**Mick’s Story.**

**14th November. Mick’s living room. Interviewer: Ian, also speaking: Mary**

**Summary:** In this interview Mick speaks of working for Chiswick Work on HGV vehicles, remembering a TA Army vehicle he was out in charge if fixing and test-driving 35 miles. Consequently Mick drove the vehicle to his estate where the local children enjoyed a ride on the back. Mick also talks of his time as a shop steward at Southwark Council and how he “kicked arse”.

**I am with Mick who used to work for Southwark Council. Can you spell your surname for me?**

**Mick:** R-E-A-R-D-O-N. It’s the English way of spelling Reardon.

**Right**

**Mick:** I was saying there are four different ways of spelling Reardon.

**So R-E-A-R-D-O-N.**

**Mick:** Yeah.

**Okay. Oh is that the same as the snooker player?**

**Mick:** Yes.

**When and where were you born?**

**Mick:** Um. Mile End Hospital. Possibly within the sound of Bar Bells…er…within the sound of Bell Bow, Bell bum, oh fuck, I’ll get it right in a minute! [Laughs]Within the sound of Bow Bells.

**And when?**

**Mick:** So I am a genuine Cockney, although they tell us now that, because there are a lot of big buildings now that Bow Bells don’t go quite so far out so I can’t. I don’t know where the hospital is cos I’ve never been there apart from when I was born!

**And when was that?**

**Mick:** Er, 1943.

**1943. If you, er, we’re going to talk about your working life, if you were to describe what you did for work what would you say?**

**Mick:** Well, I could, if you like, go roughly through what I did, you know. I started off in Siemens’ Hospital, no, er, Siemens, near Greenwich, er no it’s near Woolwich, innit? And that’s gone now. But I started off there as a printer and I just did not like the job. It was good because you— the good thing about it was you learned to read words backwards! [Laughs] That’s the only decent thing, I wasn’t really that interested in it and I used to play about, you know. Like you do when you’re a young kid and I was only sixteen anyway. I left school at sixteen and then, um, I was always— I like to do jobs in engineering and that kind of stuff, you know—that kind of stuff where you use your hands. So I sort of hunted around and I got— I think my first job was erm— let’s see where it was? —I started in a hospital as a what in them days they called, a semi-skilled engineer.

**Right.**

**Mick:** Cos you was, like, learning the trade.

**Is that, this is after the printing job?**

**Mick:** Yeah after the printing job I left the printing…

**Yeah.**

**Mick:** Cos I wasn’t really interested in it.

**Um, very quickly, what did you— so, you were at the printing only for a very short time, was that like an apprenticeship or something like that?**

**Mick:** Yeah, I think it was. I think they called it, a trainee printer, or something in them days. It was the old-fashioned type setting.

**Yeah.**

**Mick:** You know, that’s how old I am! All the old, where you put them on the little thing, you learn to read back-to-front cos the type’s obviously back-to-front, so when it prints it comes out the right way. And um, you fill em, put the thing on like a round kind of thing and they slip in— the print slips in. It’s lead obviously. Slides inside the… it’s like a round thing, you know.

**Oh right.**

**Mick:** It goes round and round…

**Oh, roll?**

**Mick:** Yeah, like a roll, or something, and it have got little slots in it that you stick the type in there. Erma and also I was quite good at…

**What were they printing? Sorry, just…**

**Mick:** Oh, just ordinary forms and that kind of thing. Nothing fancy, er, you know, for their work. Cos there was a— it was a big engineering company.

**Yeah. So is Siemens, is that a German firm?**

**Mick:** It is, well, I don’t know whether it was then because I didn’t know very much in them days but apparently it is now a German firm. I thought it was an English firm. [Laughs] I didn’t know what it was really. But I was there— I wasn’t there all that long and I used to play about a bit and I sort of got told off by the foreman, you know, “If you don’t stop playing about you going to end up getting the sack!”

**Right!**

**Mick:** And I thought, “fuck!” I’m not really that interested… I was there a while. I suppose about a year.

**Yeah.**

**Mick:** So, I got fairly good at reading backwards.

**Yeah.**

**Mick:** [Laughs]

**But you didn’t like it much?**

**Mick:** I didn’t like it because [coughs] I like to do things where you’re building things, repairing things—that stuff like that.

**Practical.**

**Mick:** Practical yeah. I was a very practical person.

**Yeah. And then you moved on and you started working…**

**Mick:** I moved on and then, in the old the days, the road— it wasn’t actually that far from here—the road from Woolwich down to Greenwich was absolutely filled with engineering companies. And I sort of moved from place to place, you know, at different times. Stones, you know, I used to work in. I can’t remember half of them. I wasn’t there half of the— lot of the time cos of— there was something—

**Mary:** A-E-I

**Mick:** What?

**Mary:** A-E-I

**Mick:** Well, that is the— well its where I done the printing.

**Oh right. A-E-I Siemens, that’s right, it’s a German name…**

**Mick:** Siemens— Siemens AEI it’s called, yes. It started off as Siemens and then changed it to AEI.

**Yeah. They were international even then. I didn’t realise that. So you moved to start…**

**Mick:** So it— in them days you could move anywhere, you know.

**And in the hospital— you said you started working there?**

**Mick:** I found—I finally found a job that I was interested in and it was like engineering. I was like a trainee engineer. And er, we was like the back room boys where, you know. In hospital you have, erm, gas and steam and all sorts of stuff like that, you know.

**Gas and steam, what kinds of things are they, services for the hospital, kind of thing?**

**Mick:** Yeah that’s right.

**So what…?**

**Mick:** Calor heater, er, boiler houses, all that sort of stuff.

**So, kind of heating and…?**

**Mick:** Heating, yeah, pipe-work everywhere. We, er, they had Ca, what they called, Calorie. What do they call them now? It’s like a great, big thing where they put the— where they boil up the water.

**Oh right like bercos, like a giant one— big, big.**

**Mick:** Big, massive thing, yeah, we worked on all sorts of general maintenance really.

**Right for the whole…**

**Mick:** For the whole of the hospital.

**So what would that involve, kind of if you, just thinking about what you would be doing over a day, say, or a shift? Did it, was it always…?**

**Mick:** Hot pipe, pipe cutting and threading and, er, one of the good things I liked about it— you got into welding and all that. I was taught to weld by a bloke that welded. So gas welding, which I find— I used to like that.

**Right.**

**Mick:** All kinds of things really, you name it, we done it more or less. Cos it was like a it was, to keep the place going, you know. We’re engineers…

**So it sounds quite varied.**

**Mick:** Mmm, it was always very varied. That’s what I liked about it. I mean I was there quite a few years and then I— I think after—I sort of, er— when it was— Oh yeah that’s right I got a job at Siemens hospital. Cos I’d done, like, I’d done, er, my time.

**So you kind of went back?**

**Mick:** Cos I’d done my time at the…what’s the name of it? It’s not there now City hospital. It’s gone now.

**Yeah. And that was the standard, and that was an ordinary hospital, not a kind of, not a…NHS, was it NHS?**

**Mick:** Yeah it was NHS. But um, the hospital’s not there now. But—

**Right, and it’s Woolwich?**

**Mick:** No, it’s not Woolwich. It’s sort of Greenwich…

**Greenwich.**

**Mick:** Hmm, it’s sort of like Charlton. I’m not sure where the border is really. It’s sort of somewhere near there.

**Yeah, the kind of Charlton…**

**Mick:** Yeah, Charlton, Somewhere…

**Not on the hill?**

**Mick:** Yeah that— the nurses’ home used to be up on the hill.

**Yeah there still is a hosp. there’s still a military hospital.**

**Mick:** Oh no, that’s further up. This is, you know, the lower road in Greenwich. Well, it’s, well, a blooming, great, big hill, goes up. Flipping massive, great hill and right off the top they had the boiler house for the nurses’ home. We had a nurses’ home as well. And had— that had its own oil-fired burners, you know. And also, we obviously we had a big boiler house down where the hospital was. So you got all the steam heating and everything else like that, you know, down in the hospital. At St. Alfeges! That’s it. St. Alfeges.

**Right.**

**Mick:** [Laughs] I can’t— I’m losing— cos I’m getting so flippin old I’m losing me memory! But that’s where it was, St. Alfeges. And on them grounds they built that new Greenwich hospital, if you remember. Even that’s gone now. Apparently something to do with asbestos and all that rubbish. It’s actually still boarded up at the moment. But that was a new hospital. But for now, St. Alfeges, cos I stayed there as a boy right up when I was about— I dunno about 21 and moved on to, um, Siemens hospital.

**And this the same kind of— lots of preparing, sorting things?**

**Mick:** Yeah, the same kind of work, erm, maintenance, but—

**Of heating…?**

**Mick:** I’ll tell you the difference— the difference with the two hospitals. St Alfeges… I’m beginning— it’s sort of coming back to me… if you keep on asking the right questions... they had a massive laundry and what they—I’d done a couple years, sort of general maintenance and they needed somebody, a bloke retired, and they needed someone to take over the laundry.

