yard called W.M & A Quineys which was in Paradise Street. Then when I was twenty-one I applied for my brief to go into the dock and I got it (pause) then I worked in the dock for thirty-four year (pause) came out of the dock when I was, fifty-five ‘cause I always said I would do that, *and*, then I went to work for Southwark Council, in the libraries at first then I got a transfer to the Livesey museum which was in the Old Kent Road, then I retired at sixty-five.

**Fantastic; and just going back a bit can you tell me about your apprenticeship, what were you learning to do?**

Len: Er (pause) to be quite truthful love (laughs) I was learnin’ more about repairing work than I did actually making shoes. So it was no great loss really, er, it was interesting I will say that (pause) I learnt a lot about ladies fashion shoes, and also did learn, er, machinery like a (unclear word) and er well a well a sewing machine for sewing souls on boots, I did learn that, I went to the Cordwainers Technical College which was in ‘Olborn (pause) so I did I suppose, I shouldn’t be critical. But I did learn a lot about shoes.

**But you decided to change your job then**

Len: (Cuts in) Purely for money, nothing for no other reason other than that I was er (pause) I was earnin’ somewhere around £2 , 2 shillings and as I say my father died and it was just me and me mum and I wanted more money together (pause) and I asked him for a rise and er he said I could make it up to £3 (pause) and I said, well I said er a friend of mine has just said to me I can go to work down where he works and I can get £5,10 a week (pause) so that was basically the reason I left (laughs)

**Fair enough. So you got this next job then through a friend of yours?**

Len: Yeah! Both err, the chap I’m going to see when I leave ‘ere, he er, we were a couple of mates, he was and another one I just learned he recently died last year, so that’s the sad part

**Sorry to hear that**

Len: (Cuts in) But er, yes! We enjoyed it was a good, good two years I worked there, it was enjoyable (laughs) and everything else, everything was ‘eavy, ‘eavy work but it was mm good, I ‘yknow.

**So could you describe a typical day at work, what did you actually do at work?**

Len: Er well (pause) there it was just er sheets, steel, sheets of steel, everything to do with barge building which was always a long there, used to to do bollards for er barges, stoves for the like cabins, sheets of steel for the barge repairers, rivets and everything like that. It was completely steel stockyard basically on the principle of feeding all the barge builders that used to be along there Thames ‘ere.

**So you did a lot of heavy work?**

Len: Yeah, that built me up for goin’ in the dock (laughs)

**And could you describe any of the tools you used in this job?**

Len: ‘ands, just that. Just you and ‘ands, all bulk, there was (pause) goin’ back that was in the (pause) that was in round about the 40’s, ’49, there was no mechanical, how there is now, it was just you and other fellas, gang of blocks, lift tt and that was the same when I went inta the dock (pause) it was just all man ‘andled, every (pause) when I went into the dock there was somewhere around about 42,000 dockers in London dock system, when I came out there was only 9000 (pause) Because everythin’ was changin’, it was becomin’ mechanisation, containerisation and everythin’ like that so.

**How many years did you work as a docker for?**

Len: 34 year

**And, so you saw huge change in**

Len: (Cuts in) oh definitely, you saw *vast* change, as I say er (pause) one of the basic changes was when I, when I started in the dock there used to be, dependin’ on how many ‘oles was a long the ship but, you had 12 men workin’ on the ship, 12 men on the quay, 4 each ‘ole (pause) right (pause) when I was at Tilbury (pause) I finished up at Tilbury, when I was at Tilbury there was only 6 men down the ‘ole, each ‘ole and 1,2,3,4, 4 forklifts for the hole of the ship, ‘cuase (laughs) that’s when I , I’m waiting, I started a job over at the main ‘ole and I was just waitin’ there and the clerk said to me, he said there’s cargo down number three waitin’ on the quay there, so I said ‘no, I’m at the main ‘ole’ he said ‘no you’re not, your on the ship, you do the ship,’ so that’s how y’know if we got a bit busy they mighta put another 2 forklifts there y’know but that was basically what it was (pause) you didn’t do separate, shore gangs you done the whole of the ships with forklifts, ‘cause everythin’ was palletisation and containerisation.

