Stephen Williams

**Hi Stephen, thank you for joining us today. Erm, could you just, er, say and spell your surname for us?**

My name is Stephen Williams, surname is spelt W-I-double L-I-A-M-S.

**Okay, and can you tell us the date and where you were born?**

I was born in Dorking in March, 1954.

**Okay, and you are here as an individual doing this, er..**

I’m here just as a friend to help your project.

**Brilliant. Okay, so erm, my understanding is that you cut your teeth as a factory inspector, here in Bermondsey, erm and you did your training here,**

**is that right?**

Yeah I started here in January 1977. So virtually straight aft-straight from university, and I worked here for about 3 or 4 years before I moved to another part of London and then before I moved to our headquarters, and then moved down to Ashford, but certainly this is my formative area. South London, working out of the, erm, Southwark office, which was at 36 Blackfriars, Trowbridge Road, and it started and then-er, I did a spell out of our Lewisham office as well.

**Okay. Erm, so we can get a general understanding of your role then, which might inform the interview, is could you give us a general understanding of what you did, a typical day, and what your job was for.**

Okay, well a typic-typical day after training, ‘cause of course in the early stages the days weren’t typical because I was specifically being taken to factories to see, see specific activities so that I could understand them in the future. But, of course, in those days an awful lot of activity was carried out in either very rundown industrial estates, particularly the bigger factories as the closed down, being divided into smaller factory units or in the, erm, railway arches of South London. So, a typical day there would be to get us a bunch of our files together, and then go out in a geographical area based round, probably round one of the stations, and then actually inspect those factories that had come up as part of our system for as due for inspection.

**And what were you inspecting?**

Inspecting for health and safety, inspecting for compliance with the legislation, inspecting to see that reasonable conditions were being maintained for the people that were working in the factories.

**And when you turn up to a factory to, erm, inspect it, what was the reaction of... was the factory there, what was the reaction of the workers?**

Okay, well one of the key things that, erm, we did in those days and actually that remains to this day, is the importance of our unannounced inspections. You know, one of the key things was to make sure that you saw the working conditions as they were on a day to day basis. And this, of course, has both advantages and disadvantages. The disadvantages of turning up unannounced are that the owner of the factory or the owners of the factory might not be there to talk to, so you got to talk to the, the top people. The advantage, of course, is that you actually saw what was happening on a day to day basis. So that was, that is what we were doing, we were there to check compliance with the legislation. And when I started, the Health and Safety Work Act had just been passed. So I started in 1977, the Health and Safety Work Act came into force at the beginning of April, 1975. And that was a fundamental change of the legislative regime, from the very prescriptive legislation of the Factories Act and the regulations made under the Factories Act, to the goal setting legislation of the Health and Safety Work Act. So part of that period and that time was actually of educating the workers the management and everybody else who was involved in creating a safe environment into understanding that actually they had a new, a new way of looking at health and safety, and this is a fundamental duty under the Health and Safety at Work Act, which is basically to look at your activities and make sure that they are safe, so far as is reasonably practical is what the law says safe in a reasonable way would be a common term for it. Safe in a reasonable way to those who were working in the factories and those who might be affected by the factory activities.

 And that was a very big change from the legislation which actually said paint the walls of your factory every 14 months, guard your machine in this particular way, have these machines checked every 14 or 6 months. So it’s a very big shift in thinking. Now, at that stage the Health and Safety Work Act and Factories Act ran in parallel for a while, but um, then after that, reach, um there’ve been Factories Acts in the UK since, well pretty well since the start of factory inspecting in 1833 when the, er when the first law which was the, I think Health and Safety Morals of Apprentices Act was passed. Erm, and the first four factory inspectors were appointed. So, there’s this long tradition of very prescriptive, very detailed legislation often arising as a result of a particular problem. So, asbestos regulations, for example. A good, a good example of, erm, of the way detailed legislation grew out of particular problems. Abrasive wheels regulations. Abrasive wheels breaking and then flying off of course are a real concern, so some very detailed regulations on abrasive wheels. That legislation was starting to become old fashioned against the goal setting Health and Safety at Work Act.