**Yeah.**

**Mick:** Not sort of ‘take over’ it, but take over the *maintenance* of the laundry and there was great, big flipping great roller things. There were enormous and they was mostly— they was run by steam and water and that kind of thing, but mostly steam. So you great big clarifiers and that sort of thing. Cala, cl, clarifiers. Clarifiers.

**What’s a clarifier?**

**Mick:** It’s really— all it is a giant kettle.

**Oh right.**

**Mick:** [Laughs] Basically.

**Or right…**

**Mick:** Heating…

**Its sounds kind of like clarified butter, or kind of heating…**

**Mick:** Yeah. Safety valves on it, so that, if, you know…

**Mick:** **Pressure…?**

**Mick:** Pressure goes up too high it sort of blows off. You know that kind of thing so it don’t blow up. And then the pipe work used to go various places and the heating would run from it.

**So the whole system, for the whole place was run from the same set of things so the laundry fed into the heating, fed into.... right…?**

**Mick:** Yeah.

**Did you kind of, did it link into things like kitchens and all that kind of stuff as well?**

**Mick:** Yeah, oh yeah. Cos in the evening in the kitchens they had, er, um, these flipping things where they clean the stuff, similar to what you get now, er, the old, er what you put your, er, crockery and that stuff in but they had them there run by steam.

**Right. So did this at Siemens as well, you went back and was that, how did that go?**

**Mick:** Now, I think I’ve lost you now, I think, what did…

**You said you went from the one at Greenwich and you moved back to Siemens?**

**Mick:** Now where was St. Alfeges, that was really was, erm, Charlton, wasn’t it, sort of? Sort of Charlton, wasn’t it, or was it Greenwich?

**Mary:** I think it—wasn’t it on the same—wasn’t it on the same—?

**Mick:** It was on that great bloomin hill!

**Mary:** Wasn’t it the same, er, didn’t it go to the Greenwich and district?

**Mick:** Yes.

**Mary:** Yeah, so that was sort of between Greenwich and Charlton.

**Mick:** Yeah, so, yeah, it was so it was between Greenwich and Charlton the first one I worked at.

**Right.**

**Mick:** That’s erm that was like St. Alfeges. When I was there. And then it was been, what like Mary’s just said it becomes Greenwich and District hospital. And I think it’s still got the nursing home at the top there.

**Mary:** They probably have.

**Yeah I’m sure I’ve driven past it.**

**Mick:** Yes. Yes.

**But you-?**

**Mick:** And then I—after that, I went from there to Siemens hospital. That Siemens hospital. On that one-way system? That’s where I went.

**So they had their own hospital?**

**Mick:** Well yes.

**Mary:** It’s a naval hospital.

**Mick:** Yeah, it was a naval hospital but they had—they had lots of locals...

**Ah! Seaman’s as in—Yes. Not *A E Siemens*…?**

**Mick:** Ah, sorry no. Seaman’s.

**Yeah, I’ve got your notes it’s...**

**Mick:** Seaman’s.

**As in naval.**

**Mick:** Yeah. You’ll cross a lot of this out wont you?

**No, no, no! It’s fascinating. I mean…**

**Mick:** [Laughs]

**Um, so was that different? What was that like working in a naval hospital?**

**Mick:** The difference, wasn’t a great deal of difference, but what you never had, you never had the laundry but what you had instead was the, erm, the vans, they used to go to St Alfreges and pick up the clean laundry and distribute to a few local hospitals around there. Including their own hospital which was Seaman’s. There was also a normal hospital which was mostly for Seamen but when I went there, there was lots of local people because there wasn’t so many seamen around to use it anyway. So, which was a thing I was very interested in for a long time as a, you know as a youth, I used to play about with cars and all that rubbish you know, and when I went there, the bloke, he sort of, I, erm, when he had a lot of work I used to go in and help him doing sort of work on the vehicles. I was always; I was always interested in that.

**So you started really kind of mechanical engineering on vehicles at that time?**

**Mick:** Yeah, yeah. Well, not always, no. When I could ‘cos I loved working on cars and vans and stuff like that, ‘cos that’s, really enjoyed it, you know. But the other work was good as well it was very interesting, especially the welding and that sort of stuff. I don’t know whether I should say that, [Laughs]but when I was there…you might have to…the thing, cross it and rub it out! [Laughs] Yeah it was good it was really good. But I needed a, I needed a trailer one day and I couldn’t afford to buy one so what I did, I drove my car in, it had a tow-bar on the back, drove me car in, cos you could park in there and some of the, I used some of the metal to make one of these, a big frame. Have you ever seen a trailer?

**Yes. Yeah.**

**Mick:** The base of them, are like square? An they got a bit going up like that, and that’s where your balls in, on, fits on the ball…

**On the back?**

**Mick:** Yeah. [Laughs] I built a trailer in there. So I drove in with nothing and drove out with a trailer on the back. [Laughs] Over a— like— took a week or two, you know! But… [Laughs] That’s brilliant. It was too expensive I couldn’t afford to buy one ‘cos the money wasn’t that great. And her, that was great, yeah, really good there.

I’d always had an interest in buses as well. When er, I really fancied busses, so I did really did think I would love to work on busses. Am I making this thing crackle?

**No, you’ll be fine the levels and things are fine on there.**

**Mick:** Um, I was there quite a long time. I used to even be on call there, as Seaman’s hospital, ‘cos I’d done my time, I’d done my training…

**So how, a long time, so kind of more than five years…**

**Mick:** Yeah. Oh yeah, I was in the hospital service, that, I think, was twenty something, I could give you the actual dates if I had ‘em, I haven’t got them with me though I have got them written down somewhere.

**But you were part of; you were employed by the NHS?**

**Mick:** For, er, ‘till I was like a youth, something like twenty two or twenty three…

**Right.**

**Mick:** And chance came up to get, well I looked for jobs for er, with the London transport and I really would, ‘cos I loved busses as well and I fancied playing about with busses as well so I then applied to London transport and I went to London transport and there, I, we, there, I done a driving test ‘cos you always had to do a driving test in the London transport.

**What ever you were doing?**

**Mick:** For what ever you were doing, and, er from there, I done the driving on the busses for a while and then I went over to the factory there in erm…

**So you started as a driver? You went as a driver.**

**Mick:** Well I started off— I thought I fancied driving busses, you know?

**Yeah. Yeah. Was that the kind of— cos you were interested in busses I’d just assumed you meant—**

**Mick:** Busses. Well, I was aiming for a mechanics job in the busses. But erm…

**But you started as a driver.**

**Mick:** Yeah, I started, yeah.

**How did you find that?**

**Mick:** Well, it was just an advert in the papers, I think. I can’t remember.

**The actually thing of doing it, did you enjoy? Cos I mean I can’t imagine…**

**Mick:** Oh, it was nice. It was great, when you do the driving you go all over the flippin’ country you know. And er, places I’ve never been to and then you go to airports and all, cos in my time they used to go up some airport or other I can’t even remember where it is now. But you used to do reversing and all that sort of stuff on the airfields…

**Oh right…**

**Mick:** Unused airfield, you know, they got the use of it, bloomin’ great big things and you got to reverse and all that rubbish, in the bus.

**Oh I see sort of double D-clutching and all that kind of stuff?**

**Mick:** No!

**Oh?**

**Mick:** [Laughs] I’ll tell you about that in the minute! So, I started off as the driver. Think, oh well that’s right, did I, I failed me test on the actual driving I think?

**Mary:** Right.

**Mick:** Right the... and they offered me a job in, er...

**Mary:** Miscellaneous vehicles.

**Mick:** Miscellaneous, no they didn’t offer me a job in miscellaneous vehicles initially.

**Mary:** Oh no, you were doing bus engines.

**Mick:** Oh, in the factory didn’t I? Yeah. I failed me driving test. On the bus. ‘Cos I went there for a driver, but I was hoping to move into, what they called the bus mechanics. Cos I loved busses. Anything to do with busses. But I failed me driving test, I think? I’m sure that’s how I got into that, erm, what’s it called now? I can’t flipping remember?

**Mary:** I don’t know.

**Mick:** Chiswick works!

**Mary:** Chiswick works.

**Mick:** God, see even she’s forgetting now!

**So that’s over in West London?**

**Mick:** Yeah. So I ended up at Chiswick works. And because I was, I’d done a lot of work on you know I was an engineer and they sort of took me on as an engineer in the factory, working on engines, on bus engines. And a job came up in what they called the miscellaneous vehicles, which was the lorries and everything else including cranes, everything related to Chiswick works and all the garages around. You know...

**Was that like the kind of central engineering works for the whole of London transport?**

**Mick:** Yeah, yeah.

**Wow.**

**Mick:** There was actually two. One of was the body side, ah I even remember the name. Aldenham works was for the bus bodies and we was all the other things like the gearbox engine, back axle, batteries, everything you can think of on a bus apart from the bodies. The bodies used to be done over in Aldenham. And erm, but when this job came, this vacancy came in the miscellaneous vehicles and I though mmm I like the sound of that, ‘cos it was great big lorries! [Laughs] And I loved working on busses and lorries so I managed to work me way into that and I was in miscellaneous vehicles for a long time wasn’t I? Don’t know how long though.