**And around what time did you notice the big change with mechanisation, was it gradual?**

Len: (Cuts in) oh that was more or less when we er (pause) round about ’69, then you got (pause) Surrey Commercial Dock closed (pause) then I think London Dock closed first, that’s in London Docklands, St Katharine’s (pause) then everybody was being allocated to different. Then as I say, Surrey Commercial Dock closed, then they were transferred to the various places. I was lucky because I didn’t go into the enclosed down very much, I preferred to work along the riverside. The firm where I was regular at, Bellamy’s Wharf that more or less closed in ’68, ‘69 same as Surrey Commerical docks (pause) so (pause) we was on the pool, what they call the pool then. Then they made, what they call decasualisation and then we was allocated to different places and I was allocated to a place called Fishers Wharf, which was just a long, at the top of er Swan Lane, it’s just a long ‘ere and I worked there for a few years. That closed, there’s lovely ‘ouses dowh there. Where the rats went, it was in the water where they went I don’t know (laughs) but they musta gone somewhere and er then I was allocated to the Thames Rice Mills, which is down Rotherhithe Street. If you hold right at the street more or less, where the Amos Estates still there, The Walf is still there and you’ve lovely apartments there, if you want the Walf front it’ll cost you a million quid (laughs) and so on and so forth. Then that closed and we was allocated down to Tilbury. And in the mean time they were offering different severances, that money y’know they buy ya brief off ya basically and er I took mine in, why I don’t know, I was sent down there in 19, I was sent in ’83 and I came out the dock in, just over a year down at Tilbury and I came out I think it was just ’84. When I was 55 (pause) as I said, I said I would always come out at 55, simply for the reason when I first came into the dock I didn’t know nothin’ I was just (pause) went to the pool and my first job was in (inaudible) Coal Store which was in Deptford, and I had a day there, I went back to the pool, the second day I got sent to Scrums, delivering flour into a barge and I was in the barge workin’ with a man that was 74 year old, simply because there was no pensions and that and he was a seaman and the dock was busy then and they just, believe me he taught me a lot, and he was the one that said to me, ‘boy you’ve come into the dock, if you find a good govnor, kill ‘im before he ‘comes a bad one’ and that was the attitude of most dockers toward dock employers (pause)

Because there was a very, very bad feelin’ toward dock employers in some cases and it was justifiable (pause) but in others there it was just one of those things y’know because basically they dated from the ’89 dock strike, and in the 1889 dock strike they come out for a guaranteed six pence an ‘our, they won it after a long period but then within a month or so it was taken away from then again (pause) so because it was the single reason it was er (pause) the iron and fire principle, y’know, if there was an hours work they’d employ you for an hour, if there was a cart wanted loadin’, mind this ins only ‘istory, what my father and my grandfather and me mum used to talk to me about, er, cart day, you go to work and perhaps earn a penny and that was that.

**No job security**

Len: None whatsoever

**Wow, so there was still this feeling when you started?**

Len: Oh yes! There was still that bitter feelin’ amongst men that the (pause) they didn’t give a little, so why should we give a little, it was a, it’s a, it was a strange feelin’ and it’s the same, it’s the same in the general strike, when the general strike was on in 19, well 1929, the year I was born, ‘round about that one time er (pause) there was still resentment to men ‘cause where I worked there was two men, where I worked at Bellamy’s Wharf there was two men there, Friday night I spoke to him this particular man and I was told, ‘what you speak to him for?’ ‘oh well, I just’ ‘well don’t,’ it was, that was a bitter feelin’ amongst the older clan ‘cause he went to work at the time and so there was still. He was sent to Coventry otherewise (inaudible) there was still that bitter feelin’ amongst er, amongst er ordinary men I mean that you had it with the miners stroke, that was bitter feelin’, that there y’know. That’s how resentful they ‘came y’know.

**So you were talking about the pull, the pool?**

Len: The pool. That was National Dock Labour Board. And they called it the pool of labour. There was a pool in Surrey Commercial Docks and our pool, ‘cause we fed the river side, was a pool in Burrell Road. Just in Burrell Road where the flats are now, and, we used to shape out on the, the call what you call the call at a quarter to eight I used to go to Bellamy’s right, there was no work for me at Bellamy’s, if there was no shipping there or someink if I didn’t get work in the warehouse then I went to the pool and then from the pool I could be allocated here there and everywhere (pause) as I was telling er Claire when we were talkin’ and that, the farthest I went, we went in there on the Friday mornin’, given to, there was a gang of us sent from there to (pause) GravesEnd (pause) GravesEnd we picked up a tug and it dropped us off at the ship and it was two miles off the Southend peer, loadin’ ammunition.

