Howard Sturrock interview (0:45:44)

Thursday 10th November 2022, 13:00

Chandler Building, UCLan.

Present:

Howard Sturrock (HS)

Keith Vernon (KV)

Helen Howell (HH)

Maggie Wild (MW)

HH It’s nice to meet you Howard, thank you for coming in today. Just to start with would you mind saying your name, and if you don’t mind, your date of birth as well please?

HS My name is James Howard Sturrock, my date of birth is the 24th of April, 1942.

HH Thank you very much. So when did you actually attend the Harris?

HS I attended from 1955 to 1957.

HH Right, thank you, erm...

HS I have got my last report here if you want to look at it.

HH Have you? Yes we would please, yes.

KV We would love to.

HS I found as much as I could, in my archive, which I had a job to…you should never really put a file in there with books in, should you, it doesn’t work very well. Right. [Rustling] There’s all sorts of things in here, including pictures of my daughter and granddaughter, which shouldn’t be in there, but never mind. I’ve got my old blazer badge…

HH Ooh look at that!

KV Yeah.

HS Have you seen that before?

KV I’m not sure I’ve seen… I’ve seen a hat badge…

HS Well that was on my black blazer.

KV Yeah yeah.

HS pauses – Ahhh, [HH oh wow] That was my first year’s report, and that was my second one. If you want to have a look at those, or photocopy them, or anything you want.

HH So how old would you have been when …

HS The first one? Well I would have been, er, 14 I think, it’s on there, the last one was just before I left, so I would have been 15. I was 15 years er… 15 years and 3 months when I left, and at 15 years and 4 months, I started work at Leyland.

HH Did you? [HS Yes] So what course did you do at the Harris?

HS Erm, well it was just the Harris Secondary Tech in those days. I failed my 11 Plus, much to my father’s disgust, I went to the Secondary School, and they said you can go to the Tech if you pass the exam, but we don’t recommend you do that, ‘cause you won’t get as good an education, which quite frankly was a load of bollocks, er, so I went there, and I got a brilliant education. I went to Leyland, and the, all the new starters came, August the 19th 1957 it was, they divided us into 2 groups, because they had their own school there, you know, and, they said the ones who went to the Tech or to a Grammar School that side, those who went to Secondary School that side. So if you went to the Tech or the Grammar School, you went straight into S1, because they did their S1, S2, S3 at Leyland Motors School. So that meant, as I had passed everything, by some miracle, I actually had my Ordinary National when I was 18, which was pretty young. It all went down hill from there, but, so that’s how I came to be here. 03:15

HH So, what did your family think about you coming to the Harris?

HS They didn’t bother, it was just another part of my school education, you know. Junior School, Secondary School, me dad went to Grammar School, and he was a bit distressed that I didn’t do anything, you know, and all the rest of it, anyhow, I proved him wrong, but there we are.

HH And did you enjoy the time at the Harris?

HS Yes, it was a great. Er, it was very, very good. Odd things you didn’t like, but basically speaking it was very, very good, yeah, erm… And obviously, it gave me the sort of education that I needed to go into engineering, because not being one of these professor types, or anything, I was never interested in history, geography and all that, which we had minimum amount of I think, to carry us through, but we had - the Maths was split into four different sections, it wasn’t just Maths, it was Algebra, Trigonometry, Mensuration, I’ve said that right I think, and something else, I can’t remember now. It’s probably all there anyway [indicating the report on the table] er, and I quite enjoyed it, yes, I was always good at Algebra, don’t know why but I was, and I also remember now, you went back to teachers, you had a fair list of teachers, there was one teacher who came, and I can’t for the love of me remember his name, I rang Jeff Littlefair, I rang Jack Smith, he’s rang a mate of his who came afterwards, and they can’t remember either, but basically when we started we had, er, Mr Hulse, Jock Hulse, you’ve also heard of him [HH yes] and he took us for woodwork and something else, and then we got another teacher called Mr Cross, who came and took us for woodwork, we had a fella called Bell, a little fella, ‘ding dong Bell’, who took us for metalwork, and he moved out of it and came back, I don’t know what happened, and a younger chap came and he took us for metalwork and for technical drawing, in place of Mr Tookey, who took us for that then, you see, now this bloke, who’s name it was, I can remember him now, I can picture him, but I cannot remember his bloody name, and Jeff Littlefair, Jack can’t remember either, so I don’t know who he was. I’ve got all the other names of other teachers here, you’ve probably got some of them anyway, but Jack will have probably told you quite a lot.