**What were you doing mainly with the vehicles?**

**Mick:** Right.

**Mary:** Don’t forget you did London transport twice. You had a period there then you left to do something else...

**Mick:** Yeah but we’ll get to that. This is the first period. Erm, miscellaneous vehicles was virtually, what it says. Was sort of that’s right everything that had an internal combustion engine. SO that’s miscellaneous vehicles. So and if you had an electric crane, that was electrical, but if it had a combustion engine, whether it was a crane, a road-sweeper, a lorry anything, even busses. We used to do them as well. We used to strip ‘em down right to nothing. Right down to the last nut and bolt.

**Just take them apart.**

**Mick:** Take them apart. Where needed, not unnecessarily. You know. If the engine was knackered we’d build the engine up. We had a lot of blokes who liked building engines all the time and they was on it all the time, but we all had a go at the engines and everything else. And erm, gradually you sort of worked you way through. I used to do servicing on the breaks.

**So you worked your way through, like the body of the bus all the different parts?**

**Mick:** Yeah. Not only the bus, don’t forget we’re talking about the HGV vehicles as well that deliver the bus parts to the busses. To the bus garages rather.

**And you said, the key thing was that it had an internal combustion engine. Did that mean you only worked on that bit or did you worked on other parts?**

**Mick:** No. We worked on anything except body. Well, we had body men in the, er, shop. And we also had electrical people within the shop, you know, that done the electrical wiring. Although I used to do that as well with them sometimes ‘cos if the bloke sort of went I had to be interested in electrical work as well and I’d done a couple of night schools on it as well. So when he weren’t there used to do a bit of electrical cos no one else seemed to know anything seem to know much about it. ‘Cos they was all mechanics, you know engineers.

**Right.**

**Mick:** But yeah, it was really interesting. A brilliant job that was. Used to do flipping…done that…remember that big army vehicle?

**Mary:** Oh gosh yeah.

**Mick:** The wheel was as tall as that!

**God! That’s as tall as you. Above you head.**

**Mick:** And I got the job! Yeah.

**That’s what, six foot two?**

**Mick:** Yes. Well, I’m about five foot eight?

**Mary:** About five eight at the time.

**Mick:** Five eight.

**Five eight, right wow.**

**Mick:** Well I got that job, it was an army vehicle and they sort of done work for all sorts of people as well as for London Transport. I suppose partly ‘cos we had a good reputation didn’t we? There was none of this cut corners, the job was done properly. And they had proper people that would check everything over and all this kind of thing. You know it was proper, you know, none of this cowboy rubbish.

**And was it, I just want to, um, this is probably this is too specific, was it— London transport— was it a state— was it a nationalised—was it a government-owned firm or was it a private?**

**Mick:** No, it was owned by the GLC.

**Right. Yeah. But they used to contract and do work for all sorts of other people.**

**Mick:** Yeah. Partly, I mean, I suppose partly because there wasn’t many people who would take on that kind of job anyway. I mean ‘cos it was an army lorry, you know. You would expect the army to do it ‘cos they got their own engineers. Oh, no, I know it was the army but what’s them other people? TA?

**[And Mary] The Territorial Army.**

**Mick:** The TA, that’s it. It was a TA Army lorry. So that might be why we got it. Probably. I never really thought about it actually. Cos the army you’d think they would do their own lorries wouldn’t you?

**I don’t know. I think it’s…**

**Mick:** They have engineers and everything else, don’t they? But I dunno. But anyway‘d done this lorry and its erm, when you put the engine back together and everything else, it’s a massive thing. You used to have to take it for at least, this was part of, you know what they called for, you had to take it for at least a 30 mile drive! To make sure it’s alright so I thought that’s excellent! [Laughs]

And so I came from Chiswick works, and I came down here, didn’t I?

**Mary:** You did!

**Mick:** And [Laughs] little kids around the estate got a ride on the back of the lorry! [Laughs] That was good, wasn’t it? A massive flippin’ great thing, you know! It was enormous.

**Driven all the way back from Chiswick works!**

**Mick:** Yeah. So, done the— the…the thirty miles you know! Cos it was, not sure about 20 something, maybe, not sure whether it was 20 miles but it was definitely, you know, you had to take it maybe 30 miles or something. Cos Chiswick works I suppose, is probably about 20 miles from here innit? I would say?

**Mary:** Yeah.

**Yeah.**

**Mick:** I would say.

**And that was quite a regular occurrence that you’d take a vehicle out?**

**Mick:** Erm, not, not where you sort of used to wander around with it no. It’s just a one-off. But you’d do, obviously, in them days you test your brakes, you know, somebody would take them out on the road but of course you got to bear in mind that when I first went there I didn’t have an HGV. But this sort of came in afterwards, doing that lorry. I’d been there for quite a long time but I didn’t have an HGV license at the time. But when this lorry came in I was sort of well established, you know and being an HGV…

**Sounds like you were learning stuff all the time?**

**Mick:** Yeah. I was! It flippin’ brilliant! Great, great. Sort of, that’s what I wanted to learn and learn and whatever. I’d try anything I would! [Laughs]

**And was that something that kind of spurred you on to go on and do different things? ‘Cos it sounds as though you had quite an appetite for….**

**Mick:** Oh yeah, I didn’t care what I took on really. In them days.

**So you worked there for quite a long time. What happened next?**

**Mick:** Well, like Mary said, I did have a split service at Chiswick. What happened, first, I left. Trouble is I can’t give you the dates at the moment, I could get ‘em if you really want the dates I could look ‘em up. I should have dug out the paperwork actually; I could have looked them up. But I can give you the dates if you need them, cos I’ve got them all written down you know. I’ve put it down as like, you know them things when you apply for jobs.

**Mary:** CV

**Mick:** That’s the thing.

**Yeah I mean that stuff’s…**

**Mick:** I wrote out a CV but it was like as about as thick as that you know!

**You’re remembering loads of stuff that won’t be written down so its, kind of, that’s interesting.**

**Mick:** Anyway, I had a split service, erm, I was going to Australia with me dad. And he was torque-heeled, and he had— what was it?

**Mary:** Arthritis.

**Mick:** Arthritis. Yeah, no, it’s the old legs, weren’t it?

**Mary:** Hips.

**Mick:** Hips. That’s it. Think it was the hips wasn’t it? Or was it the knee? No it was the hips wasn’t it. He had hip trouble. And he was going to go, cos he was, he was sort of single ‘cos me mum died years ago. Cos he was, we had, we got family over in Australia, an’ I was going over there with him. But he was torque-heeled. So what I had to do, I had to get another job, ‘cos I was thinking, well, he’ll be over it, and then we’ll go you know, and erm— I took another job just down here on the corner actually, where there’s a block of flats now, but there was a garage there and I used to do work…

**Mary:** Deptford motors.

**Mick:** Who?

**Mary:** Deptford motors.

**Mick:** Is that what it’s called and they used to do sort of MOT and all sorts of stuff like that and we used to also service, N… what was that flippin, TIN…?

**Mary:** Enthoven.

**Mick:** Entoven. That was one of them. That was the lead works.

**Mary:** Mollins

**Mick:** Mollins, yeah that’s it. Mollins, we used to service their lorries as well. You know, all sorts of cars. And er, I stayed there; I was there about just over a year, wasn’t it?

**Mary:** Two years.

**Mick:** Two years. And, er…

**How had that compared to the?**

**Mick:** I found out that me dad wouldn’t go, wasn’t going now after all, and so I thought, well that’s flipping great! You know, I jacked a good job in and I was stuck you know and there was some talk that the actual garage was going as well. An I thought flippin’ ell. So anyway I thought well, what is it, I thought I’d try and get back to the transport where I was and they took me back actually.

**Mary:** It was Alfie. Alfie, your friend at the transport.

**Mick:** Yeah.

**What made it— Becos you described it as a good job. What would you say it was that made it good?**

**Mick:** I don’t know really when you say that. It’s a good question. [Pause] Erm, I’m not sure. The work for a start.

**Mary:** I think the colleagues you had.

**Mick:** I had a lot of colleagues; I was an active trade unionist there as well, which, sort of, I enjoyed doing as well. We had, well when I first went into our workshop we had, er, rather a lot of racialists there. And I don’t like racialists. And I was only a young man of course when I first went there. And no one would stand up to ‘em, and I got the arse me and I thought why don’t I just tell the bloke to shut his trap you know? Flippin’ goin’ on about racialist all the time and I used to argue with them like buggery! And eventually they sort of got isolated and I got elected to the shop steward then a little while after.