**Ammunition? Wow!**

Len: That was the farthest I ever, and we worked we, we got a short night to finish the job and we had a hundred ton of ammunition, shells, detonators.

**And was this around war time?**

Len: No, no, this was peace time, this was around, round about (long pause) 50’s, in the 50’s y’know, (pause), comin’ up to the ‘60s, I don’t know the actual date now but it was ‘round about, end of 50s. The war had finished, I think it was goin’ out to the Middle East, or the far East and somewhere, y’know.

**And so did you have any interesting cargos that you**

Len: Oh yeah, I, I (long pause) I didn’t, I preferred workin’ in the dock under a casual system ‘cause I didn’t like workin’ at the one place too long. When I was sent to Fishers and the Thames Rice Mills and that was the most boringest time that I ever, I ever had in my life (pause) it was just (pause) at the rice mills it was just doin’ bags of rice, bolt rice, bags ‘m. I used to get absolutely pissed off, I cant express it, But *then* they started a system to save employers bein’, havin’ to keep with so many men hanging about, the, the, National Labour Board bought in another system again that if your employer had surplus labourers he could phone them and they would allocated to any firm, n’that wasn’t too bad. ‘casionally we used to, I used to get sent to either Daggenham, Daggenham Dock, Convoys at Deptford, various little places y’know.

**So would you have specific types of cargo and specific cases?**

Len: (Cuts in) Oh yeah, Bellamy’s we done everythin’, loadin’, dischargin’, mainly, pardon me, mainly dates, used to do dates, bolt grain, maize, wheat, barley, everything and it was er corn beef and everythin’ like that. ‘cause the people that owned the jetty was owned by a shipping company called (inaudible) but the warehouse was owned by (pause) OXO (pause) the OXO people, Lord Vestey. So we used to do a lot of stuff for ‘im, from South America, corn beef and everything like that err the other bit was er Persian gold barley and dates, they used to come, everythin’ was basically seasonal (pause) so (pause) during the summer you could be sent in the dockland, timber, because that when the timber season was basically on, then when the seaways frozen over. When I was in the regular ship gangs at Bellamys then you get the dates err, round the Mediterranean, dates, figs and everythin’ like that and the Persian gold barley and then you might get the Canadian wheat come over and everythin’ like that. So it was basically most then most then, not ‘ow it is now, most of it was just seasonal and then get the fruit, Spanish tomatoes and everythin’, we used to do that, it was a lovely job that, tomatoes, money, money, money.

**So if you don’t mind me asking, your wage was something you were happy with?**

Len: Oh definitely yeah, on the fruit job you was definitely happy with it. Very, very lucrative job, er, it was a, that was a job that (pause) er (pause) only come in for a short season so about a month or so (pause) and you did earn money, really good money. (Long pause) so basically that’s what it was.

**I imagine the men working on the docks with you were men of all different ages, did you have a social group there, were you friendly with the other dockers?**

Len: Oh yeah! You get friends, I mean your gang, the gang that you work with, that, that becomes like a little family y’know, er the top man, he’s the ganger, then you have six down holders then you have four outside men and there’s different crane drivers, but that’s basically y’gang (pause) 5,4,9, say used to be, 6, 4 outsiders, yeah it was 10 men (pause) no, 11 men, beg your pardon. Can’t count. 11 men. 7, 4, 11 men, that was your regular ships gang, 12 men were normally your ship gang. But when I first went down there it was called a family firm (pause) mm (pause) ‘cause (pause) I had an uncle, 1,2,3,4,5,6, cousins and a brother (pause) and a nephew, and when I went down there the first (laughs) one bloke was ‘not another fuckin’ one!’ ‘scuse the language you’ll have to cut that out.