**In terms of the Health and Safety Act was it more employee person focused rather than machinery focused?**

The focus was to actually, really to step back and first now days sitting here in 2013, it seems a completely obvious way of doing it, you know. But in those days it seen as quite a radical change of thinking. The purpose was to actually get people to step back from there activities and say, okay, effectively what can go wrong with what you are doing, how can that affect other people, be it people who are working in the in the factory or be it people who are coming via the factory, people in the vicinity, and what can you do what should you being doing to control those risks and to get people to think a bit like that. In some ways a much more common sense approach; it arose partly out of our civil liability legislation. Well not the legislation, duties under civil liability, it was basically a much more sensible way of looking at things.

**And in terms of the processes did the Health and Safety Act change the processes in which you used in which the factories had to sort of set themselves against?**

In some ways yes and in some ways no. Um, in-in-in the, in terms of yes because the legislation increasingly has become more goal setting it gives the people who are in charge of risks a wider way of actually explaining and particularly understanding and then particularly managing those risks so long as they ensure it is safe it doesn’t matter how they get there sort of thing. Umm, on the other hand, obviously, some machinery that is used today looks exactly like machinery that was used when I started in 1977, looks exactly like machinery used in the 1900’s. And, you know, a power press today would look vey similar to a power press of years and years and years ago except that it would no longer be driven by line shafting if you understand that but it would be driven by a individual electric motor.

**Ok and you used the word goal setting quite a lot what does that mean in the context of the Health and Safety Act?**

What it means effectively is if it says you should ensure the safety of people so far as is reasonably practical. So it sets that goal, that’s the standard you’ve got to meet. And what it does then is allow you to meet that standard in any, in a number of different ways so long as you can prove you have got there. It’s a bit like taking a journey you know you can go several different routes from here to London Bridge, you can go by bus, you can go buy bicycle, the Overground train and walk and that sort of thing, but so long as you get there on time you’ll have met your objective. It’s a bit the same in health and safety terms.

**And who drove the Health and Safety Act, was it the government, was it the unions?**

The Health and Safety Work Act was a result of a report by Lord Broden whose regarded, widely regarded as the architect of our modern health and safety.

**And did the unions play any part in shaping that or were they quite vocal.**

One of the things that um, one of the things that, the Health and Safety Work Act did was to set up the Health and Safety Commission and that was very, the whole aim of that commission was to be a for a health and safety system to be run by a tripartite grouping of government, employers representatives and union representatives. So it was a, like a three way process that was set up by the Health and Safety Work Act. So, if you look at the early parts of the Health and Safety at Work Act it sets up the health and safety mission the health and safety executives gives the inspectors the power they need to, go about their work, et cetera, et cetera. In fact that’s been overtaken in recent years by the abolition of the Health and Safety Commission and the HSC is now run by, as a policy organization. We have a board of non-executive directors and a chairman –currently Judith Hackett who um, chair, who runs sets the strategic direction for the Health and Safety Executive, the executive-the organizational body. But, um the functions of the Health and Safety Commission are echoed by the Health and Safety Executive’s Board, current Board.

**And how welcoming was the Health and Safety Act from the point of view from the employer and also from the point of view of the employee?**

Well I think it depended very much as to whether you were a big company or a small company, and it still does actually. Big companies have always been able to deal with the concept of health and safety so far as is reasonably practical ‘cause they can, they can do the thinking, they can think, ‘okay we’ve got to get to that standard, what is the best way of doing it?’ Um, smaller companies for a long time regretted the passing of that detailed prescriptive legislation ‘cause they could read the legislation and say, ‘I’ve got to do this, this, and this, when I’ve done it I know I’m safe,’ was their sort of attitude. Um, and then when people came along and said, ‘well you’ve got to just do the thinking yourself ,’ I think that came in some ways harder for them. Not for the enlightened ones of you like the enlightened ones they were perfectly happy with that. But for some small companies they struggled with goal setting legislation. In terms of the Health and Safety Record, well the Health and Safety Record in the UK is basically second to none across the whole of Europe. If you look at any of our statistics, you’ll find that UK, GB is always at the top end of what is achieved in terms of health and safety. Um, and compared to some countries around the European Union, remarkably so. So, overall I think that most people would argue the Health and Safety legislation has worked. So when I started work, there was something over five hundred people killed a year through work related activities. Last figures that we published, there were less than two hundred killed.

