**Pat’s Story...**

**Pat Jenkins interviewed by Jody on 15th October, 2012.**

**Summary:** In this interview Pat talks about working from the age of fifteen working on the switchboard, a counter clerk at the Post Office, and as an accountant for factories, such as Allards’ Suppliers and Wilkinson’s Containers, as well as at the fish market.

**So, I’ll just start by saying the date: it’s the 15th of October 2012. And, we’re here with Pat. How do you spell- what’s your forename, Pat?**

**Pat:** Pat Jenkins.

**Jenkins. J – E – N – K – I – N – S**.

**Pat:** Yep.

**And we’re in Pat’s home -**

**Pat:** Yeah

**Fantastic, okay. And when and where were you born? When’s your birthday date?**

**Pat:** 18th of October 1933.

**Then your birthday is coming up!**

**Pat:** Yes, in three days! [Both laughing]

**Excellent. Is that it for the logging? Thank you. So we’re here for the hmm- the project is called “From Docks to Desktops” and it’s about work in the area and how work’s changed, and the story of people’s lives in relation to their work. So that’s the main thing we wanted to ask you about today.**

**Pat:** Okay.

**So, can you tell us where- where you worked?**

**Pat:** Well, I worked hmmm, well I left school when I was fifteen and I went to work at a factory in Bermondsey called Allards’ Suppliers. It was a- it made jam and jellies and it supplied groceries shops. There was hmm, I don’t know if they’re about now- I don’t think so but there used to be **Home Colanial, Lipton’s, Perk’s, Maypole**. They were all belong to the company so we used to supply them with jam and jellies, you know, but hmm, that’s it. And I worked there for twelve years.

**Full time.**

**Pat:** Yep.

**And what was your job there?**

**Pat:** I was, invoice, typed invoices.

**Of the whole company?**

**Pat:** Yes. Yes.

**Were you in a- in a team of people doing that?**

**Pat:** Yes, we were, yeah, I was in a team, I was in a team. Can’t think about the name of it. But it was, a section, you know, the invoice section, there. Yes. And also- I also did hmm, switchboard as well.

**And was it- it sounds like a big company?**

**Pat:** It was a big company. Yes. I mean it’s not there now, a big factory in Rouel Road. It’s not there now

**Which road, sorry?**

**Pat:** Rouel Road.

**It’s not there now, it’s gone?**

**Pat:** Oh no they’ve all gone. It was hmm, as you say it was a big factory. Yeah.

**So, so when - how old were you when you started there?**

**Pat:** Fifteen.

**Fifteen, and you went straight in?**

**Pat:** Yes, I started off- I did intend- I took an examination to work in the libraries but I didn’t pass the exam so I went there for, when I was waiting the results of the job I applied for and hmm, but I never got it, so I stayed down and I stayed for twelve years! [Laughing]

**Did they train you?**

**Pat:** Oh yes oh yes, they did, yes.

**And the first job you did there was in accounting?**

**Pat:** Yes, invoicing. Yes, invoicing. Yes. In general office, yeah. I did.

**And then after that?**

**Pat:** Well, after that I went to work for a transport company. Because I had children- I had a couple of children by then, I needed to do part time and cause they didn’t do part time here at Allard’s Suppliers. So I went to work for a transport company. And Joseph Mannard I went to work for him, I went to work for them part time, and then I left, because I had another baby so I left there, you know. And then I didn’t work for a while, but hmm. So I say I then I moved to Peckham. And I hated it, I hated Peckham. [Whispering] I mustn’t say that, shouldn’t say that, should I? But I went to work for them and, as I said I didn’t work I had my younger son by then and I didn’t work for five years but hmm then I went I did work at the Post office, so I worked at the Post Office in Bermondsey Street for a while.

**What were you doing there?**

Well, counter clerk, you know? And hmm, which was quite nice, I did that for a couple of years. And then I went to work hmm in, my brother in law’s company had a company in the Billingsgate Fish Market and I worked in there invoicing you know invoicing wages. You know.