**So you had lots of family working with you?**

Len: Connections yeah, my father worked there, my father worked at Bellamys and that and er my grandfather worked there so yeah, you got that in the docks, you got little families. It was the same if you went to Chambers, there was blokes families there it was just ‘ow it was in the dock you got brothers in gangs, y’know and er (pause) yeah I enjoyed every minute of it. Hard work and sometimes there was no work at all so you got no money, well you did get money, you got what they call a retainer fee, what called a bumper money (pause) you had a brief and in the brief was 52 pages of like a little stamp book and when you went to a employer you had stamp on it and you had 1,2 (pause) 2, ‘cause you was only (pause) you could only be employed, the least you could be employed was for four hours, so if he had an ‘ours work you got sent to him, that way he had to pay you a minimum of four hours day work (pause) er (pause) and that’s how it was so you had to, and you had to go report to the pool, if you never got no work in the mornin’ you had to be there before 9 o’clock (pause) if you got no work then you got what they call a bumper (pause) that was the pool stamp, then you had to report back to the (pause) this one closed, one in Brunel Road closed, so you had to go to the one in Surrey docks at 1 o’clock (pause) no later, 1 o’clock there you were, if there was no work, you got another bumper but if you were allocated to another job, your number was called out, not your name, your number, because that’s all you was, a number, my number was 16-284, and when you was called out you went round the back of the pool and he said to you ‘right Albert, Deptford, Greenwich’ wherever your job was there, more often in the afternoon it was over at the Albert the CG or the west, y’know, so.

**So you had to play by the rules?**

Len: (Cuts in) Oh yes, no, if you didn’t play by the rules you got what they call suspended, I had to, wasn’t an angel, got two suspensions in my time at the dock. One was for a week and one was for three days (pause) so (pause) there you are.

**If you don’t mind me asking, what were they for?**

Len: (Laughs) being stupid, er we was workin’ down at Tilbury and er not all gangs, not all, when you got allocated, not all of ‘m were good boys, you got sent with I’m afraid, and it was just some of my tough luck, well it was my own stupid fault really, it was er new years day and (long pause) no was it, yeah it was new years day because we never used to get a day off and it was in the week and course er (pause) the governor, the foreman done a silly thing with these boys, er, right, ‘the trains, well if you catch the one just after five o’clock, that gets you back into London by six’ (pause) ‘oh right, but we’re not workin’ ‘till seven mate, we’re workin’ ‘till five,’ ‘oh right,’ ‘alf past four we was coverin’ up which we shouldn’t of done and we left at 5’o clock, I got done for not workin’ till finish and blowin’ out the followin’ day. Blowin’ out was an expression, I went out on the night time, had a few bevvies, got er, drunk more than I shoulda done and er woke up, oh god it’s 8 o’clock. Shoulda been in the, shoulda been at work at Tilbury. Went in the pool got a Bumper but then got seven days suspension.

**Oh well it was New Years!**

Len: Oh well that didn’t count, went to the, when we went to the ‘cause you could appeal and we appealed, well some of us appealed, I did anyway and er (pause) the union rep said ah well, didn’t wash, seven days suspension and then the other three days was for (pause) walkin’ off the ship. The ‘ole ship for three days suspension for that because we walked off er (pause) we had a dispute, it was a bad cargo, we went down the, well the gangers went down to see if they could negotiate a price as they used to do and er (pause) the ‘ead ganger Bill, call ‘is name Bill, wont say ‘is other name, Bill, he was the shop senior ganger and he said right wotn give us ‘nothin, up we walked off the ship and er first time I ever, our governor done us, got three days suspension for that. We went back got a price but we got three days suspension for it.

**And how did that make you feel?**

Len: Er didn’t make you feel anyway, you walked off, you shoulda negotiated and stayed workin’ and that was the union principle but whether you done it or not that was entirely up to you (pause) that was the rules laid down by the Union worked, carry on workin’ until negotiations but er (pause) where I worked at Bellamys we was called militant and er no way, nothin’ came over, no work and so that’s how I got three days suspension. And in thirty-four years that was madness. Some people didn’t get any, but that wasn’t too bad, well I didn’t think anyway (laughs)

**And you said how busy it was working in the docks, I’m wondering what kind of atmosphere was around when you were working, what kind of things did you hear, smell?**