KV Can you remember what he taught?

HS He taught Metalwork and Technical Drawing…

HH And did you say he was a fill-in teacher?

HS No! I think he was permanent, because there were…they had a few teachers came and went you know, when I was there.

HH His name might be in the list, in the prospectus, so we might be able to have a look at that for you…

HS Yeah well, I can’t remember, I can describe, him, he was a bloke about late 30s, and I remember, when he took us for metalwork, I was making something meself, and I went to see him at lunchtime, and I went down into the downstairs machine shop and I asked him about cutting speeds and stuff like that, I can remember the conversation, but I’m buggered if I can remember his name [KV and HH chuckle]. Right. [HH thanks.] Do you want to chip in with anything? 06:34

HH Er yes.

HS You can see there on the last one [indicating the report] I got 90% for my Technical Drawing. [HH right] That’s [ineligible] [Rustling of papers.]

HH The last one…oh yeah…

HS Now this chap, who’s name I can’t remember, he was invigilating at an exam that we had to take, when we left, and he came up to me in the exam, and said I’ve just been marking your drawing results, report, you got 90%, he was quite surprised, and so was I. Er and I remember saying that to him, in the exam, he was very unusual for that, but he did, you know. I subsequently went to Leyland, and got into the Drawing Office, and I bloody hated it you know, but there we are, it was one of those things. When you start as an apprentice, you’re on the shop floor, you’ve got overalls on, you’re hourly paid, and all the rest of it, and my object to the exercise was to [move myself off ?] to the staff, so I got an opportunity at Leyland, they took us for S1, S2, S3, for your Ordinary National, but those who did well in the second year, they got an extra day off, S3, with 2 days off, in [illegible] to do Jig drawing, which I did and a lot of it was drawing bloody Jigs and fixtures which I could not abide, anyhow we did that, and I was the last one to be picked, and they sent for me, and said erm, ‘We’ve got a place for you in the drawing office,’ I said ‘Where’s that,’ he said ‘Jig and tool drawing office,’ I said ‘Well I don’t want it’ he said ‘Well you did say, that when you got [?with us?], if a position came up you would have it,’ [‘Well if I have to, I have to’ ?] but I said ‘I don’t want it, I’m not interested,’ all the rest of it. ‘I want to work on vehicles, you know,’ and so that was that. 08:22

HS Now then whether it was nepotism or what I don’t know, but the chap who said that to me, was a fella called Harry Glassbrook, I don’t know whether you have heard of him, he was the student gaffer at Leyland. And coincidentally, my father …’scuse me, [Redact: ‘me nose is running, it does when you get old…’?] my father was a civil servant, and at that time, he was manager of what was then called the Labour Exchange, now it’s called whatever it is, in Leyland, and he knew Harry. Now I’ve no idea, I know they spoke, but I’ve no idea whether that would do me any good or not, but anyhow, that’s what happened, you know. If you’ve got family in the trade, why not use them, you know. So that was that. We’ve digressed a bit now haven’t we. 09:07

HS Do you want copies of those?

KV If you don’t mind, that would be…

HS I don’t mind you copying them at all yeah, that’s why I brought them.

HH Thank you. What else have you got there?

HS Ho ho ho, well, a picture of me daughter and me granddaughter, I don’t know how they got in there. The names of the teachers that I’ve got. Have you got all of these or what?

HH We’ve got some of them, yeah.

HS And there’s one on there that’s missing, and I can’t remember his bloody name.

KV Did you get on with the teachers?