**How long were you at the fish market?**

**Pat:** Hmm about seven years, about seven years.

**So you started work in the market- in- within the market?**

**Pat:** Yeah, yeah, in the offices, yeah, upstairs.

**Was it kind of normal working hours at the fish market?**

Pat: Oh yeah it was only sort of more or less part time nine till one, something like that it wasn’t much more something like that. And then my final job was with a company called Wilkinson’s Containers, which is in Verney Road, and I went to work for them and I worked there until I was 72. And I did wages and accounts, there. And then I retired, what six years ago, six years ago.

**What was the last company?**

**Pat:** Wilkinson’s Containers. They made tins.

**They made tins?**

**Pat:** Yeah, biscuit tins, paint tins. You know.

**So they supplied other companies?**

**Pat:** That’s right, they did they were – they just supplied loads of different companies, you know.

**So you must, so that sounds like that was a big company as well.**

**Pat:** Yes, it was, it was. Quite a big company.

**Is that still…?**

**Pat:** Oh that is still there, that is still there, yeah. But the other companies I worked for they are not there anymore.

**I’m gonna- I’m gonna backtrack a bit, and take us back to the beginning of your- your working life.**

**Pat:** Yeah.

**Because I just wanted to get a clearer picture of what- what your experience was there. And how, hmm… how the company kind of worked, and what kind of experiences you had there.**

**Pat:** Oh I see.

**Cos’ you were very young then when you started as work.**

**Pat:** Oh yeah, fifteen.

**Were a lot of people that young then?**

**Pat:** Oh yeah, we all did. I mean some people started at 14. But I was born at the right time so the schooling age was up to fifteen, you know, so that I started work at fifteen, yeah.

**So a lot of the other people were that young?**

**Pat:** No, there was a lot of elderly. Well, elderly people. There was some youngsters you know. But it was mostly sort of people who worked there for years.

**And was it quite even between women and men- or like in terms of the numbers?**

**Pat:** Well, it was mostly, mostly women in the office, you know, hmm… but the men were sort of, had They were like bosses, you know, they didn’t have women bosses in them days no it was men.

**And, did you feel, hmm, did you feel happy at work there?**

**Pat:** Oh yeah, I loved it, I loved it, yeah.

**Why?**

**Pat:** Cause I worked there for twelve years- well because, I mean, I had friends there, so I loved it, you know. I worked there as I say for twelve years. In between I had children and went back there you know, so, I had hmm, when I had twins. Twins first of all, I had twins. So I went back to work after they were about fifteen months old I s’pose and I went back to work.

**And did they- so did they pay, did they give you a kind of maternity leave or –**

**Pat:** Oh no we didn’t have a maternity didn’t have anything like that then, you know, not like they got today, no. Didn’t get paid- I didn’t get paid no.

**So you just, you just –?**

**Pat:** All I got was the family allowance for one of ‘em. Eight shillings a week. [Laughing]

**For one- not twins?**

**Pat:** Not twins, no. But I had twins only got it for the second one, not for the eldest one.

**And so, do you think, I mean a lot of working women working there must have had kids, who looked after the kids?**

**Pat:** Well, I don’t know a lot of them- what do you mean, nurseries? You know, cause you did have nurseries then you know. But I mean my mum looked after mine, I didn’t’ put them in nursery my mum had them you know. I mean I went back to work when the twins were fifteen months and my mum had them you know, I mean, I owed her an awful lot because she had them, and then she had my daughter, but hmm as I said when I had my last one, I lived in Peckham so I didn’t have anyone to – ‘cause my mum lived in Bermondsey. I didn’t have anyone to have them so I didn’t go back to work till he was five.

**And then? So what were the conditions like when you were working? Did you have like paid holidays if you didn’t have –**

**Pat:** Oh, yeah you got paid holidays, they used to do a Christmas party if you had children, you took the children. I didn’t have children, you see my sister used to go hers were a lot younger than mine. She used to go; they used to have Christmas time there presents for the children yeah. But no, it was quite nice, nice company. Really nice. But then of course as I said in them days you could walk out one job into another, there was so many different places round here you had the coffee, Sarsons vinegar you know all the different smells and smells of Peek Frean’s you know with the company I worked for, when the, sort of the strawberries were in season, we used to smell of the strawberries you know with the making of the jam, and the jellies, you know. But hmm that was quite a lovely- lovely round, around here then.