Len: (Cuts in) Ohh well ohh, found it was a good atmosphere ‘cause don’t forget in most repetitious jobs, if you don’t make it a laugh or ‘ave a bit of a giggle you (pause) it would become very boring so yeah, sometimes it was ‘ard work, sometimes you didn’t have time to bleedin’ moan, it was y’know it was all, ‘specially when you was doin’ tomatoes n’all that or fruit y’know it was just, it was all slow it was err not particularly ‘eavy but you had to keep going, y’know it became very tedious, ‘specially on dates, that was very ‘ard work, that was dates, that was twenty pound case each pickin’ up. Load the board, board up usually it was goin’ shore as it was thirty odd on board, board lifts up, 2, 4, hooks up or eyes at the end of each board and er 2, you split into two pairs or pairs, so there was six pairs, on fruit usually there was eight pairs down the ‘ole so you had each pair and you had to, you had to fill, it was usually (pause) six, fives, thirty each side and er (pause) that was that and fruit was the same y’know.

Though you was twelve, sometimes when you was doin’ dates er (pause) only (pause) four down ‘oles dockman, you lost your two, four outsiders, two of them came down the ‘ole, then the other two had to wait. See what they picked up and er (pause) but on fruit it was usually on tomatoes, you kept yours, you kept your eleven men, then (pause) eight of you would go down the ‘ole, then two, the two men was left would go on the quay and they would do Passover so they, so you had your shore gang, they had two men, and you had two men, so as the board landed you would, they would, you would unlock it. This is all, sounds silly, but they would unlock it, right not to do ‘nothin, then four, then the two men that was for the shore gang or foremen, which ever, they would unload that board and you would stand the board up when the crane come down, unlock the set, then hooked on the board that was empty, and that would go back and so forth (pause) but that’s how it worked.

**So you had to work very closely with your team?**

Len: (Cuts in) Oh yeah, well my mate, was mate for years and er Lofty and er good mates, very good mate died of cancer poor sod. And er well (pause) he wasn’t, he wasn’t, he didn’t even reach sixty and that er I’d come outta the dock then and er he was, he was workin’, he came out the docks just before me, he was workin’ for the, for the ministry, I think somewhere y’know and that.

**Quite interesting how earlier you were saying how everything changed in the industry over the time you were working there, did you notice any changes in the area?**

Len: Oh cor blimey yeah, there was a vast, vast, ‘cause I mean don’t forget you get big seamen now, I mean you get a thing like the Surrey Commercial Docks, that close, you got cafe’s that was along Lower Road, you got transports, all of them was affected by just that one closure. Same as the Albert when they closed, I mean it was tragic y’know. It became a desolate area, y’know that’s how, that’s how (pause) ‘cause there was the dock there you had related industries and er closing it was er devastating to the East End, it really was, more so than over this side ‘cause over this side you didn’t have solely reliant on docks but you had a fair amount ‘cause you had Tooley Street, and that was all warehouse and that. Used to get sent up there quite a bit, er (pause) and as I said when that closed that was all derelict and that and course now it’s a thriving community, Hays Galleria and everything else. But on the whole yes, you did notice the difference.

And as I say (pause) as men were being caned then they started off as, first kick off, the severance pay was very poor in my opinion anyway, y’know, and then gradually they up the severance to get more to come out and there was, basically they was offering at first kick off a years wages but then y’know when you see it now, some of the elder men, liked the elder men took it, but then they were more less in their 60’s, 65, so it seemed a bit of a lump sum for them, erm, (pause) afraid a lot of them are dead now. There are a few still alive but then as I say, they upped the, they upped them and when Mrs Margaret Thatcher (pause) I came out just before that, but after, but after I just come out she refused to sign the National Dock Labour Board agreement so that gave a lot of the employers (pause) a chance to sack you. Which they did. And there was a big strike at Tilbury then but there was no men there (laughs) the convoys sacked ‘m all, waved them bye bye. That was owned by er, oof (pause) they used to do all paper (pause) I think it was basically the Mirror group or something like that who owned it, and anyway there were all sacked but then the National Dock Labour Board did with them a good severance I will say that, ‘cause one of my mates, he came out when that happened and he said to me they didn’t do too bad out of it.