**That started then at London transport then when you were working in the Chiswick works?**

**Mick:** Yeah.

**And within the workshop, was that an issue, quite a big issue in the workshop when you first got there?**

**Mick:** I found it an issue. Erm, I dunnp I think in the workshop. Cos there was a lot, there was a lot of old blokes and I was only young so you got to bear in mind, but there was a lot of old blokes and none of them were challenged. There was this big-mouthed bloke; no-one would challenge him you know. He just spoke about racialists all the time an’ it pissed me off. I used to have rows like nobody’s business with him. And then, funnily enough we had a, I had a, cos I’m not sure why historically, London Transport, not in my time, before my time, you could get a job there if you had family there, but it all changed. But in my time there was a lot of Maltese people that used to go there for a job and I mated up with a Maltese bloke and he was another, he didn’t like racism either, so we had, that was two against the racist. And then Alfie— [Laughs] so we mated up with Alfie— so that’s three against the racist. So in the end we flippin’ pushed him in the corner and never used to talk about racism when we was around ‘cos we used to slag him off.

**Were there lots of people?**

**Mick:** Others were sort of they just, put up with it, you know and never argued never quarrelled with him and I thought well flippin’ tell him, tell him to shut his face, you know. Don’t want to hear about it. And, but they’d never challenge him, you know. But we did.

**How?**

**Mick:** We’s all young.

**So that, you were saying that he would say things. Did you challenge him openly?**

**Mick:** Yeah. I didn’t give a damn about it, didn’t frighten me. [Laughs] Would be able to catch me even if he tried to thump me anyway! [Laughs] It’s too quick. I’ve done Judo and all that stuff anyway. SO he wouldn’t have done it anyway.

**Yeah.**

**Mick:** He wouldn’t have done nothing to me.

**So you got people from Malta, you got people from, so, did you have a lot of people from different backgrounds then coming in to the workplace?**

**Mick:** Yeah there was quite a few. Actually we was one of the first places to have a lady, erm, lady electrician. That’s right.

**When was this?**

**Mick:** Oh, I dunno what year. I could look it up.

**The sixties?**

**Mary:** I’m thinking— I’m thinking, let me think dates. Erm…

**Mick:** She used to be good with dates, but since she had this…

**Mary:** You went there, when Michael was two when you went back. We married in seventy eight, you were at Deptford Motors when we got married, erm, so you would have been there probably from the very early seventies. I don’t know were you there when you got divorced? Was you going backwards and forwards on the staff bus.

**Mick:** Yeah, yeah. I was.

**Mary:** So that would have been, yeah that would have been about seventy three seventy four. Your first time there.

**Mick:** I even used to run up there.

**Mary:** Yeah so you were probably there for about three or four years the first time and then you went back in, Michael’s seventy nine… eight-one. You went back.

**Eighty-one?**

**Mick:** Yeah another few years.

**Mary:** And you were there for about fourteen years.

**Mick:** Quite a long time.

**Mary:** No, eighty-one…

**Mick:** It’s a good five years anyway, maybe more.

**Mary:** No I think it was less than that. I think you left in eighty-seven.

**So it’s kind of early eighties, and it was kind of in the air. It was very much what was happening where you were was happening elsewhere.**

**Mick:** Yeah. So that was after I left this garage. I went back to there and this was the second half actually of what I’ve done, I’ve tied the two together.

**That’s alright.**

**Mick:** The second half was when I done this lorry you know?

**Yes.**

**Mick:** The army lorry. And got sort of into the old lorries and sort of, there they, I done an HGV there as well I can’t remember when I done me HGV there now.

**Mary:** Would have been the mid eighties. Because if you left in eighty-seven.

**Mick:** It was the mid-eighties.

**It sounds to me, what comes across is, well one thing that there was a lot of training, if you wanted to learn…**

**Mick:** Yeah.

**You got, people would train you and help in that way. Did they look after you, was it a nice place to work in terms of...**

**Mick:** Now I remember why it was a good place, you’ve just reminded me. In the transport, they had a sports club, they had a canteen and, in the sports club there was all sorts of things including videos, you know, films and all, filming and all that stuff and bowls.

**You could actually go in an shoot film and stuff and, be, there were, like Opportunities to**

**Mick:** I borrowed a couple of cameras when I first started filming from them. That got me on the road to filming.

**Right. So, super-eight?**

**Mick:** Super eight yeah. Before super eight actually, as well.

**Oh right. So what was that before super eight?**

**Mary:** Standard eight.

**Mick:** Standard eight, that’s it, you remembered!

**Standard eight!**

**Mick:** Standard eight, then super eight. Before standard eight even they had a bloke there that had a camera that was some other eight millimetre type thing. And you had to put sound on it?

**Right. A strip?**

**Mick:** Yeah, well with super eight, the camera that I got, it didn’t have any sound, but you obviously know a little bit about that. What I done, I sent the film away and got it what they called striped

**Yeah.**

**Mick:** Both sides. Remember the little bit of tape down the side?

**Yeah.**

**Mick:** And then I put sound on it. And that’s how I come to make that film, you probably seen it, about Rotherhithe? I made that when I was working there didn’t I?

**So that was something you started off, at work?**

**Mick:** I started that at work yeah.

**They had an opportunity. And did you, sort of, quite a few opportunities. How did that fit in to your week? I mean, when was it? When did you use it was it just something you did at weekends or did you do it after work or was it something people could go and use at…**

**Mick:** Well, you’re talking about the actual…

**The Club?**

**Mick:** The club. What used to happen, we usually, I think I used to go there, from work we used to go to the cine club didn’t I?

**Mary:** Yeah I used to come and up and meet you.

**Mick:** But bearing in mind it’s a fair old way to come back here to go back up there cos we lived in Rotherhithe at the time at er in um….

**Mary:** Er, in them days we lived in Holyoak.

**Mick:** Oh Holyoak, oh just over the road.

**Holyoak.**

**Mick:** Yeah, so that’s quite a long way but you could go straight there through it. You actually come to some of the cinema things.

**Mary:** I used to go up there quite a lot cos it was quite a family-orientated thing, I used to make tea

**Yeah we was always very family-orientated.**

**Mary:** The ladies would be in the kitchen making tea and sandwiches and the men would be in the screening area saying…

**Mick:** [Laughs] We had a proper cinema in there by the way… screen the lot!

**Cinema, swimming pool…**

**Mick:** And seats.

**….And kind of sports fields and things like that?**

**Mick:** They had sports fields, but the sports fields weren’t up there they was actually over the, er, just off the…South. What’s it called? What’s that ring road?

**Mary:** South circular.

**Mick:** South circular, but I’m trying to think, where that, remember that big park? Where Peter come off his bike?

**Mary:** Dulwich.

**Mick:** Dulwich. Over in Dulwich there somewhere. I know where it is, but I think it was in Dulwich, part of Dulwich. And they had, sort of, cricket ground, football and all sorts. But the bowls, they had a little ground there in the actual factory for the bowls.

**Yeah, so you had that kind of leisure side of things and, kind of, the film thing. Any other kind of things that particularly you thought were good about work.**

**Mick:** Well I used to be shop steward there a long time. And I well I actually asked them to set up a committee for the young apprentices as well so they could sort of act on their own behalf via the shop stewards committee.

**So they had kind of representation from…**

**Mick:** So they had their own rep, they had their own guy, that was sort of elected by the young apprentices and they used to come to the shop stewards committee and sort of, you know.

**What were relations like in the union type thing?**

**Mick:** Oh it was alright. We had no problems. We had a strong leadership there anyway.

**Was it one union or were there more?**

**Mick:** Nah there were loads of unions there, but there, you got a federation steward who’s like the leading one. He’s like elected by everybody and er then you got different, like your shop stewards committee, the works committee, they had the works committee there which was the thing that they started during the war I think you’ll find, ‘cos they used to build planes in there, when old, you know, before my time but during the war they built planes in there.

**What did the works committee do?**

**Mick:** Well, they was involved with management. Talking about different things. You know talking about work and all that business.

**Kind of, er, what kind of, yeah they talked about work. What kind of things could they contribute to?**

**Mick:** Well...

**Was it quite, I mean…**

**Mick:** Health and safety. That’s number one. And number two was, they were, some time ago and this was a long time before they done it in the council, they tried to sub-work, sub-contract work out. And I was a shop steward out of miscellaneous vehicles, plus I was on the shop stewards’ committee as well, and I stopped them putting the work out. Because they, we argued that if there going to give it out to contractors, they should be like for like. In other words they should do exactly what we do for the money, and then, always they make their quote, for the job, but it should be done on a like for like basis. So we had a committee set up to look at the work they was doing and their work was shit! They weren’t doing nothing that we do! You know, they, maybe, say you get a clutch, and we used to change all the bolts. Every single bolt we’d take out of the clutch you’d put new bolts in. Whereas they’d change one or two, so I mean immediately, and the diameter of the clutch was massive, so the bolts were going to massive. I mean a bolt, I don’t know what they cost but they must have cost an awful lot of money just for one bolt so that’s how they got a cheap quote ‘cos they’d never replace them all. And that’s how we beat ‘em in the end. With the management we said, well look there not even doing half of what we’re doing! They’re just doing a cowboy job and that’s how we kept the work in, you know it, on site.