**It was busy?**

**Pat:** Oh it was busy yeah. There was so much around here you know. I even did, I even went to Shuttleworths for a while an evening work, you know hmm, wrapping Easter eggs [Laughing]. It was so much to do, there was always a job you know you were never be without a job. Never, ever worked at Peek Frean’s. Never ever worked at Peek Frean’s.

**Did you want to?**

**Pat:** Not particularly, no to be honest. My dad always to worked for Peek Frean’s but I never. Never even thought about working at Peek Frean’s to be honest, you know. As I say I said I just went straight in to this job at Allards’ Suppliers and then I stayed for twelve years.

**And, so, the feeling was that you had a lot of options, in terms of work.**

Pat: Oh God yeah there was always plenty of work! Yeah! I mean, I’ve know people to go from one job, get fed up with this job for instance I mean this is someone said that they worked hmm, at a Tower Bridge road, in the factory there and they decided they would like to go to Metal Box which was- or John Fever’s they were both tin people in Tower Bridge Road- and she went there one dinner time and they said “Oh yeah you could start this afternoon”. So she went there in the afternoon, didn’t like it, so she went back to her old job in the next day and told them she was off sick cause she didn’t feel very well. And she’s been working another place [Laughing] That’s how easy it was to get work! You know. I mean there used a place round here that used to make shirts you know, down in Creadon Road they used to do, the factory there that made shirts, it was always plenty, and plenty of things to do.

**Which meant people stayed in the area?**

**Pat:** That’s right! No one moved away, you didn’t move away from your family! You know, but of course, as years gone on, I mean when my mum I mean I never moved away from my mum, you know I was next door to my mum, but hmm I mean when my children came along they were all made to move away, because there was nothing there for them you know.

**Because all the factories had gone?**

**Pat:** That’s right. All the factories have gone, there’s nothing now. You know. There was plenty then.

**So after Allard –**

**Pat:** Suppliers, yeah, I went to work for the, hum transport company which I ended part time, afternoons-

**Maynards’**

**Pat:** Maynard’s yes, Joseph Maynards, yeah. Just one thing… [whispering] God...

**What’s that you can’t remember?**

**Pat:** I can’t remember names. I’m not sure –

**Oh were it was-**

**Pat:** I know where it was, but I can’t tell you because it’s all, all different now, you know. Hmm…

**I’m so sorry. So just that we understand, Maynards what did they do?**

**Pat:** Transport, it’s transport, they used to transport. In fact, why I went to work for them, because they used to do work for the other company I worked for Allards Suppliers you know, they used to do work for them they used to transport tins or whatever and when I worked at Allard they used to make jams for hmm prisons and send to prisons and remand homes but the only jam they ever had was rhubarb and ginger [Laughing] that was the only jam that ever went to these places!

**Why was that?**

**Pat:** Well because they were in prison I s’pose they weren’t going to give you good jams, they weren’t going to give you strawberry weren’t they? They’ve got to have rhubarb and Ginger

**The least popular one!**

**Pat:** [Laughing] yeah!

**What was your favourite one?**

**Pat:** Um strawberry, I liked strawberry, yeah. I did like strawberry jam. But I used to be fascinated the girl with the jellies hmm they used to wrap, because they were wrapped by hand jellies put them in the boxes, the little tiny boxes and I used to be absolutely fascinated watching these girls do wrap em, they were so quick, wrapping up by hand and put them in the boxes. You know I suppose it’s like everything else, you know year after year, you know you get quite good at it. You know they were absolutely fascinate me to watch them you know.