HS Most of the time, yes, they were very good. We were quite well behaved, because we were, I suppose you could say we weren’t the thick end of the… the people who took the exam, there were 60 odd people who took the exam every year, they got 3 batches of 20, 1A, erm, 1B, 1C, and there was no problem. Jock Hulse was [10:09] was a funny fella, he was alright, but he was quite strict in some ways, and the other ones, he was a bit of a character, and there was another chap who came later on who took us for geography or history, and his name was Mr Topping, and he was a bit of a, I don’t know anyhow, we always called him Spinner Topping, and the people in the 1A class, one of them was quite a wit in there, and he wrote a poem about him on the blackboard, which caused a problem, and it was to the tune of Davy Crocket, [sings] ‘Spinner, Spinner Topping… blah blah blah’ you know… and it was, this got seen, and the whole school got a telling off for that, you know. But nobody particularly liked him, he was just an idle sod, he’d come in and he’d give us a book and he’d say ‘read this, read that, then write something about it,’ and he’d bugger off for a smoke, you know, so, he was… I didn’t disagree with him, you know, he was just – useless.

HH Were there any teachers that you did admire, or think highly of? Was he an exception?

HS Yeah, I think so, they were all pretty good, you know. We used to have Mr Birkett, who was the head, and he used to take us for English, which, our English perio, in our class, was the last period on Friday, and what we did then, he taught us, well he didn’t teach us, he recited to us the novel ‘The 39 Steps,’ do you remember that? He had the book with him, and he never looked at the book, he knew it off by heart, the whole book!

HH I wonder why he did that? 11:50

HS I don’t know. It was [illegible: ‘one of those things’?] thing anyway. And the other…we’ll digress onto all sorts of things, but you’ve heard about the great flood have you? 11:59

HH No.

HS No, well, class 1A, their classroom was opposite the door that went out at the quadrangle to the gym. You come upstairs, it was classroom straight ahead of that, and it had a wooden floor, which was an old wooden floor, it was very good, and at the back of that classroom there was a sink, and the sink had a big brass tap on it with a square on, and Miss Mellor, who was the art teacher, who couldn’t keep control, you’ve probably heard about this, on her keyring she had this big brass key with a square on, to allow people to use the sink for doing a bit of painting. And so they used to use that classroom for other classes, ‘cause it wasn’t class 1A that did it, because Jeff Littlefair who I know, he was in 1A, he told me it was another class, went in there to do art. And some bright spark, got a pair of standard issue school compasses, you know the old brass compass with a knob on the side, got that onto the tap, opened the tap, and couldn’t turn it off. In consequence, the whole room flooded, there was water flowing down the corridor, which was a marble floor or something else like that you know, and they couldn’t get this thing stopped. The benches were that way, [indicating] and the floor was that way, laid, planks, and the benches that you sat at were double ones, big old-fashioned things, with a wooden bar across the bottom, and the floor erupted, as the wood expanded, broke all the bars on the bottom of these things, you know…

HH I bet that was quite spectacular. 13:39

HS I can’t remember who was responsible, which class, but it certainly wasn’t class 1A because they’d moved out, and Jeff Littlefair, who doesn’t seem to want to be involved in this, he told me it was not their class, which figures because other classes used to go in there and use this sink facility at the back [HH wow] Whether its [not?] there or what, I don’t know, they had to obviously mend the desks, and relay the bloody floor, let it dry out and do it again, you know, which must have cost a bob or two. [HH yeah, yeah]

KV Were there any other incidents like that? We’ve not heard of this one, and…

HS Well, there was a lad called Salisbury, he wasn’t in my class, I can’t remember his Christian name, and he was a big lad, tall lad, and there was another lad who was quite small…and I think it was Mick Salisbury… decided one day he would pick him up by the scruff of the neck and hang him over the top of the steps, which was quite a drop down to the basement there, and nothing happened, but Mr Birkett found out about it, and he sacked him, ‘cause he said we can’t have people endangering the lives and all the rest of it. Then of course there was the big inquest, and he apologised, and he was re-instated, but, you knew never to mess about there, because that staircase if you went up the third floor down to the basement was a hell of a drop. I presume the basement is still there is it? [KV yeah]

HS ‘Cause we used to go down there for Woodwork and Metalwork, so that was the only other incident that I was aware of. I think his name was, it was [illegible] Salisbury, I can remember his surname. Are there any other names on there that you’ve not got, or have got, or anything?

KV I think we’ve got most of those.

HS …You can read my writing?

HH M Carroll, I don’t remember that name, [HS Who?] Carroll, is it?