But the PLA, they said they was at the Docks at Tilbury and they was all outside the gate and PLA foremen came out and they picked out names and he said they was all names of previous perms, because the PLA used to employ a lot of permanent labourer and he said they more or less called out the regular names and the rest of us, hello, goodbye, and y’know as I say, the National Dock Labour Board did win them a good severance pay (pause) and that was that more or less, basically the end, farewell. Back to how it was in the beginning, casual labour, no guarantees, nothin’. But I believe now under the work something act they now have to employ them for a day, I believe something like that. I’m not particularly worried at the moment (laughs)

But er, also for the fact now that there (pause) I see Felixstowe and what’s the other new big port, that way, you don’t see anybody, cranes, that must be a crane driver, he comes over the ship, picks up the containers, lowers it over either a straddler or the trucks that’s come down. You don’t even see a man standing there and he just drives on. Everything is done by the crane driver. So that’s no men basically y’know.

**Did you miss it when you left the docks?**

Len: Not (long pause) not really. I will say not really. I, I enjoyed workin’ at Tilbury don’t get me wrong I liked it, that was the last place but (pause) no (pause) I came out and as I told you earlier that was, I vowed I’d come out at 55, I wouldn’t work any longer in the dock and I did come out, I be honest with you, I got severance money and er (pause) but (pause) I missed what I had at the beginning, casual, very good friends, mates, very good laughs, silly things sometimes y’know, but I enjoyed that part of it I could say. But when they made us regular, regular I didn’t enjoy that one bit because it was so repetitious y’know er and Tilbury I enjoyed, It was an experience, needed eyes up the back of your arse, because It was all y’know mechanisation and speed. Speed was the essence (pause) no (pause) no getting to know anybody. I went down there with some mates and that’s all I knew. I got to know some of of the, the, other blokes down there but er (pause) they was y’know you got to know them when you was either on delivery and that was all different blokes and you got to know. I got to know ‘couple of nice fellas down there y’know and er because by then I was one of the oldies y’know (laughs)

**The veteran**

Len: Yeah and that y’know. It was, er, there was a lot of elder blokes down there but then you had the younger element, who was the last briefs comin’ in and they were issued round about 60’s, I think. Last lots of briefs, and I say they opened the port briefs, to give you your briefs and er (pause) that was a limited number I mean ‘cause we worked with one of ‘m. Young Allen, we used to call him young Allen, he more or less got the last lot of briefs that was issued. But er someone did tell me that (pause) PLA ‘ave taken on some more perms as they call ‘m. Because of ‘m they musta, I mean some of the perms musta been getting old like that. I know there’s a chap that lives on our estate. He used to be a perm on the Surrey, now he’s retired, he’s a bit younger than me, but he’s retired and he, he kept on down the Tilbury, he was called y’know, and err, he must be about 70 odd now, but he musta got in the last intake, lucky enough to get a perm job.

**Absolutely. And you were saying with this change in the area, cafes shut down. Other associated businesses, were there any other kinds of…**

Len: There was, I mean there was, what can you say, I mean (long pause) different things. You got the allocations of different things from the docks n’that and the Wharfs, the warehouses started closin’, then you got some of the factories started closin’. I mean Tooley Street, I mean that was a vast, I mean that stretched from more or less Shad Thames right the way up and beyond, round about up, I think it was just the other side of London Bridge. So that was a fair stretch of all the Wharfs. What they calls the A Wharfs group (pause) then you had all the coal stores, that was from more or less Blackfriars Bridge, Dutches, Nelsons, Redborn, no Redborn was the other side, it was in the city, ‘cause there was a cold store under Canning Street Station.

**Wow**

Len: (Cuts in) Yeah (laughs) lots of people surprised. But it was called Canning Street coal sore and it was actually under the station and that and er (pause) yes, you got all of them close but then that didn’t have such a disastrous effect because it was some of it, some of it was in the city, Redborn, Canning Street and other warehouses, that was it, I forget now, I got sent there a couple of times, I got sent to Canning Street. I got sent to Redborn, then you got Dutches, Nelsons, and what they call seven sectory, that was the cold sector, that was what they called stores, cold stores. And I didn’t like that very much, I hated working on that. And er used to send me a cold feelin’ inside (laughs) never used to like that. Timber, didn’t like that very much but I didn’t mind it but the meat, cold store, didn’t go down well with me at all. Purely for the fact it was cold inside, but you, you worked. They give you a big coat n’that, then er after a while you took your coat off. If you were workin’ you didn’t mind it. But no it was just, it used to give me a cold feeling. And the first, that was as I say my first day in the docks, I was sent down to (inaudible) cold store which was in Deptford and I passed out because I didn’t ‘ave an hat.