**Was it very noisy where they worked?**

**Pat:** It was quite noisy, and it was very wet. When they used to have the boiling room down you know where they were boiling jam, it was very wet there you know. But they hmm jelly floor wasn’t too bad where the girls were wrapping the jelly, so not too bad at all there, it was quite a nice floor to work on you know. But as I said I worked in the office, and I – I liked it, you know. But we had a boss, he was terrible he used he used to have his office it used to be the whole floor was the office you know there was different people doing different jobs so now. The boss we had he used to, his office was at the back and hmm he used to have one clear pane of glass so he could see what we were all doing and hmm so he’d come out he said to this girl he said to her : “Have you got – are your eyes that bad?” “What?” He said “you’ve been cleaning your glasses for five minutes” [Laughing] It was terrible honestly. You weren’t away from your desk five minutes you had to be back they ‘were very strict.

**So it was like open – open offices?**

**Pat:** Oh yeah, the whole floor so I say you were doing invoices and then the girls at the back, were on adding machine you know adding up for you to invoice, and hmm and there was the accounts, you know they were behind you book keepers it was really, you know

**So you, what were you working on?**

**Pat:** Typing.

**Typing, so you would type up the invoices?**

**Pat:** Yes, yeah.

**So then somebody else?**

**Pat:** Behind there would be different department there would be the book keeping you know and then someone that’s how it would go right along to the back of the office you know like a whole say for instance from here to the front of my house say it was all open, that was the office you know.

**So maybe 30 people?**

**Pat:** Oh God there was more, yeah! There was quite a few people worked in there, yeah. They would you they would.

**Very big company.**

**Pat:** It was yeah, it was quite a big company. As I say because as I said they had these I mean these shops are not there anymore you know now but years ago there used to be big shops you know that grocery shops. Every town had a Liptons or Home Colanial you know, Maypole Perks, they were all part of that’s why they were called Allard Suppliers because they had all these different companies, worked for different companies, you know different shops I should say rather than companies, shops.

**So they, they, they were the- they owned the shops as well?**

**Pat:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. You see the company Allard Suppliers was all part of now what’s that big – that big company, it was the mother company… [sight] Oh God… It’s they do soap powder and all that, you know what they are. They are this big company, what’s it called? …It’s a comp

**No Unilever?**

**Pat:** Yes! Yes Unilever! Yeah it was Unilever and they owned the branch’s off that you know so that it was quite a big company.

**Right so you- you would type up the invoice (yeah) and then what would you do?**

**Pat:** Well, I just typed up the invoices and that what is, that was my job typing invoices. That was all I did and then as I used to say I used to work go on the switchboard and I worked at the switchboard temporary if the girls were having a break. But then when I after a few years I got there permanently, we had a double switchboard and I used to work one she used to work the other next and of course I left because of the children. And hmm but so I did end up on the switchboard. But previous to that I worked run around you know taking things to the factory, to the bosses different bosses’ office you know, take the post round and all that you know so a bit of a run around.

**And how did the switchboard work?**

**Pat:** Oh it was good, that was good! Yeah we had a double one and I mean not now, now it’s a different now but you’ve seen these old pictures you can put [Laughing]

**You have to plug in the cable to the right….**

**Pat:** Yeah and also they used to have a sausage factory as well where they make sausages, in SpaRoad and with my friend we used to play out a bit and so she sent me over to Spa Road for about three months and she says where jam is, where the jam factory was, then after that she- we changed over you know we used to mess about. But I did work over in Spa company, on the switchboard, and I can remember one day the boss came out I mean it was all plugging in plugging out really an old fashioned type thing, so I remember the bout coming out one day, he stood at his office here and on the switchboard quite a few feet away and he’d say to me: “You’ve just cut me off from Liverpool!” [Laughing] He was funny like that that, in Spa Road. He used to come out and if there was no one at the office cause it was only a small office there, there was no one, he came out and said “it’s like flag day or Glasgow’s central with no one here!”. [Laughing]

**That was in the sausage factory?**

**Pat:** Yeah that’s in the sausage factory, yeah. But as I said that’s not there anymore you got a block of flats there now, well same that estate. That was built on where Liptons were you know and where Allards Suppliers were yeah. No but we’d have a good laugh you know we used to have a good laugh, no but they were rather strict and you didn’t get well with anything really. But hmm my job I enjoyed it anyway. [Laughing]

**And did- did people who worked together so they socialized together you know?**

**Pat:** Oh yeah! Yeah we used to get a couple of laugh no we still got on quite well, yeah, I enjoyed it you know, met my friend came to work there and we were friends I suppose we’ve been friends for over 60 years you know unfortunately as I said she died last year but we started both started there you know.