When, um, if you think of the Olympics and the whole of the Olympic project from the first day that we won the bid through all the huge enabling works and demolition works on what was a very run down part of East London, all of the temporary works and putting the services in the ground all of the work then to build the iconic venues on the Olympic Park, the year of test events, the running of the Olympic Games themselves, the change-over from the Olympic Games to the Paralympic Games that rushed period betwixt and between, then the Paralympic Games themselves the fantastic opening ceremonies. All that was achieved without a single work related fatality, which is a fantastic story. And, of course I think quite rightly the government, the HSC, um, the UKPLC want to trade on that and say to the rest of the world, look: A) you can do it and you can do it safely. Secondly, you can do it safely and come in on time and on budget, ‘cause of course there was a completely immoveable deadline for the Opening Ceremonies. Thirdly, you can make it exciting and enjoyable, if you think you have exciting Opening Ceremonies were and the Closing Ceremonies were for the Olympics and Paralympics. And fourthly, of course you can just turn round and say, ‘and actually, you know, if you follow UK way of thinking you can, you too can do the same sort of thing and do fantastic work without injuring or killing your workforce.’

**And talking about health and safety in the context of work-related deaths and injury, it gives a positive context and health and safety seems to have moved certainly in my work career I know we take these courses in health and safety and everyone talks about health and safety and u do you think there is a different context in which health and safety is spoken about to when it was first introduced?**

There is no doubt that over the last say, eight to ten years probably that period, maybe twelve— that other people have hijacked health and safety for their own aims in a way in which was not helpful, has not been helpful. By which I mean there are some consultants who do the typical plumbers thing. You know, when a plumber walks into your house and goes, you got a problem but I can fix it for some money. And I am afraid to say consultants have done the same, so there’s been a growth in consultants over egging the pudding, asking people to do far more than the law requires, far more than is needed for health and safety. That’s one unhelpful development which we’ve been addressing. So there’s now a register of health and safety consultants so you can go to the people on that register and know that you’re not going to get someone who’s going to behave like that so that’s one problem area. I think from probably spreading from The States, but this is a personal view, you got um the whole question of civil liability and claims and and people being scared into doing more than they need to for health and safety because their lawyers, their insurers tell them they need to do it. Um, thirdly people, and you see this routinely, just use health and safety as a easy excuse not to do something they don’t want to do for completely different reasons. So for completely different reasons they’ll turn around and say, they think to themselves I don’t want to do it, I can’t do it because of health and safety. And so we’ve got a, we’ve got what’s called a ‘myth busters campaign’ to, to-to address that. Se we have, we have currently running two challenge, challenge panels. One is challenge panel where if a regulator makes a decision that you are not happy about you can go to that challenge panel and say “I’d like that decision reviewed because we don’t think this is a sensible decision we think the regulator has gone over the top umm but actually what is much much much active is our second challenge panel, myth busters panel and you can go on our website and read our myth busters which is, enables anybody to write in to HSC and say “I was told I couldn’t do this for health and safety reasons what do you think, HSC?” And then we’ve got a panel of independent people outside HSC so we as the officials, we as HSC give you the formal position we say “yes there are regulations on this or “no there aren’t,” all this sort of thing. Then the panel, as, if you like, the ordinary man or woman in the street is then able to say “this seems to be bonkers.” And that’s very active, I mean we’ve done well over two-hundred cases since we started that a year ago.

And we publish we publish them and try and get some real publicity for, for the wilder allegations of health and safety. You know, “this restaurant didn’t allow me to use a tooth pick because of health and safety grounds.” You know, “they band cups of tea at the schools fete in case someone got burned by the kettle,” you know that sort of nonsense.

**Yeah no skipping ropes, no conkers.**

Yeah, conckers, bonkers stuff. So there is for various reasons over the last, I say, eight, ten, twelve years the name of health-, the brand of health and safety has become unfairly tarnished. We’re doing an awful lot of work to regain that brand and say, you know be sensible be proportionate and to say actually managing health and safety properly is just one aspect of good health and safety management and managing health and safety properly is one aspect of good health and safety management is just one aspect of good management generally. My experience over the years from right when I started, going back to where we started this interview, the firms that used to run their factories properly for health and safety you could tell they were normally profitable, the conditions were good for their employees, they had smart cars sitting outside, they were managing their waste properly. And it’s true, absolutely true today. If you go to a well run company it tends to be well run across the piece, health and safety, environment, waste control, cost control, etc. Um, same is true of a construction site. Decently run construction sites tend to be safer. So, good health and safety management is frankly just one aspect of good management.