HS Miss Carroll, she was the art teacher before Miss Mellor, [HH oh, OK], and Miss Mellor, was the one who couldn’t keep control, and I was always one of the good behaved lads, you know, there was always a few in the class weren’t there, you know, and Mr Birkett was taking us for English one day, erm, and in the, because they had so much trouble with Miss Mellor, I was sat there one day, I’d not been larking about much, I’d just done something, out of order slightly at the front of the class, and Jock Hulse came charging in through the door, and he said ‘Are you having any problems Miss Mellor,’ because they were trying to keep it, you know, and she said ‘Oh this boy’s being a bit troublesome’ so he dragged me out, and sent me to do something else, you know, and then when he took us for English, the following day or two, he said to all the class, he said ‘Now then lads,’ he said, ‘this larking about with Miss Mellor, it’s got to stop,’ he said ‘we expect one or two of you,’ he said, ‘but when it comes to Sturrock here,’ he said ‘we’re totally surprised because he…’ [laughs] which singled me out as being a goody-goody.

HH Did you do things in the eve…, like after school, after class, with your class-mates?

HS I didn’t, no. Some of them did, because they’d come from same schools and all the rest of it, and they were sort of, more from Preston area, you know, I know Jack Smith did, and one or two others. I mean, you see you’ve spoken to Jack Smith haven’t you? Jack was in my class, and er, I’d nothing to do with him really because we sat opposite each other, and he knew a lot of other people, and I knew one or two people who had come from Penwortham, so that was it. ‘Cause you weren’t tied to be with them anyway, because you were just split up into three classes. How they split us up I don’t know. That was that yeah.

HH So how did you travel in to, erm, the college?

HS On’t bus.

HH Right.

HS I used to go home for my lunch, as well, in Penwortham. [HH Did you?] Used to get the bus go home, and come back, yeah. ‘Cause they had what they called the Refectory then where you could have a meal, and it wasn’t very good you know, er, then there was also, which you must have heard of, the café on the corner, which was referred to as Septic Fred’s [HH was it?!] Everyone that went in… so, because when I started on S1, I went to Day School, they shut the Refectory so if we wanted a brew or anything, we used to walk down to Septic Fred’s, and he always had Pyrex cups and saucers which I never really liked, drinking out of this you know, er and you could get a piece of toast and stuff like that you know. A friend of mine, who was quite wealthy, he’s died now, he was a millionaire, I said ‘Do you go in Septic Fred’s?’ he said ‘Yeah,’ I said ‘What do you have?’ he said ‘A bottle of coke,’ he said ‘they can’t contaminate that.’ 18:28

HH So where was that café?

HS Er, as you come past the old Tech Building, the next left is an estate agents on the corner or something now – No it wasn’t, no, as you come down past the Tech building, you turn left into the car park at the bottom, and the main entrance, don’t you, that used to be Kendal Street, [HH oh right] and it was on the corner of Kendal Street [HH was it] [KV ah ok] right.

KV So – that way?

HH It’d be that way, won’t it? Probably all been built on now.

HS Well if you go down [HH not this way] if you go down from Corporation Street, to Edward Street, go past the old building, [KV, HH yeah] to where they built the entrance past it now, down the slope, that was Kendal Street, there were terraced houses along there and everything, you know, and there was – the canal was at the bottom of there, you know. I’m going back a bit like, I am 80, you know. 19:23

HH Did you do PE?

HS Er yes, I was never very good at PE, I used to get out of it if I could do. We used to go in the gym and climb up things and all the rest of it, and we used to do football. Now football and me do not agree, whether it’s on television, whether you’re playing it, or anything. It’s the most useless bloody pastime in the world. And we used to go to the old Harris Art uilding, you know where that is don’t you? [KV, HH yes], and then down the Colonnade, over the old tram bridge, and there were four fields on the right, which we used to use for playing football. There was pitch 1, pitch 2, pitch 3, [?] and pitch 5, which I was always on pitch 5 because that was where the nobodies were, you know, ones who didn’t bother, you know, and I used to hate football. We used to go into the old art building there, and there’s a big long - like a theatre thing, where you’d sit down ramps like that, which we used to go in there, get changed and walk across, you know. And Mr Tookey, and somebody else, used to take us, yeah, and I got out of it as much as I could, you know, but there we are. 20:28

HH So did the – did you ever bump into the girls, when you were in the building? [HS No] No? Were you separated?