**So but you’d still- you would see some people?**

**Pat:** Hmm not so much now, no- no. I did my friend but as I said but we kept together she was my bridesmaid you know so all the years we stayed together but she died as I said last year so… [sorry] yeah but I enjoyed my working life, you know didn’t have an awful lot of jobs but I mean I was pretty good really because this last company, the last company I worked for before I retired in 2006 I was there 24 years!

**The tin fac- the tin factory?**

Yeah- yeah, I worked.

**What was that called?**

**Pat:** Hmm Wilkinson Containers. Yeah I worked there for 24 years you know! Which was quite, that was quite a nice job to work for there wasn’t an awful lot of girls in the office but they’re just a small factory downstairs you know not big they employed about 50 or 60 people I suppose in that factory you know not like Allards Suppliers that had quite a few people you know but hmm no I enjoyed it.

**And that company had been there for quite a long- long time?**

**Pat:** Well I don’t quite know how long Wilkinson’s’ Containers have been there but hmm they I don’t think they’d been there cause there used to be over East London and they came over to South London you know but I don’t know how long they’d been there, I’ve no idea you know. But they weren’t originally from South London, they were from East London, you know Wapping, that’s where they came from you know originally that company.

**And were you working on computers by the end then?**

**Pat:** I was, oh yeah I was yeah! [Laughing] worked from typewriters to the computer, yeah I was working on computers at the end, yeah I was! [Laughing] Cause I had a good life I enjoyed my working life I worked all my married life I always worked. The only time I had off was five years when my younger son was born because I lived I moved to Peckham and so I didn’t have anyone to have him you know. I used to go in sort in holiday you know sometimes they would fetch me some work home for me to type out you know I’ve done that before now but hmm I didn’t go actually to work, if I went to work my mum would have him I would bring him over here and he would stay with my mum you know.

**And was it quite common then most women were working?**

**Pat:** Well that’s right. well, yeah that’s true you know I mean some didn’t work but I did, I worked as I said all my married life really apart from the five years when Mark when I didn’t go to work you know till he was five. Until he started school then I went to work. But then I worked only part time so that when he went to school I was there when he came home. You know so only sort of part time. But as I said years ago when I first started work it was different thing together you know [Laughing]

**Why?**

**Pat:** Well we would it was different in as much as it’s not a bit like today you know you had it was …you didn’t earn as much for a start, I think I earned about £1.50 I think I got £1.50 when I worked for I started work. I used to give my mum a pound and keep 50 pence or so.

**A month?**

**Pat:** A week. Not a month [Laughing] a week! It ain’t that bad- not going that far back- yes, so it’s hmm, you know you got it from there when I started it was only £1.50 a week, by the time I finished I was earning £400 a week you know so just it’s over the years, you know!

**And were women wages –**

**Pat:** Oh yeah we didn’t really get a lot wages you know really I mean men always did get more than us but I think times have changed now I think women are now on equal terms with men you know some earn more than men but in them days the women didn’t earn what the men earnt. No.

**So- but when you walk around the area now-**

**Pat:** Yeah. I can visualise where things were, because I mean I can I mean I was born in Cherry Gardens Street, well there’s a Cherry Garden’ Street this side of Jamaica Road but I was born in Cherry Gardens Street on the other side- now there’s nothing there now- that’s all gone now there’s all flats and that estate, that estate in Drummond Road I used to live in Fenner Road which was there along Drummond Road and I could tell where the church is, the church in Southwark Park Road, I know that’s where I lived in that road there because that church was at the end of my road so I lived there, yeah because it’s got that big Estate now the- Four squares, you know. But that’s where I lived. And I went from Cherry Garden Street up to Fenner Road, I lived in Fenner Road, and hmm but as I say where that church is I know that was my road so I can still see that there but now it’s all you try to visualise where the various things where you know, like when I got married I got married in Christ Church well Christ church is no longer there but it’s opposite the park gates where the vicarage well that was the vicarage but the nuns live in there, don’t they? Paradise street they live in there. So I there was a church next to that where I got married, you know. But that was pulled down. But it was all the smells, the smells around here you know there was onion smells, biscuits, there was jam, you know, smelling of oh coffee [Laughing] but hmm it was hmm I loved it and I never moved away from Bermondsey lived all my life in Bermondsey apart from going to Peckham which I hated [sigh] but I got back here eventually.