**As so we’ve covered, probably not all of it, but health and safety in which was part of job implementing, as it was an Act that had just come in as you started. Was there other Acts, or procedures, or parts of your job that you did in the early days in Southwark?**

Well, I suppose the main functions of a factory inspector then, and now actually, were first of all to carry out if you like proactive unannounced inspections just to see what conditions were like. And we still do that in the higher hazard industries today so those industries which we have, we have looked at and said “look this sector is still causing problems,” in terms of health and safety, we still do unannounced, proactive inspections. Ports, docks, foundries steel works, etc. You know, those we do that, that’s if you like job number one, or one element of the job. Second element of course is to investigate complaints, and we do that both over the phone and by letters, but also by, if we think it’s serious enough, by sending people out to look to see what is actually happening. Thirdly, of course we investigate accidents and um, a-and cases of ill health, and we used to do that in those days. So, I remember one of the first things I did as a factory inspector was to go with the inspector that was training me to help him investigate this accident where a person had got caught on the stock bar of a lathe, and been turned round and round been dragged off his feet by the force of this, gone round and round and round and broke various bones in his body. And it was very serious- it was an absolute standard thing that you should fence the stock bar of the lathe, and that hadn’t. And this chap had got very badly injured. And there were a lot of, there were a lot of quite nasty injuries in those days, as I’m afraid, there still are today. When I say it’s less than two hundred people being killed, it is less than two-hundred people killed, but it is still around two hundred people being killed as a result of work activity. And, if you look at the number of cases of ill health and disease and other injuries there is still a substantial burden on the working population of the UK. Um, and that is the other side of the question about the health and safety brand. There is damage to the brand by people who have over egged the pudding and taken it too far. What I see on the other hand, of course as well, is the serious injuries deaths and disease that poor management of health and safety risks can bring.

**When we went to unite the union one of the things they were talking about and what they’ve been doing some work on is um the unseen workforce, the domestic service in this country. Um, who clean offices or factories in the middle of the night, and sort of, um they were looking at, I can’t say exactly I only picked up a little bit but that domestic service where maybe there’s is not such tighter rules because you don’t see it as much. Umm, and I just wonder if, you were saying, you know, there’s still fatalities we’ve sort of gone very health and safety but actually there is still a work force that’s maybe unseen.**

I think there is always ever since I started um there were pockets of the employed workforce who were disadvantaged compared with others. So I moved from having worked in South London where you’d see actually bad cases of exploitation, people working in conditions that we wouldn’t contemplate regarding as acceptable Um, I then went down to work in rural Kent. I worked out of our Ashford office, and there you would see, particularly in the smaller villages in rural Kent where there was not very much other employment to be had, you’d see people being really exploited and working in very poor conditions because they knew if they made a fuss they had very little other choice in terms of work. And, quietly they would be very pleased to see you and see you were trying to do something about things. I suppose now days some of our key problems in terms of pockets of the work force that are exploited, first of all migrant workers. Um, particularly, you know we don’t care two hoots the law treats everybody the same we don’t care whether they’re here legally or illegally or what-from a health and safety point of view, obviously the government does from other points of view. But, um the law provides the same standard of health and safety. But of course that’s a tricky area for-for enforcement generally.

Always, it’s always been difficult where you’ve got shift working, after hours working, maintenance working, those are activities which are not exactly unseen but they’re not, because they’re not happening day to day 9-5, it’s far more difficult to both manage, from an employer’s point of view, but also to regulate from an HSC point of view. So there are, there are pockets of work force that perhaps need more attention and more help than others and we do special initiatives. So for example one of the initiatives that we did last year and the year before was to go out and look at the working conditions of those working in the fields doing harvesting, um manual harvesting and pack house working, that sort of-that grey area between after the food has been sewn that grey area as it is harvested and then prepared before it gets to the supermarket. Traditionally, migrant workers or certainly temporary seasonal workers often migrant workers, um and um traditionally um very variable conditions.