HS We were separated. They were doing other things, you know, and there was never any occasion when we met, at all. Er…[pauses]…Anything else you want to know?

HH Erm, erm, sorry – were there any down sides in going to the Harris, do you think?

HS Er, I can’t think of any, I enjoyed it. The days were quite long, we used to finish about half past 4 or something, which was quite long in those days, we started around I think it was quarter past nine, but er, it suited me that, it was no problem.

KV What kind of school did you go to beforehand?

HS I went to er… well it was called Penwortham Secondary Tech then, it’s called Priory now, off, just off Liverpool Road. I went there for 2 years, and I failed me 11 plus, and I was at the junior school next to it before that.

KV Ah ok, and how did you find…so there was an entrance exam, or something?

HS Yes.

KV Did you, was that organised through the school, did they put you forward, or did you…

HS We were told we could apply for it, and I applied for it, oh yeah dad helped me fill the form in or something, and I got a erm, a request to come here one Saturday morning, and they sat us all down, and did an exam. In the second year, I invigilated on one of them, being one of the senior boys, you just had to keep an eye on them that was all, it was a piece of cake, and that was all it was, and you knew nothing then. They picked the best 60, split them up somehow, and put them into 3 classes. 22:23

KV So the school – so people at the school told you about it, did they?

HS The staff at the school told us about it I think, I can’t remember. I do remember the recommendation that we shouldn’t go because we’d get a better education where we were, which as I politely put before was a load of bollocks. ‘cause we did. If I’d stopped there, when I’d gone to Leyland, I would have been 17 before I actually went into S1, S2, S3. By the time I was past S3, I’d got my Ordinary National, you know.

KV You said that your dad was a civil servant in the …

HS He was a civil servant, he always worked for the Ministry of Employment. He was the manager, he was manager at one or two places, but at the time I went, he was manager of the Labour Exchange, as it was called then, which was in Northgate, in Leyland, it’s a private building now, you know, and then he went to Morecambe, and Lancaster, then he came back to Preston, which was a big place, as deputy manager, then he moved over somewhere Manchester way, we had to live in Marple, so that’s when I was on my own until I eventually got married. He was quite a clever bloke my father, but he always had a big chip on his shoulder, because he had a brother who was two or three years older, and unfortunately, he caught diphtheria when he was a little lad, and he finished up with a tube in his neck and he couldn’t talk properly. He could talk like ‘kkkk,’ you know, and I could understand him because I’d known him all my life, you know, and he did…failed his 11 plus, and me mother, me grandmother, who was very wealthy, she paid for him to have everything and all the rest of it, you know, and she more or less neglected me dad, ‘cause he always said ‘There’s people in my class who are doctors and surgeons, and that now,’ you know, he always thought he never got the opportunity – which has got absolutely nothing to do with what we’re talking about, but there you are.

KV You were saying that he was a bit disappointed that you failed the 11 plus?

HS Well he passed his you, see, oh yes he wasn’t very happy at all. Oh, he says ‘You’ll finish up being a labourer at Leyland Motors. Well I finished up at Leyland Motors, but I wasn’t a labourer, I was a staff member, you know. 24:55

HH How long did you work there?

HS I worked there til 1970, and then I got approached to go and work for another firm, which you will never have heard of, called Chiswick and Wright, who were the biggest exhaust system manufacturers in the country, we used to do all the [original?] equipment for Jaguar Ford and people like that. I started there as a development engineer, and finished up as one of the sales managers, and then I moved over to Bainbridge, which you might have heard of, the after market people, and I set up something there, and like a fool, somebody approached me, and I left, which was now daftest thing I’ve ever done, but you do all these things, you know. I was quite an expert in my field by then, you know, so, anyhow, not to worry. Right.

HH Did your mum work?

HS No. No, she never worked as far as I knew her. She worked, obviously, before she was married. She used to work – she came from Wigan, Ashton in Makerfield, and she used to work as a seamstress, or something, at a factory in Wigan, where they made gents trousers, and er, if I got some trousers that wanted altering, she wouldn’t bloody alter them the bugger.

HH Oh! She’d had enough!

HS So that was that, yeah. And my father and mother met, because at that time he was working for a labour exchange in Ashton in Makerfield, and she must have been out of work, and that’s how they met. All these strange things you see. Right, anything more about the Tech?