**So there were some, there were issues when disputes came up.**

**Mick:** There were issues yeah.

**Can you just kind of broadly talk about those?**

**Mick:** Erm.

**Or specifically think of example of things that might come up?**

**Mick:** Well there’s, we had a demonstration up in London on, er, they was trying to cut… I can’t think what is was about now? Flippin’ eck. Such a long time ago. [Laughs]Do you remember I done a film about it?

**Mary:** Only things coming out of my head, round about the time of the tendering.

**Mick:** That’s it yeah.

**Mary:** Was Ken Livingston, used to go up to County Hall and meet Ken Livingstone. To sort something out. That’s all that I can...

**Mick:** Yeah, we used to. Yeah. We used to attend meetings with him. They was trying to cut some bloomin’ thing. I can’t remember what it was though, such a long time ago now but we had a big demonstration in London over it. That was the time of Ken Livingstone. He put the fares down. And the, bloody, er, one of the local boroughs took ‘em to court. One of the Tory boroughs.

**Mary:** Bromley.

**Mick:** I can’t remember which one it was. Who?

**Mary:** Bromley.

**Mick:** Bromley! That’s right yeah, Bromley. Bromely took them to court. I think it was Bromley anyway. One of the Tory boroughs took him to court and tried to reverse it so in the end he didn’t win actually, they did win. And they had to put the fares back up again. But we had a demonstration on that ‘cos it’s causing us to lose work an all sorts of things like that. They tried to get rid of the green line buses, which they did in the end, but that happened a long time after I left there, but they done all sorts of stupid things like that, but we had a few. Oh and there’s another time when we went on strike, think it was probably over money or something and erm, they took [Laughs] they took our union to court. And fined them and the union refused to, AUEW wasn’t it? Or AEU as it was at the time.

**What does that stand for?**

**Mary:** Amalgamated union of…

**Mick:** Engineering. They took them to court. And fined them. And they refused to pay and they ended up taking all their furniture and stuff away. From the union office.

**What they came in and seized?**

**Mick:** We was out on strike you know, over that for a week or so.

**How long, so there were strikes. Long, short?**

**Mick:** Not usually very long, nah I mean a week was I think about the longest.

**Yeah, and were you kind of involved in the negotiations, the resolutions side of tat as well?**

**Mick:** Ah yeah I used to put different resolutions, I was fairly active actually, you know. But, we had the federation steward thought, he was like the chief, and I used to be a minute secretary, trying to think, maybe I was a secretary at one time or something.

**So when you were doing that?**

**Mick:** On the shop stewards’ committee.

**Was that quite important?**

**Mick:** Oh yeah, you got to do that right, ‘cos that’s like you record innit?

**So, yeah...**

**Mick:** Go on, anything else? I’m losing… [Laughs]

**Well I, no. Cos that’s, er. You—**

**Mick:** I can’t think of anything else.

**You mentioned health and safety as something that was an important part of…**

**Mick:** Yeah, we had a health and safety committee. Probably one of the first companies that done it actually. Cos that was quite a long time ago.

**Do you remember how that came about? Was it cos, you were saying**

**Mick:** I think it was cos, we was er, pretty militant anyway.

**You were pretty militant?**

**Mick:** So it was pretty militant there cos it was a closed shop.

**Which means…?**

**Mick:** Which means nobody can come there unless they got a trade union card. And I, that was one of my jobs as well I used to, as they come in for the job they’d have their interview, and if they got the job they’d have to come see me and I’d check their cards to make sure it was up to-date and if it wasn’t I’d tell them to piss off! [Laughs] Until they’d made it, put it up to-date. [Laughs] And then they could come back. And then they’d have to show me, you know, when, if it was up-to-date I’d let them start.

**But that, you’re saying, that kind of militancy had an effect in terms of things like health and safety became more established.**

**Mick:** Oh yes health and safety. To be honest when I first went there, and I must be honest, the shop steward, sorry, the miscellaneous vehicles, I was rather shocked, ‘cos I was a fairly sort of modern kid, you know, when I went there you know? I was rather shocked they were using bloomin’ great big bars like this \* fffffff sound effect\* to tighten lorry wheels up. I thought that’s flippin’ , you know that’s kind of old hat that it is. \* laughs \* They was using bloomin’ great bars and them big box spanner to tighten the wheels up. I thought that’s not right they shouldn’t be doing that. Don’t they know there’s like airlines, these days, air hammers you can put on the end of the line and just go \* drrrrrrr drrrrrrr \* I thought this is stupid. So that was the first job I had when I was shop steward, I got a load of the old air guns.

**So you done that kind of thing of going in and observing?**

**Mick:** That was all health and safety anyway.

**Right. Were there any other kind of practises that were, any other things that you felt you contributed towards in that way.**

**Mick:** I done loads of thing. I suppose, Oh, one thing I was quite outspoken about being young you know, was this apprentice committee. And they also eventually had a health and safety committee as well. You know. Erm.

**Why was that? Why did you feel it was really important?**

**Mick:** Because it , erm, gets them involved and makes them realise, you know, health and safety, they should have a say in health and safety ‘cos they’re young and they got to teach other people eventually in’t they?

**Yeah. Before health and safety, did you, did it improve things? How did it change things? Because, I mean, I’ve grown up, I’ve never not had a situation where there wasn’t health and safety in the work place. I just wonder what it was like before you had the things set you said.**

**Mick:** It’s made a massive difference. It was slow but massive, it was slow. I mean, think I remember more about The health and safety in the Chiswick works wasn’t the same as my dealings with the local council, because the European regulations hadn’t come out in them days. So you know, but you would still argue health and safety, obviously, because I mean it’s sensible anyway innit. You’re doing dangerous work it saves accidents and all sorts of things people being off sick and everything else.

**Were, I mean, I was gonna say before, I mean, because you kind of came, seem to have started before it was really established, were accidents something that happened on a more regular basis, or did that kind of.**

**Mick:** There, I don’t think there were many accidents actually. Because of the health and safety.

**Because there was some already.**

**Mick:** Because there was health and safety. And we had health and safety meetings. You know, so if there was anything wrong we used to meet management and sort of say, well, you know, “sort that out!” and they did, you know. But my time in Southwark was a completely different thing really. Cos the European regs had come out by then, and erm.

**And why did you move to Southwark.**

**Mick:** Right well let’s see. One of the reasons I left, erm, Chiswick works, Number one it was a long way wasn’t it? And I used to get up in the early hours of the morning didn’t I?

Mary: Yeah he used to leave the house at five.

**Mick:** What happened though, which made me mo...mo… leave was, erm, mostly, was they introduced, erm, shift work. And as it was I got home late and I never see me kids that much anyway. Didn’t I?

**So you’d start the day at kind of five when would you kind of get home?**

**Mick:** What time would I get home? D’you remember?

**Mary:** [Phone rings] sorry, can you press pause?

**So you started about five, get there quite early.**

**Mick:** Used to get back fairly late didn’t I?

**Mary:** Ooh, depends on what you were doing. But, ten O’clock wouldn’t have been unusual, so it depends on what meetings you had that particular day.

**Mick:** By the way, yeah, they used to get, have meetings. Used to go to the cinema club didn’t I?

**Mary:** Yeah, very often. I used to bring the kids up to see you up there didn’t I?

**Mick:** This thing's itching me.

**Mary:** [Laughs]

**Mick:** That might be my chain. P’raps that’s what’s doing it. Erm, I used to do running as well. And I used to do Karate didn’t I up there?

**Was that associated with, that was club stuff?**

**Mick:** Was all to do with the club, yeah. And I suppose the running we used to run round that, what was it called?

**Mary:** You were a runner with us, you weren’t a Karate man. You’d already done that, that was the first time. The running was a big issue the second time.

**Mick:** There was that park I used to run round.

**Mary:** Richmond, yeah.

**Oh yeah.**

**Mick:** What was it?

**Mary:** Richmond.

**Mick:** Richmond Park. Yeah that’s it. Richmond Park. I used to run round there two or three times, with a couple of the blokes from work you know. I used to do; I used to run once a week from here up there as well, I used to run all the way up there to Chiswick works, which is about twenty miles. Which is, shows you how fit I was in them days!

**So quite long days you were working and then you said they introduced shift work? Which…**

**Mick:** Yeah, anyway, they introduced shift work. By then I was getting a bit older. Sort, of, ‘Cos I’d been there quite a long time. And I as the oldie and all the others were youngies. I started there I was the youngie and the others were oldies! So things have changed now, like this is a lot of years later. It’s still shop steward though! It’s a shop steward virtually every job I’ve been to I’ve ended up being a shop steward ‘cos no bugger does the job half the time so I think well somebody’s gotta do it so I used to do it. But erm, So now I’m an oldie now, one of the oldest that’s in the shop. And erm, sorry what’s the question?