**I was thinking when you was er talking about turning up unannounced, or letters, and I was just thinking about the tools you have used in your career to communicate and to do your job. I just wondered they have changed and maybe impacted on your job and also the messages you are trying to get across and the changes and the implementation of the Health and Safety Act.**

Well in fact, in some ways the tools I would use if I was going out inspecting today are just the same tools I would have used when I started, because the basic Health and Safety Works Act hasn’t changed over that period of that time. It was such a good bit of legislation that it has stood the test of time, so, I mean the tools, what I used –well, first of all, actually just talking to people and trying to persuade them, then you could always write if you are not convinced that they’ve got it, we could always follow it up with a letter. If you think that things are really important and really need to be changed, you- we have the powers of an improvement notice, if something is immediately dangerous, we have powers of prohibiting people, if we feel they have broken to the law sufficiently badly, and have therefore met the test for public prosecution, we can take them to court and prosecute them. We have powers under the Health and Safety at Work Act to ask for a director to be debarred and prevented from running a company for a period of time. We have powers to cease, render, harness and destroy stuff and equipment if we feel that it’s, uh, sufficiently bad. All those powers have stayed pretty well exactly the same over the years. We’ve had some fluxuations, we’ve had one or two hurdles put in our way, but actually now the same tools are available, and the government would recognize now the importance of using those tools where people are seriously at fault.

**What about in terms of equipment, what equipment you would have used, maybe in the office or…**

That’s changed. That has changed um I mean when I started we used, used to have what was called the Kalamazoo Account Register. So we’re talking a fancy but glorified paper system with records of every, every factory that we knew of course we didn’t know of all, of all of them because not everybody did what they should have done, which was to register with us.

Um, so we’ve gone from that to um, you know computer databases and screens. We’ve gone from carbon copies when I started. Yes, I can remember carbon copies. I can remember the typists typing a letter I can remember typists having to retype letters and not being very happy about that. So we went from the days of typed letters and carbon copies through to photocopying of course, now emails, digital printing and everything that we associate with a modern office environment. We went from days of our own individual offices even as relatively junior members of staff. Through to, we’re all in open plan, hot desking Um, quite tight hot desking ratios and indeed I am just about to oversee the London office a further change, where we’re going to increase the heat of the hot desking if I can put it that way. So of course there been, there have been a lot of changes in those terms. Um, we’ve also recently introduced Fifa Fault as a direct means of charging.

**Sounds like an X Box game. (Laughs)**

Yes. (Laughs) So, in past if we turned up and wrote subsequently wrote you a letter or subsequently served an improvement, or Prohibition Notice, we would come check it off, make sure you’d done the work and that would be that. Now days if we turn up and find that there is a material breach of the legislation, then we would write the letter but we would also say, “by the way because you have broken the law here, here is a bill that runs with this letter until you have got yourself back into compliance with the law.” And similarly for improvements, prohibition notices, for serious matters for significant material breach and, so not for trivial matters, obviously, and – so that’s a change, that’s a change that. And it’s a direct link on the principle of the prohibitor pays. If you are breaking the law, then you should be paying for that responsibility and you should be paying the cost of the government having to regulate you and having to bring you back into compliance. So there have been, there’ve been changes in terms of the way we’re organized, which I won’t go into ‘cause it, it’s fairly dull. But as we have changed the size and shape of the organization and as we’ve changed our structures, become much more efficient hopefully also more effective as is demonstrated by downward, erm, downward trend in accidents and-uh fatal accidents and health cases. We’ve changed our tools in terms of our communication tools, but the basic powers and the basic job today would be still recognizable to someone working as a factory inspector 50 years ago and certainly when I started which was, say 1977. Um, the job that I did then and job that I would do if I went out as an inspector now would be perfectly recognizable.

**You were saying about um, I was thinking about communications changed, um, and as you’ve seen today our servers down we’ve got no emails no internet and communicating with the outside world is a bit difficult, has that changed the way you’ve communicated with the employers the way that you have communicated with society about your message have they all been positive changes?**

Well I think, I mean we-what we are able to do is for far, far less money is communicate with a far wider audience. So, HSC is on twitter and all those things that you would understand, um, so in that respect we are just the same as any large, large modern organization we use all the means at our disposal and those that the government is happy with us using to communicating our messages. And obviously we cut our cloth according to the money we get to do that. So in that respect I think that we work much more effective much more targeted in our activities much more, basically, as I say, much more effective and efficient as we go about our work. In terms of the one to one communication, frankly that still depends on what it depended on when I first started and that is of training your staff well so they can communicate effectively with the people you are trying to influence. ‘Cause all said and done, when there’s one inspector influencing a factory owner, fact-you know, managing director, the sole proprietor, you’ve got to actually use your personality your communication and ability to get them to see the light.