HH Erm, you’ve got your leaving certificate there I see, is that from the Harris?

HS That leaving certificate was just, er yeah that’s – there’s three there aren’t there – that’s the last one, where I got 90% for drawing, taught by a bloke who’s name I cannot remember, and nobody else can either, but there we are.

HH We’ll have to solve that mystery won’t we. 26:53

HS When I left school I was 5ft 2, and I weighed 6 stone 11.

KV And how old were you then?

HS I was 15 point 4, 15 years, 4 months it would be, wouldn’t it, yes.

KV When you got the place at Leyland, did the college help you with that?

HS The only thing that they did in those days, because there were so many jobs about for people, Harry Glassbrooke, who was the apprentice superintendent at Leyland, and another bloke who was a similar thing at English Electric as it was called then, came to school and said please come and work for us. I always liked vehicles and all the rest of it, so I always wanted to work at Leyland. 27:42

KV So it was more kind of ‘We’re looking for people’…

HS Yes, I still had to go for interview and all the rest of it, er, it wasn’t a God given right you would get a job, but most people that left the Tech, without any problem got a job at English Electric, Goss’s or Leyland. And then out of 60 people, there’s always a couple of twits aren’t there, you know, but that was the situation.

KV And you went into an apprenticeship at Leyland [HS yes] and was there any further study as part of that and did you do that at the firm, or did you come back here? 28:23

HS I studied S1, S2, S3, which got me my Ordinary National, at Leyland Motors Day Continuation School, and then I used to come here one day a week to get my A1 and my A2 to get my Higher National, and I struggled to get the maths in A1, I had one or two goes at it. All this differential calculus and all that you know, and I’ve worked in the drawing office, I’ve designed things, I’ve never in my bloody life found anybody who’s ever found a use for differential calculus. Simultaneous equations, you can understand that, I’ve used those many a time, because I was quite good at basic Algebra, but a lot of the stuff we learnt was totally, utterly useless, you know, like learning Latin, what good’s that, you know. So..

KV Sorry Helen, just on the apprenticeship thing… so you came here for a day a week, was that throughout your apprenticeship, and how long did that last for? 29:19

HS It lasted for… but it should have lasted two years, A1, A2, but it lasted more than that because I had 2 or 3 goes at taking my A1, you know, so that was a few… but once I’d got me Higher National Certificate, and I worked in the Drawing Office, which I absolutely hated, because the Drawing Office had these big boards and all the rest of it, and there was a research department at Leyland, where they did engine testing and stuff like that, you know, which was the same level of job, it was a staff job, so I went and saw my boss one night, the technical director, a fella called Norman Tattersall, and I said ‘I’d like to go and work in research, Mr Tattersall’ ‘Why? He said, I said, ‘well I want to, I don’t like Drawing Office so much’ ‘Why don’t you like it, designing and all the rest of it?’ he went on and on and on. He said ‘Well if you go to research,’ he said ‘you can’t come back’ I said ‘well that’s fair enough [30:13] suits me fine.’ ‘Well I’ll tell you what then,’ he said, ‘you can go for 6 months, and if you want to come back, you can do, and I bet you’ll be back’ I said ‘No way’ so I left and went into research, and as such I was working at the same level job, but it was much more interesting, you weren’t stuck at a board all day, you’d got engines to run, reports to write, and you’d got fitters who were…the fitters weren’t under you, they were under a foreman, but I could tell them to take that engine to pieces, and all the rest of it, but they were disciplined by the foreman [KV ah ok] who was a pillock, so…

KV Sorry to keep…so your apprenticeship, was that in technical drawing, or was it in a more general engineering kind of thing?

HS Er [rustling of papers]

KV Ooh that’s interesting – so fitter cum draughtsman, so that’s a bit of both?

HS Yeah [KV Ah ok] Because a lot of people later on in life, which used to annoy us, who’d get a degree in engineering, and they’d come in, on, I found out, they were on more money that I was on, and they’d come into research, where I was running an engine or something like that, you know, and they’d say ‘Right, I’m so and so, and I’d like you to teach me all you know about the job,’ to which my reply was ‘You can piss off, I haven’t spent all my life working to get to this level to tell you what to do. We can talk about football, motor racing, but we ain’t talking about that engine there.’ Well they accepted it, you know. Sorry for the colourful language.