**About how, the shift work. What the impact of it was?**

**Mick:** Ah, got it. Well, we had a lot of young apprentices and they came to our, our workshop. All the oldies, most of the oldies had gone I was like the oldie now myself. And Alfie, wasnt it? Ralph and a few other blokes. We was the oldies now and the youngies had come to workshop. Which were all ex-apprentices from you know, trained by London transport. And we used to help them sort of learn to work on lorries, that kind of thing all the business and that, but, what happened was that, I was still shop steward then, and the company wanted to get more work done, ‘cos they had a bit of work and they come up with this idea of, erm, having shift work. Well I was against it anyway, but I mean I’m a shop steward so I got to talk for people an’ unfortunately we had a vote and I got outvoted because all the young men there, they thought, they thought that they’d “Ah this is great look at all the homework jobs we can do!” [Laughs]

**Haha!**

**Mick:** “Get, I’ll mend my mate’s car, bring it in, get it on the pitch...” you know! Weld up, da dah da dah! Ah all this they thought, fuck, great time, you know, we’ll do lots of little homework jobs, well, they did a few. But, they’re not stupid the management, they’re flippin’, they ended up putting a foreman, you know on the shift work as well so in the end they didn’t really get much time to do anything. They thought they’d be a lot better off, but I told them “you ain’t gonna be much better off!” and I was due to go on shift work, but, because of one lad, he was so money orientated, he thought “I’ll take your shift Mick, you know, Flippin’ lots of money”. I thought flippin’ have ‘cos I don’t want it! I’d lost the vote so I thought fair enough I had to go along with it. But he done my shift work didn’t he? For a long time.

**Mary:** Yeah, for a long time.

**Mick:** But he got fed up in the end. And I had to go, I had to then take up the shift work I thought, shit I don’t want this and that’s the reason I left.

**And that would involve? Shift work?**

**Mick:** Means I would never see me kids at all.

**Because?**

**Mick:** Because by the time I’d flippin’ get home they’re in bed. And...

**Mary:** Michael used to sit up waiting for you.

**Mick:** Yeah, Michael, as it was was sitting up waitin’ for me every night, Michael.

**Mary:** He wouldn’t go to bed.

**Mick:** And erm, but, you know, obviously you got to go to bed and I flippin’ wouldn’t even have been up in the morning with him. You know, so I thought, nah, not going to do that. So I thought, pfffff, you know.

**So that moved you to Southwark.**

**Mick:** I then moved, well not immediately to Southwark, but I got.

**Mary:** Went to an open thing didn’t you?

**Mick:** Because I had an HGV, it was fairly was to get a job. Was the first job, erm, that, that lifted them?

**Mary:** Oh yeah. The skip place.

**Mick:** Was that the first one I had? Cos actually I have got all this written down, but I haven’t actually got it, I should have dug it out I, I never thought, I didn’t think you’d be talking about this far back. [Laughs] Else I could have got all the stuff down.

**Mary:** yeah you left the transport to work down in Deptford, picking up skips or whatever it was.

**Mick:** Ah, right, so that was the skip job.

**Mary:** [Laughs] Yeah.

**Mick:** Oh yeah that’s right. Oh that’s, now I’m with you, now I’ve remembered.

**Mary:** Previous to that you’d been to a Southwark job open day thing

**Mick:** No, no.

**Mary:** Sorry!

**Mick:** Thank you for reminding me you’re sort of right! Right, when I came back home, sort of down back you see, I got a job driving skip lorries, but I went there as a mechanic driver. So what I was doing they thought, its, they thought, they had enough drivers, but there’d be the odd occasion when I’d be driving, but mostly they wanted me to do, to service their lorries. Which were the Bedford’s. Which was the same as that big army one but they ain’t got them big wheels. You know the old Bedford’s that tip forward. So they had mostly Bedford’s. They had all Bedford’s actually. Were they all Bedford’s? Yeah I think they were, can’t quite remember I used to service them. To be honest it is a bit of a cowboy firm. And they wanted you to do little bits of bodging and that kind of thing. Used to go out on breakdowns obviously if they had a breakdown I’d go out and bring ‘em in, tie ‘em in and repair ‘em, or take another lorry out to them and they’d get on with their work I’d repair the lorry and bring it back

**When you say “bodge” you mean, kind of…**

**Mick:** Yeah, I don’t ‘ave, that don’t appeal to me. Bodging.

**What does that, how would you explain to somebody who doesn’t know what it was?**

**Mick:** To not do a job properly.

**Yeah. Just patch it up.**

**Mick:** Patch it up, you know that wasn’t, I mean yeah, I’ll get it back you know, but I’m not gonna bodge things. I’m wanted do the job properly because at the end of the day I’d be the one, I’m doing the services it’d be my neck on the line and anyway if the bodge come unbodged you know? So I though nah I aint gonna do that and in the end I got fed up with it and but, like you said to me, during that time, I didn’t just chuck the job obviously but I actually got, had an interview didn’t I? At Southwark. I didn’t’ think I’s getting it. I got the job; I actually was interested in working in their garages. That was my main interest. But I never got that, because I dunno whether… somebody said I was over-qualified, I don’t know what that means so I can’t be sure. But the bloke there in the garage said I was over-qualified, you know that’s why they didn’t want me but I find that weird. I don’t know what they were talking about by that but I thought, well that’s that and a little while later I got a letter from them didn’t? Saying they had a post for a driver? And HGV driver. An funny enough, bit strange, there wasn’t very many HGV drivers on the council at the time. So it was ideal, you know, for me, ‘cos I’d done most the HGV jobs.

**Mary:** And after Deptford though you got a job with Boots down the road there didn’t you, driving for them?

**Mick:** After Deptford was it?

**Mary:** You’d just started at Boots and you’d probably done about two jobs…

**Mick:** Oh yeah that’s right!

**Mary:** And the letter came through.

**Mick:** It was erm, Boots place, fact it’s just down the road. Still there.

**Mary:** No it’s gone now.

**Mick:** Is it gone?

**What was that doing?**

**Mick:** I used to drive a lorry up into London. The stuff was all on like, ‘cos being Boots, it was obviously small stuff you know like pills and powders and all that sort of rubbish, what you get in Boots. Some was big stuff but it was all in these, things you push along on wheels. Kind of cage you know?

**Like you see outside a supermarkets?**

**Mick:** Yeah, you got a tail lift at the back and you drop the tail lift down and shove it on and up it goes. You shove it in and shove, do so many drops so you like put one up the front its last one you push right up the front. And the first drop you put out the back and you just used to drop it off on the tail –lift.

**So you do a route, a run?**

**Mick:** Yeah, but [Laughs]that was the early hours of the morning wasn’t it Mary?

**Mary:** Yeah

**Mick:** And er, that was alright. S ‘not bad ‘cos I could get up alright. You know I was used to getting up working for the transport. Erm, it’s only been there a little while hadn’t I? I took Michael out a few times as well. We used to have [Laughs] we used to have, erm, I took I’m in the car, in the van, lorry you’re not supposed to but I did. And we used to have a breakfast we used to stop somewhere for breakfast a bit \*makes enthusiastic eating noise \*

**[Laughs]**

**Mick:** Big sort of beef-burger-y thing ‘e used to love it didn’t he?

**Mary:** Yes!

**Mick:** used to come out with me a few times.

**Is that your youngest?**

**Mary:** He’s the oldest.

**Mick:** Erm, I’ll tell you, there was a funny bit there. Being a bit of a smart arse, I thought, there must be a different way. So I thought I’m gonna try and different way it might be a bit quicker. So I went down this back street and er, it’s a big lorry, not a little thing, big thing! And er, and I drove down this back street ‘cos I thought there was a way through it, and it was, there’s a lot of ‘em up there, you’ll see ‘em there like a road and a bloomin’ great bit square in the middle innit? And there’s all flowers and all that rubbish and cars parked all round it and I thought well if I can get through through there though, I’m sure it’s quicker. So anyway, I goes through there and I got flippin’ I just got round the corner. And some idiot parked right on the corner and I thought ah shit! Stuck! And I got this bloody great big lorry. And I’d gone quite a long way down the blimmin’ road. Oh now what am I gonna do? Luck ‘as had it, parking meter blokes, he come, he was all mooching around and I said ‘here mate do you think you could do us a favour can you just see us back?

**Yeah.**

**Mick:** ‘Cos you got a big lorry I don’t wanna run no one down an he backed me out, all the way up this bloomin’ road, back onto the main road, cos I’d come off a main road to come down this back street. Back onto there and I never done it again. I stuck to the route! [Laughs]I thought too dodgy! But yeah that was funny. I remember that. But yeah, but like you said, the um, job actually; I’d only bit there, I wasn’t there very long was I? A few weeks?