**Umm and like you said you did work around here in 1977 and we’re looking at work in that period from 1935 to the present day what was Southwark Bermondsey, Rotherhithe what was it like?**

What was it like?

**Yeah what was the environment like what were the people like?**

Well people-people, people are the same everywhere in some ways. There’s good and bad amongst them and of course there was good and bad amongst them in those days. I never had to be honest I never had too much trouble um I think there was reasonable respect. Umm as I say, some factories welcomed you some factories were less keen to see you depended how, how down they were in the pecking order in terms of their activities and of course one or two of my colleagues came across straight forward illegal activities and had, had to in fact had to make a hasty retreat and call the police. Um, it was a run-down area I mean compared with what it is now warehouse prices are rocketing where old warehouses are being turned into flats and apartments and all that sort of thing, you know, you wouldn’t have thought of buying a house in Southwark in those days. If only I had. I would’ve been a rich man now. So in that respect it was a very different area, it was rough, you know it was, it was, it wasn’t-it wasn’t in some ways the vibrant area it is now, although in some pockets, some pockets of activity­­­­­­­­­­­­, I remember visiting the boat, you know, person making-making yachts in the railway arches, South Bermondsey, quite big yachts were being made up in fiber glass and, you know, umm you can still see if you go ‘round now and you see some of the names of the factories on factory buildings you can see names of some quite big firms. There was a lot, there were a lot of small firms increasingly fewer and fewer of the larger firms as the larger firms realized it was actually much cheaper to move out of London, sell there what was starting to become valuable property in London move out to green field sites, better sites, brown filled sites where they could expand but cheaply. Um, but that-if you look the whole of South London is criss-crossed by railway lines with railway lines South London come railway arches in the railway arches in those days there were an awful lot of activities. Um, from printing to publishing, as I say, wood working factories, metal working factories plastic factories a lot of double glazing was being made in those days because it was the start of the double glazing era, so an awful lot of, um, quick double glazing factories sprung up. Uh, it was an interesting area.

**Worked seemed to be very local from people we have interviewed it seemed to be very local and a-er, a public thing. People knew where everybody worked you would see them going into work and coming back from work. Umm, during your time when you were going round the factories did you feel that environment that community feel of the area?**

Yes and it probably came home most when you were going to interview people after an accident or something like that you didn’t normally have to travel much outside the area to go to their homes to take the statements to interview them about what had happened. So it’s not like, um, it’s not like, if you like, people working in my office who can-people can live, you know, probably a hundred miles apart. Certainly at least eighty, nighty miles apart because someone can live in North London and work in Central London some would live in South London commute in. Whereas, most of the people in the factories were locally based, it seemed to me.

**And with the people we’ve interviewed also had very when we asked them how they felt about their jobs and the environment they worked in the majority of them say they had very good relationships with their employers with the people that they worked with and that it was quite a positive atmosphere. Um, and I just wondered again if that is, that is something that their thinking about retrospectively that you know now there’s years gone by and actually it was quite nice did you see that when you went into the factories?**

Most of the time there was particularly smaller firms where you had to get on it was a reasonably good atmosphere and people rubbed along together ‘cause they had to. There were pockets of difficulties, printing industry was one particularly the newspaper industry because the unions and the management, you know were fighting battles as the technology changed within the printing industry and I’m sure people’ve talk-talked to you about that. But, umm, but generally most of the factories were reasonable atmosphere.

**Um, no, no one has told us about the printing and union, sort of, disagreements. What was that what was they sort of disagreeing about…?**

Well this was as new technology came along in the printing industry, think newspapers, think Wapping, think the-the change in the way in which printing technology was –and of course the old printing unions were struggling to maintain standards and maintain the conditions for their workers as new technology came along which actually made it much easier to still do a very good job. Um, so there were unions then that don’t exist now, of course. SOGAT. MGA. All of whom are now wrapped up in big umbrella union organizations. So that-that-that was, and of course health and safety got pulled in sometimes as an excuse sometimes from the unions to bash the management of vice versa.