KV We’ll edit it out!

HS Oh of course, you are recording it aren’t you.

HS Do you want a photocopy of that or not?

KV If you don’t mind, we’ll take photos or photocopies of…

HS That was just a…that was one of the exams, Christmas term 19…These were some of the exams I took, and I kept the papers, er [papers rustling] [Pauses.] 32:29

HS That was, well those are my qualifications, Ordinary National Certificate and mechanic…, some of these were at the Tech and some were at Leyland School, and, [papers rustling] what’s that? Ordinary Mechanical Engineering, Leyland, oh yeah, Tech, the lot [HH oh wow] I thinks that’s all of it, well that’s the, that’s the original certificate, [HH oh yes] [KV Ah right] I’ve got a copy of that on my garage wall, you know, and if people say ‘How do you know something like that,’ you know, I thought ‘Well I was taught by Sir Henry himself, you know, Sir Henry Spurrier.’

HH So how would you now, looking back, reflect on your time at the Harris? 33:16

HS Er, at the Harris, at the Secondary School, from 55 to 58/57, it was brilliant. The Higher National Certificate, some of the teachers weren’t all that sympathetic, and some of the subjects we had to take, which were totally, and utterly irrelevant, that’s one of the things I remember, you know, I mean, I still don’t know what differential calculus is, it’s absolute – I took the exam twice, three times, I took it on us own once, just to prove a point, and I got 42%, which was a pass, and that was it, and there were 8 people, 10 people took it, and 3 of us passed, it was that hard. Once you got to AS, erm, A2, it was much more sensible, you know, that was that, so there we are.

KV But within there, obviously you were able to go in to the research area, and you didn’t need degrees and stuff to do that kind of thing?

HS Not in those days, degrees were very, very rare on those days. Very few people I worked with, who were my age or older, (quite a lot were older, you know,) had degrees, and it was only in later life, when they started this degree business, they got people with degrees, offered them a job, you know, and they started them off in Research or in the Drawing Office , and they were in their 20s, they’d obviously got a brain to be able to get a degree, erm but they had no practicality about them, which is real, you know, and I’ve worked with people who’ve got degrees in engineering, and they don’t know the right and wrong end from a bloody spanner, you know, which is… [redacted]. Right.

HH Well thank you very much. Is there anything else that you’d like to mention, that we’ve not talked about? 35:24

HS Erm, I can’t think now [pauses]… I don’t think so.

KV Can I – did you have any brothers or sisters there?

HS I’ve a sister who was a few years younger than me, and she went to Grammar School, and again, me father was disappointed in her because she could only get, got clerical jobs, and stuff like that, he was very, very that way, my father, you know, and er…

HH Did she come to the Harris? 35:57

HS No. My daughter came here, she’s got a degree, and that’s how I came to be a member of the Alumni. I went to her graduation, whatever it was, and a chap who’s dead now, who was a vice chancellor, I can’t remember his name…

KV Was it Brian Booth?

HS I don’t know, could be. Er I was talking to him, you now, and I said, ‘It’s 2 generations, I went to the Tech.’ He said ‘Are you in the Alumni?” I said ‘No’ he said ‘Give me your name and address,’ the next thing that’s where all this came about, otherwise I wouldn’t be here.

HH Do you go to the meetings that they have regularly here, the reunions?

HS I go the reunions. Some of the lectures they have I’ve never been to those, they’re not interesting to me. Because they cover such a vast range of subjects, you know, I mean when I went, it was a Technical College, you know, it wasn’t a – dentistry and doctors and vets, and all the bloody rest of it, you know, so that’s where we’re at. Er, yeah, I’ve two daughters, the other one went to Manchester Metropolitan University at Alsager…

HH Ah that’s where I grew up.

HS Is it, Alsager?

HH Yes, yes, I went to the Comprehensive School across the road from the College. [HS oh right] Was she a teacher, teacher training?

HS No no, she’s got a degree in some, some nebulous bloody subject, I don’t know. Well both of them have got good jobs anyway, they don’t rely on me. The bank of dad has never had – well has had to come to the rescue on a temporary basis once or twice, but they’ve both got houses, cars, everything’s paid for, so, I can indulge my savings in a Jaguar and a Bentley [laughs].