**Oh, they didn’t give you a hat?**

Len: Oh no, they lent me an ‘at afterwards, but I’m workin’ there, also they call me and pull me out and a bloke says ‘I told you you wanted an hat’ so after that I bought a hat.

**So it was up to you to provide?**

Len: Oh yeah, they provided you with a coat, sometimes they were so shitty and dirty you didn’t wear it y’know and most of the blokes that worked there used to have their own. ‘coz they sometimes employed regular men. Well most of the wharfs employed some regular men. I wouldn’t say they didn’t coz they did. I mean there one (pause) little wharf that was in, in er (pause) Shad Thames and he employed three regular men (pause) now this was *the* downfall in my opinion of decasualisation (pause) because every now and then he’d ‘ave (pause) what was it, three crane drivers and two men, they used to do delivery but sometimes he’d ‘ave a barge or ‘alf a barge, Polish jams and everythin’, he’d have eight men allocated to him, he’d sent for the pool and they’d go there and it was er a negotiation job. What we used to call a negotiating job, ‘’ow much you got there governor?’ so and so like that, ‘what you gonna pay? Ohh, er,’ so and so ‘yeah that’d be reasonable’ ok then, go and ‘ave a cuppa tea, go away and think about it I (laughs) ‘yeah ok’ boom. We do it. If he only ‘ad ‘alf a barge we’d be finished before dinner so you’d always say to him, ‘well (pause) give us so and so and so and double ramp, that was two bompers in the mornin’ and in the afternoon. So that was that. *But* (pause) when decasualisation come in (pause) he was allocated eight men permanently, *no* way they could afford it so that was there where a lot of small employers pulled out. Which was understandable ‘cause you (pause) pardon me (pause) you couldn’t do it or they couldn’t. You were being fair and you was being reasonable but then course that was when the freemen were sacked. (pause) so that put more men on the pool and in the end they started offerin’ us severance money, y’know, but it was due to the Devlin report and Lord Devlin came in because of the strike and it was just before everything (pause) if you didn’t know that something was gonna happen you was a bloody fool (pause) but you sensed something ‘cause you heard it on the news, containers, the Americans started that, containerisation, *and* (pause) you sensed that, Lord Devlin came in ‘cause some facilities was absolutely diabolical. They really were and that was in the enclosed docks aswell as everywhere else, actually you (pause) did nothin’, your clothes, you supplied everythin’, your hook, everythin’, and we wasn’t the only industry that, I mean a lot of the engineers and everything had to supply all their own tools, but (pause) er, the conditions was absolutely appalling.

You’d go to them, there was no facilities for washing ‘ands (laughs) y’know, you couldn’t, you was a docker, you was the lowest of the low. We couldn’t get any lower and as I say, you was, I was a number (pause) I was a number, 16-284. And I was dealt with in the pool as a number. When you dealt with an employer, number. Y’know it wasn’t, you was known by your own name when you was in your gang. As I say that became like a little family, and Devlin he said it, he said working conditions are *appallin*g, and he made it, they supplied facilities, they, when we were made regular they gave us clothes, overalls n’that, and er (pause) but then as I say, if you didn’t know that something was goin’ to happen, I mean where I was working at the rice mills, we used to do (inaudible) and sea bits. Now if that cut back you wouldn’t even need a docker or a container, I mean it was all massive bulk because we used to do the rice, but they used to come off, actually when I was working at Tilbury, I see it there, the boat pulled into the Thames, lowered, lowered, lowered, ‘is front and they just used to float these barges there (pause) the lightmen was workin’ but other than that I mean, go to, up river and the same we used to do all the bulk rice, come in from America, and as I say America, that was done in the Vietnam war. Quick way of supplyin (inaudible) so that everythin’ like that you knew, as I say if you didn’t know that something was ‘appenin you either had your head up your bum (laughs) y’know, that was that, y’know there was no excuse about it. And that, that’s all.

**Thank you very much that was brilliant.**