**I was going to ask you that umm-if there was…**

Occasionally.

**…if there was a role for you within those disagreements with the unions and the, and the employers.**

Occasionally. Most of times it was to say, “this not a health and safety matter thanks very much guys and girls,” you know, “sort yourselves out.” I think it was Len Murray who was the, um, general secretary of the TUC who when asked about one particular printing dispute said he thought the printing unions and the printing management deserved each other.

**Wow that’s quite a statement.**

But you can probably look that up.

**Yeah and of course this area had the docks and a huge area of this was the docks did your work ever encounter the docks or was it just**

Not much, no, I didn’t I didn’t um, cover the dock area I think in those days we probably had that as a separate specialist group rather than general inspection which is what I was responsible for.

**Do you ever remember seeing the docks when you came, when you came to the area and sort of what was happening?**

Not in the way I wish I could do, to be honest. I mean my only experience of dock work was when I was working in Kent and I used to go down to Dover occasionally and Folkston if they had problems but not London Docks.

**And in terms of the area you were saying that it has changed and you know just the environment and the aesthetics of that has changed in the times in which you worked I’m just looking at those buildings and the people who worked in there and did you feel when you know you was doing your job day to day?**

I never felt worried, threatened or anything like that. I would happily wander around, I mean maybe I was being naïve but I would happily go ‘round places without any fear of coming across problems. Indeed I can remember to this day two incidents. One, I’d gone into a factory, given them a bit of a hard time, ‘cause it wasn’t very good. Come out, found I had locked myself out of my car. So I then had to go back into the factory and ask if anyone had any spare keys “don’t worry gov’ I’ll get you in.” He hadn’t got any keys at all but he got into my car in less than 30 seconds. And that taught me a lesson straight away.

**Wire coat hanger. (Laughs)**

(Laughs) No he didn’t bother with a wire coat hanger actually. No, no, that’s what I expected, I expected right to the coat hanger, but in fact he used one of those packing strips and just slipped it and- he was up very quickly indeed. So I remember that. I remember, I remember another occasion where the car wouldn’t start so I had to go back in a factory and several blokes came out and gave me a push to bump start the car. So there was a general, there was a general acceptance that you were doing a job that needed doing.

**Yeah. Um, there was just a question that I thought of when you were saying about taking statements if there had been an accident and I just wondered within that process what was the feeling of the people who were giving those statements and who was you asking in those circumstances?**

Well the job was to collect evidence to find out what had happened in the, in the- you know, around the circumstances of any particular accident. So, let’s take a hypothetical accident: man cuts fingers off on circular saw he alleges there’s no guarding on the saw, we come in to investigate –so you need to actually find out, was there guarding on the saw or not, were the guards regularly removed or not, who-did the management supervise that and try and stop the workers doing it, etc., etc., And it was that sort of statement this was to explore whether there should be a criminal case or not out of it.

**And the people who were around there, the witnesses, were they willing to give statements?**

Mostly, no mostly people were very willing an prepared to give statements. And, I mean sometimes I would do it in the factory if there was somewhere quiet that you could sit. Sometimes I’d go to people’s home if they were still off with their injuries. Sometimes I’d, sometimes they’d like to have someone else to listen to the questioning and sometimes they’d say no that’s fine just go ahead sort of thing.

**And can you maybe name some of the factories that you-you visited, we won’t ask you whether they were good or not. (Laughs)**

(Laughs) Uh, I can’t really. No, memory dims me. Course we’d go to whole sort of—

**Because we’ve heard of places like Normans, Pearce and Duffs and the Gelatine factory…**

I probably tried to avoid the gelatine factories ‘cause they were always pretty smelly places, but I can’t remember, I mean this was ’77.

**Did you ever encounter the leather factories that we’ve heard really, that were really smelly?**

I knew of the leather factories, yes, I knew of the leather factories but I don’t recall ever visiting. I remember visiting a candle making factory which was pretty pongy and obviously there were a lot of hot wax everywhere but mostly it was small engineering, small woodworking, printing factories in those days engineering factories down that sort of, that sort of stuff.