I came back here in 19 - I think I moved away to Peckham in 65? No… yes 65. I moved to Peckham in 65 Mark was about eight months old when I left and hmm I moved back here John and Steven were 18, I think I came back here in 72, 73 I think I moved back to Bermondsey, you know I moved to back to where Eldridge Court is, that used to Pearsons Dove made the custard, made the custard, made the custard andthey used to do custard powder and all things like that; Pearsons Dove. That was another, another one of the smells Pearsons Doveand custard. It was all so different smells you know? And I moved back there yeah I came back to Eldridge Court which was near where Pearsons Dove wasstill there anyway and then they moved us out of there and than I got this house and I’ve been there ever since, I moved in this house in 19 - hmm - 74 I think it was, yeah. I moved in in 74. And that’s it. And we bought it in 82 I think? Bought the house in 82 Which I don’t think I did myself any favours by buying that cause it’s all pay out, pay out, pay out[Laughing] I’d be laughing, but unfortunately I’m not! So that’s the story of my life! [Laughing]

**Thank you.**

**Pat:** I don’t know if it can be of any interest!

**No I think-**

**Pat:** Cheese biscuits in Peak Freans it was horrible smells of cheese, custard creams I liked them.

**All the smells you mentioned were very pleasant but were there any unpleasant smells?**

**Pat:** Well there were onions, and vinegar which was Sarsons and all different things you know. But there was plenty of smells but there was plenty of jobs always vacancies outside every factories. Vacancies, vacancies.

**It’s like an alien concept know isn’t it?**

**Pat:** Yes, it’s such a shame really- as I said you could walk out one job without any bother. You know, I told you about that girl, you know, she didn’t even hand in her notice, she went there to work for half a day didn’t like it- walked back up and she’s been off sick for the day, she’s been working

**That mean at the same time did that mean that you if they wanted to get rid of you they could do that as well- job security?**

**Pat:** Well I don’t think it was secure I mean- don’t really know- I suppose they could get rid of you if they wanted to you know but hmm like I say I don’t really know.

**But you had a very stable?**

**Pat:** Yeah I liked my job yeah. Yeah I worked for ages for them, you know. In fact I still got a letter and next year I would have been married sixty years next year right obviously husband died twelve years ago but, hmm I still got the letter with the lady who looked in charge of our section she hmm she wrote to me when my mum and dad sent an inviteto my wedding and she couldn’t come and she I still got a letter now, you know, where she said that if you get some photo cause my dad used to do photography and hmm so she said to me sent me this letter she said “if you meet up with your office mum” she called me her she was my office mum you know and I still got that letter now and that was she sent me that in 1953! [Laughing] She’d retired then! But as I always said to her coming to my wedding she used to say, ‘no I’m not coming to my wedding’, which she didn’t but it wasn’t because she didn’t want to, she it was a Christmas time and she was going away you know! But as I said I still got that letter now!

**Wow it’s lovely.**

**Pat:** I’m one of these a bit of a hoarder you know! I keep looking back at all the things the kids give me I mean I’ve got a something out there that Nicola done for me when she was eight! And I still got it and I can’t find a way you know my daughter and my sister you know “you should get rid of these”. I say “I can’t! I can’t throw what the kids have done for me you know!” It’s silly little things say something Kate did for me and I said to her- she said, ‘oh nan get rid of that’- I said, ‘I can’t! You know!’. [Laughing] I was trying to find some photos of you when you were small but I looked in that drawer – You don’t need this anymore I?