**Mary:** About three few weeks.

**Mick:** Maybe a month or so. And then I got this letter from the council.

**Right.**

**Mick:** \*sighs \* Er, there starts another story.

**Yeah, when you were with them as an HGC driver, I mean, it sounds like you’d done a lot more than that, do did you just stick with driving or did you do other stuff.**

**Mary:** [Laughs]

**Mick:** I used to do everything. I didn’t care what it was. Erm, I did, we did quite. When I first went there, you know, when you first go there you just do whatever you just follow like a sheep don’t you ‘cos you got to be a good by and all that rubbish and that’s what, I’m the same, keep the old head down for a little while and er, when I first went there, Southwark council had one of the biggest, er, biggest, what they? Squatter, kind of, squatter, squatted houses for miles around.

**Like a big squat.**

**Mick:** There were squats everywhere! Cos we’ve got loads of old houses, old flats and that. A lot of people don’t want them. And so there was loads of squatters everywhere wasn’t there? We got our house as easy as anything when we moved down here. Council house. Simple as anything. They told us to go and look for it, didn’t they, look for one you fancy, you know, and you can have!

**Yeah.**

**Mick:** But there were so many squatted houses I couldn’t believe it. So one of the first jobs, we’d all go out in these lorries, we gotta chuck, well I didn’t have, I had flippin nothing to do, I’d just stick me lorry there and you can sort ‘em out! I ‘aint a copper! You know, flip that! [Laughs]

**So what, were you were actually driving to the squat with people…**

**Mick:** Yeah. They’d take the cops with us usually. A couple of people

**Mary:** It would be the, er, bailiffs wouldn’t it?

**Mick:** And they had, yeah, like six bailiffs and a copper, they usually have, and you have about six lorries going out to a certain estate almost like a raid when I was working there. And they was chucking them out one at a time. You know, all their stuff chucked in the back of the lorry. They’d been warned; I mean obviously, they could get rid of squatters in them days, not like they would now. You know they had to go through a long business of you know legal notification and all that rubbish but once they got that they sort of done a whole kind of estate with the lorries.

**What they just fill the lorry up with everybody’s stuff?**

**Mick:** Yeah and what they didn’t want or what they didn’t take out they’d just chucked it in the back of the lorry. And we used to go and dump it. Erm, I think, sometimes you’d sort of take stuff off the back that erm, they had a, like a storage place, if it’s any good, like for someone that aint got no money.

**Depository or something like that?**

**Mick:** Yeah they had a big massive kind of place underground where they used to put some of the stuff you know for people if they needed it. But most of it was just tipped and crunched down and sent upriver for dumping.

**So that was one of the kind of things you did, what about the other stuff that an HGV driver would do for Southwark?**

**Mick:** Umm, stores. I used to pick up stores.

**Stores of?**

**Mick:** Everything you mention it we did it. Like great big doors, uncut doors as well mostly. Bloody massive some of them. Door blank, do you know what I mean by door blank?

**No.**

**Mick:** It’s like a door that’s uncut and it’s usually quite big you know so you virtually cut it to whatever the size the door is. And it’s like thick bloomin’ heavy as anything.

**So building materials.**

**Mick:** Yeah but building materials, cement, sand anything you need for flats, houses, whatever, you know. Sink units.

**So it was a lot to do with public housing.**

**Mick:** Oh yeah. Loads and loads of it. Mostly that. Even sort of...

**Quite a big change from what you were doing before?**

**Mick:** Oh yeah, yeah, quite a big, yeah, quite a big difference.

**What else was different about it?**

**Mick:** Erm, I moved on, they needed a driver for the erm, the tillers.

Mary: Roofing.

**Mick:** Roofin’, and I thought that’s not a bad little job I wouldn’t mind having a go at that. \* laughs \*

**What roofing?**

**Mick:** I’d try anything. I wasn’t a roofer I never knew nothing about roofing but I used to go up on the roof and help them. You know so we got the job done a bit quicker and we could come home early. \* laughs\*

**So was this on council estates, housing?**

**Mick:** Yeah. Oh yeah. All over the place. We had two blokes, one was a big giant paddy, nice bloke wasn’t he?

Mary: Yeah.

**Mick:** The other bloke was the actual tiller. And I was just a driver but I used to be up the roof with them helping out. It was good. I enjoyed it.

**Was that in all in Southwark or did you do work outside it?**

**Mick:** Erm, there was some things outside of Southwark because at one time, but you got bear in mind mostly, it was finished when I was there. They had a lot of homes where naughty children, where you used to send naughty children but one of them was erm, Crystal Palace and down that hill do you remember the hill?

**Mary:** Annerly Hill.

**Mick:** Annerly Hill, I used to do a delivery. Well this was when I went with the stores; I went with the stores as well. I’ve been all over the place. But let’s get the roofing one done first so anyway, so I’d help him I’d work up on the roof and we’d get away a bit sharpish. Then I, job come up for a driver for the stores. That was good and I’d go out to Annerly, Crystal Palace, Annerly Road. It was like a, almost like a kids prison thing out there.

**Right. Like a behaviour place.**

**Mick:** Yeah, used to take stuff down there. You know, washing stuff and all that kind of thing. But I used to go these places where, erm, you go, you know, for your housing and like and all that. Used to diddle all over the place.

**Right. So, how, what kind of stuff for housing.**

**Mick:** Soap. Toilet rolls. All that kind of stuff.

**For schools and things as well?**

**Mick:** Yeah we used to do schools; we used to do quite a number of schools. But the trouble is you see, what happens is some of the work is contracted out eventually. You know, and you never had the job in the end.

**As schools started ordering it.**

**Mick:** Start creeping the flippin’ jobs away from you.

**So what was it, kind of you’re drawing us back in a way to your work as a shop steward. So was that different with Southwark as well?**

**Mick:** What being a shop steward?

**Yeah.**

**Mick:** Not a lot different no! About the same. [Laughs] It was more fun!

**More fun! Why?**

**Mick:** Well, they were a lot easier going the council people very often.

**So better relations would you say?**

**Mick:** Oh there was much better relations. Actually I didn’t even mind the bloke the boss man, I actually talked him into being a governor of our boy’s school. And that was we could get a few jobs done for the school. [Laughs] So I thought that was quite useful.

**So more kind of amicable.**

**Mick:** It was in a way but it was like, he knew when I went in there when something was wrong that I wasn’t just giving him a load of bullish… well I do give him, I did give him some bullshit but not that much, he knew, say for example there are blokes you got to be honest, just take the piss. They do it over and over again. For example, we had a bloke that always disappeared when the old, what’s that over the hurdles thing, them horses?

**Mary:** The Grand National.

**Mick:** The Grand National. He always disappeared at Grand National. He was ill, sick whatever, but he done every bloomin’ year! How stupid can you get, you know! And, sort of, they’re kind of, they’re not stupid management, some of them are a bit stupid but they’re not that stupid so obviously they know when he’s doing it for the umpteenth time that he’s taking, he’s taking the piss.

**So did you represent people then?**

**Mick:** And I would represent him with management and argue this old of rubbish, but sometimes, because I knew this bloke was taking the piss, so what I would do, I would go to this bloke, the bloke I talked into looking after Peter’s school, we it wasn’t him that done it but because he was the boss man, he could get jobs done for our Peter’s school.

**Mick:** I know this bloke is taking the piss, I said, but look, if you sack him, try and sack him, I will be on his side and I will make some bloody pathetic excuse even though I know he’s taking the piss because that’s me job. I said but what you should do. You know, you got all your facts. Give him a final warning. So he don’t…once you get your final warning you’re on the way out the door. So unless you’re an idiot you don’t do it. You know what I mean? Cos he used to do it every bloomin’ year and it went on and on and on. And the bloke come to me first and said he’s bloomin’ done it again. And I said, give him a final warning, and then next time if he does it again, he’s an idiot and you can then sack him. Even though I’ll still stick up for him, but you’ve got the facts and then he’s only, er, thing that he can do then is to go to a tribunal and try and get his job back that way. I tell the bloke he’s an idiot, I know he’s an idiot and I’ll tell him straight to his face and tell him not to stop piss… tell him to stop pissing about you know and that’s I used to do it. And so he said, fair enough, he’d give him a final warning, I said look, he knows bloody you going racing you do it the same flipping time every year, stop taking the piss! Because next time you’ve now got a final warning so it means next time you’re out on your arse. So just take a warning and don’t be an idiot, so he never done it no more, so, [Laughs]you can get things sorted out, you know like that. And there’s all sorts of things going on, going and talk to the management you know, they get, they start ranting and raving and you think, you aint gonna get anywhere with this so we’d sort of go to them and say well, if you do that we’re gonna challenge you and you’ll lose! You know tell ’em there and then. And they go all right, we’ll do this, and that’s how we used to get things done. Obviously sometimes we lost cases, but not very often. Not many people got the sack from there, but we still had to do our job and say look, stop taking the piss, you know, you’re taking the piss. Next time you’re down the road. So you can, you know. And they, I suppose they respected you for it, although they knew he was, well, having them over, they respected you ‘cos you’re honest you tell them straight. I’m gonna fight for him anyway, so you might as well…you know your gonna lose ‘cos you aint got the facts, so that’s how you got most your votes back. By sort of, what we call ‘horse trading’ in the game. [Laughs]Not that, not because that bloke used to go horse racing but I used to call it horse trading. It saves having strikes and all that stuff. That’s quite good, that’s what I liked about it. You could sort of do that and get away with it, and very often, not very often people got sacked. But you did get some real baddies that deserved it anyway. For flip’s sake it’s your tough shit, you shouldn’t be stupid. But you obviously got to be seen to support ‘em, obviously being a trade union person you gotta, else you’d have your own union after you if you didn’t stick up for them. But you know what the outcome’s gonna be, cos he’s telling you, go in there before and he tell’s you what’s gonna happen normally, if they’re gonna sack. That’s… I enjoyed that. And Health and Safety I enjoyed, but I was gonna tell you about health and safety?