**Where –in terms of health and safety inspection or factory inspection where do you see it going in the future? Will it still have a role within the work place?**

I think it will always have a role within the workplace I think that you have to get out and about, you have to see what’s actually happening. Apart from anything else you need to see what new things are coming along and try and consider what the health and safety risks are. I mean, without being boring there are various arguments about the need of countries having a labour inspectors and that sort of thing. I think increasingly we will continue to do what we’re doing now, which is to target our activities on the key risks. Make sure that we’re not wasting our time going to places we frankly you never really hurt yourself or get hurt. I think that will-that will continue. And that continues partly because of course the whole of the manufacturing or let’s say the commercial base in the UK continues to change away from the heavy manual factoring and the heavy industries through to service and, and-uh commercial in the office base sense of the meaning, commercial sector. And of course the more that happens the more you do move away from the high risk activities you bring other risks, you know, you bring the risk of call centres and that sort of the thing, but…

**That’s very interesting as you were saying that like we don’t produce as much in-in this country, so you think ah there’s not that much risk but then if you go into retail shops or offices like you said there is still that need to make sure people are being looked after.**

Yeah, there’s a need for people to assess the risks whatever your activity is. But in an office environment you’re not going to be run over by a steam train. You know, that’s the crude way of putting the way things have changed. In an office environment, you’re never going to have your hand in a power press. So, the level of risk assessment and the level of risk control, um, is very different because the office we are sitting in here would look like someone’s front room. You know what your front room is like so it’s a completely different way of looking at things.

**One of the things we’ve been looking at is the physicality of work and how maybe, not even maybe, but you know, the physicality of work is decreased now we sit at computers and we don’t stand all day and, we stand up when we have our tea break. Um, and I was just wondering if your job has change, the physicality of what you do. I know you still go out and visit, but…**

Well my inspectors will still go out and visit for some of them it will still be a physical job. So, if you’re an inspector on construction sites, you’ll still be walking across the construction site, you’ll still be climbing ladders, and that sort of thing. Um, I mean it’s not so much, how the job of the factory inspectors changed its just as you change your position in an organization you tend to get more and more office based, more and more sedentary.

**Would you say you’re more office based?**

I’m more office based now because I manage a staff of, you know, 350 people so.

**Do you miss the physicality of going out climbing ladders?**

Certainly when I retire I keep thinking that I must do something that is more physical as well as other-other things, yeah.

**Has that had and any effect on your health or, um, your movement because you are more office based now, have you noticed any changes?**

Creak a bit when I get up (laughs). The truth is but that is nothing to do with that’s happened over the years for everybody you know it’s nothing particular for us. That’s where-that’s where the whole of society is going.

**And just one final question I was just wondering if um working in South London, working in Southwark could you maybe tell us maybe what you learnt from that and the benefits and stuff that you’ve taken through to the rest of your career.**

Yeah I think first of all I think there’s don’t make assumptions treat everybody on their own merit. Um, I also learnt that the who argued the most usually then did the work once you had convinced them. So, to beware of people who agree to readily to do because they may not then follow through with that. I-I learnt how British Industry runs which was fascinating, you know, because I saw so many different processes you know I know if someone is extruding plastic moldings I can, you know, instantly know what that brings to mind. If someone says they’re turning a wooden chair leg I know exactly what that means. If someone says we’re dye casting this I can think yes I know what that looks like. I know how that book is printed and bound. And that is fascinating.

**It is I wouldn’t have a clue. I’ve got no idea. It sounds like you had a rich training but also time to understand the profession in which you were going into.**

Yes, yeah and that’s still true today.

**Umm and how did you get your job, sorry. Did you have to go for an interview…?**

Yeah, yeah um I was kicking my heels post university because I didn’t-didn’t go to what I was going to do and my father had a visitation from a factory inspector and he said “it seems to be a socially useful job, you’re out and about, not just in the office all day.” So I tried for that, had had the interview even remember some of the questions I was asked at that first interview.

**Oh what were they?**

Well it was all about I mean, ah there had just been a rail crash in a tunnel and so they were saying ok there’s a crash in a tunnel you have flammable liquids what precautions you are going to take just to see if you could think through.

**So was there any criteria’s had you studied anything that would have helped you be…?**

There was criteria yes, but not specific to what you studied. In fact, the recruitment policy has always been to take a wide spectrum of people. You know, art graduates, science graduates, chemists because we need that wide diversity.

**Ok thank you very much.**

Thank you.