When I went to Southwark, these European regs had come out. And they was illegal, illegal, illegal all over the place! Especially the housing side. And I was...um…

**How do you mean illegal?**

**Mick:** Illegal. Well, the way they was going about, you know, they wasn’t…

**Oh the Borough council was illegal?**

**Mick:** The Borough themselves. They…they, was not, you now, using the proper regulations, all over the place. With different things. So many things you know that they were doing wrong and I actually had to say look, you know you’re bloody way out of line, you should have been, should have complied with that ages ago cos it’s been out now for two or three years. And you still aint done anything about it and they was lucky not to drop themselves in the shit, the housing site

**This was the housing**

**Mick:** yeah, the house side where the, erm, like the work side you know, where I worked, they was, the reason I was involved with the housing side, partly was because when I went to the council, because I was doing driving, I swapped, and AUEW wasn’t recognised there anyway, I changed unions to the transport and general workers, so I got elected to the health and safety for the T and G, so I was elected by the T and G to health and safety, plus I was the health and safety on the health and safety committee as well. From my side as well. But, cos there, it was like a union there you know? And I was shop steward in my own volition, for the drivers, I was a drivers shop steward. But because I, you have a meeting and get elected to the main committee.

**Yeah.**

**Mick:** You become, sort of, a bit higher. So as well as being a shop steward your also become a committee person as well and meet management and that kind of thing.

**So you kind of moved out, you weren’t just doing health and safety to do with your particular workplace, you moved into a more general…**

**Mick:** Yeah. Being the T and G, they could elect their own health and safety rep as well, so I was the rep for the T and G health and safety as well as our work side as well.

**So it linked up with any areas, wherever Transport and General were involved you were there?**

**Mick:** yeah that’s right. Cos they had a lot of people working in housing in the T and G. whereas, a lot of them, the workers we had was UKAT, which was the building trade operators. I dunno what they are now, all the unions are changing, different names, but there was UKAT, most were UKAT. Brickies and all that kind of job, chippies, no chippies was ASW. And UKAT was like building trade and other operatives and no other people.

**So with the, you were saying that with the, the big issue was a lot of the building stuff regs were illegal, were going against practices and so you had to go and talk to them. What kind of happened in the end, how did kind of things...**

**Mick:** Well, what we would do, we would, ‘cos they had they own committee as well so I would go along there with, er, we had a convener there, instead of federation steward, federation steward you had, you have in the engineering union but in the, er, building trade unions, it was er federation steward

**Convener?**

**Mick:** So you would go to all the meetings of health and safety so I would go along with him as well ‘cos I was to be T and G rep, for their side. And er, you know, you tell them there what’s going on what they should have been doing.

**And were they quite responsive?**

**Mick:** Yeah, generally. Especially when you tell ‘em well look could be done you know. Something happens and you haven’t done this. You gonna get done, simple as!

**Right.**

**Mick:** But they was a little bit backward there. I think partially because, they didn’t sort of have shop stewards or something in the same way as we had. Staff workers they had. Of a kind of steward, but sometimes they’re not like, ‘cos they don’t work with other people they like their single person for the whole lot. Whereas we had like stewards for each trade. Which, you know you get backing from your own blokes and all don’t you, when you’re on your own you’re not sure about health and safety. You know, maybe don’t do what you should be doing.

**What so, I mean, you think, you’ve done an amazing amount, what would you say was the most important of thing to you, what do you value most about your kind of working life?**

**Mick:** Being shop steward I think. [Laughs]

**Why was that?**

**Mick:** Why because I flipping kicked arse! [Laughs]I feel sorry for people being pushed around. I done a massive thing on bullying, *in the council* I might tell you! Council. Bullying in the council! I detest bullying. Absolutely detest it. An I flippin’ put up a flippin big fight over bullying, people bullying, you know in the council. You know some nasty little person who think he’s the great, you know, he a great ‘I am’, the big ‘I am’ and he’s bullying the lesser mortals, you know and I don’t like that. So I kick arse.

**Mary:** So he done a presentation. Don’t’ know if you remember, cos you drew…

**Mick:** No, that was. Erm, that was asbestos.

**Mary:** Oh that’s right.

**Mick:** I don’t a big presentation on asbestos. Cos we used to meet with the health and safety executive on the bridge there. Was it Southwark Bridge was it? Or Westminster bridge, one of the two. Use to go down there and meet proper health and safety people. And, erm, one of my good subjects cos I read about it all over the place, I forget a lot so don’t ask me too many things, but I was very good on asbestos.

**A big issue.**

**Mick:** Well aware the damage it’s done to people in the building trade. Particularly chippies and people like that. Painters even. Poisoned.

**You were saying about the bullying thing, that that was a kind of key thing that you felt you made a difference. Seem to be saying that you made a kind of difference in that area and that was something that you kind of take some kind of pride in I think.**

**Mick:** Yeah. No one else seem to take it up, I dunno why. Probably because the people that should have took it up weren’t being bullied by nobody anyway, but I could see people being bullied all over the place. You know. And I just detested it. I thought flippin’, bloody council and they’re bullying people! S ‘not on! You could understand it in a private place, in private industry. Where they don’t give a shite you know, but, a council place. It’s not on is it, really? I mean they should be setting an example shouldn’t they? But they didn’t, so I flippin was always, one of my favourite subjects. And I made numerous documents on bullying. In me time.

**Mmm. And you felt…**

**Mick:** I felt I had to deal with it.

**Yeah, and you feel that made a difference and it had, kind of, an impact when you were there.**

**Mick:** And also I think I was rather pleased with the…with the shop stewards…with the erm…shop stewards, sorry, the apprentices…

**Council representative thing?**

**Mick:** Yeah ‘cos as far as I know, it wasn’t a very common thing. It might have been the first one in the country. But it was, you know you never heard of them anywhere else. So I thought that’s a contribution.

**So when you worked, we’ve covered nearly, we’ve covered most stuff on here to be honest. The only thing I can think of is, there’s a question here, one thing was about socialising with people outside of work you talked about it with the Chiswick works and side of things I don’t know how that was with Southwark, whether it was the same kind of situation that was it quite a gregarious place or not, was it different?**

**Mick:** What do you mean, by that? Sort of going out?

**Well you were talking about the London transport, the transport works at Chiswick, you talked about the side of the things where the community…**

**Mick:** Oh they had a sports club as well. Yeah Southwark had a sports club.

**And it sounded as though you had a lot of friends and mates, people you worked with. Your roles, once you became like a person in a union working for Southwark you’re in a different place, was it the same kind of thing, did you feel like you were part of the same kind of organisation or was it different?**

**Mick:** Erm, it was a little bit different then because unfortunately, having a special needs boy, when I finished work, you know, you come home. And you...you…we didn’t have any friends whatsoever did we? Because our boy used to behave so badly, you know when went to friends, say for dinner, you couldn’t really…

**Mary:** You’d been there five minutes…

**Mick:** You’d go there five minutes and he’d get bored and you’d have to go. So, no it was different, quite different. I mean he was only young wasn’t he? When I was at Southwark...at erm London Transport. Actually they, he got so bad didn’t he? That the council even let me go in late sometimes.

**So quite flexible, quite responsive then.**

**Mick:** They were. I think, that even though I might have trod on lots of toes, I think they respected me ‘cos they knew, you know, what I was saying was right and they knew I wouldn’t do anything behind their back. At least I was honest to ‘em. You know to their face. I think that’s why. We got on alright didn’t we? But he always knew…

**He was your opposite number?**

**Mick:** He was management and I was a worker you know, and I would stick up to the workers no matter what he said. He respected that. The same to a certain extent, not so much, well quite so much, I respected the that— [Laughs] that he was a manager, so therefore he’s got to be like a manager type! Not quite as much as that, ‘cos sometimes they can go over the top anyway. But no. He was alright. He wasn’t too bad at all.

**Mary:** He was quite good to you. There were bad times when you weren’t getting to work till sometimes ten O’clock wasn’t it, Cos you have to be with me.

**Mick:** Yeah. He did help us. And so, you know.

**Hm. Fair amount of flexibility. Um thanks very much. You’ve told us an amazing, I mean it’s been really interesting, really fascinating. Er, thanks Mick, really nice to meet you anyway.**