KV Did you meet your wife at Leyland, did she work there? 37:46

HS. No, no. No, I had a mate called Mike, and he was a Roman Catholic, as my wife was, which again is a load of twaddle but there we are, and er, there was a woman having a coffee evening, or, a sherry evening at her house in Penwortham, some wealthy woman, and she said to Mike, she said, ‘We think you know a bit about drinking, would you like to come and be the barman?’ so he said, ‘Yes.’ She said, ‘What about an assistant?’ oh he said ‘I can find somebody.’ So I went there, and that’s the first time I met my wife, and she was the cousin to this bloke, well I met her again, and we started going out, for a long, long time, falling out because of religion, which is ridiculous, anyhow we sorted that out and got married, so I was quite, well - I was 20- I was 30 when I got married, and wife was 32, so we started off quite late in life, which gave us a bit of financial stability, you know, I was always a tight sod, so – I was able to buy a brand new four bedroom detached house, and I’ve still got it you know, so that’s that really. 38:58

KV OK.

HH Right.

HS Anything else?

HH That’s been really interesting, thank you very much.

HS I haven’t bored you to death have I?

HH No not at all.

MW My question, sorry, in terms of taking copies, there is a printer upstairs, but would you rather take photographs, then you’ve got them digitally, or would you like photocopies?

HS Do what you want with that lot.

[HH, KV MW chatter about how to copy the documents]

HS You don’t want a copy of that do you? [HH Yes please] That’s my old badge from 1955, ‘HI.’

KV So obviously there was a uniform?

HS Yes. Oh, that’s another thing, there was a lad who, in class 1A, called Woodruff, and he was one of the people who was a real scallywag, he was always getting in trouble. And, er, the school uniform was a sports jacket, or a black blazer, with grey flannels, and he came in once, in some trousers which had a stripe on, and Mr Birkett pulled him up about this. Now there used to be a shop in Preston, who’s name escapes me, it was a well-known cheap shop, and he said ‘What are you doing with those trousers on, in the school uniform?’ He said what do you expect for 6 and 8 pence from wherever it was, you know? [HH and KV chuckle]

HH I think somebody was saying that the uniform was…

HS …and the other thing, Jack Smith, he doesn’t remember this, ‘cause I told him about it the other day, he could be a bit of a rogue, we used to have set squares, you know, 45 and 30 degree, and in Miss Mellor’s class one day, he decided to set fire to one of these, well, they burn very well, you know, so she sent him out to see Mr Birkett, and he came back, and said ‘Have you seen Mr Birkett?’ ‘No, I don’t think he was there’ and he’d never been. He’d forgotten about that, but I remember it. 41:00

KV The thing with Miss Mellor, was it just that she couldn’t keep control of the classroom?

HS Yes – she was a nice woman really, but she just hadn’t got the discipline. Now Miss Carroll, who was there before, from what I can remember, she was alright – she was one of those people, we traded on her weakness, are you with me? [KV Yep] You know.

KV It wasn’t just that she was a woman doing Art, and seemed like fair game to…?

HS No, it was just that she was the sort of person who was a bit sort of weak in, er, disciplining us, you know. [Pause]

MW [Whispers] I’ve got questions. 41:44

HS You’ve got a question? [MW Hmm] Go on.

MW You’re taller than 5 foot 2, now. [HS yes] But you were 5ft 2 when you were 15, is that right?

HS Yes. When I started work, my mother bought me 2 boiler suits, and she turned them up, at the bottom, and before I’d worn them out, she’d got me old overalls and she’d extended them. I’d shot up, and I was going on for 6 foot at one time, I’m 5ft 8 and a half or something now, my doctor tells me, because you shrink as you get older, you know, but I really did grow, it was a phenomenal rate of it, and er…

KV Jack said that he was quite small, when he started, [HS yes] and throughout the time, so growth spurt…

HS ‘Cause Jack’s taller than me now, er, that’s it really, er, because when I started work, at Leyland, the first thing they did, because you were young starters, rather than put you in the training centre where you learned the mechanical bits of, how to do things, they stuck you out in the works, and I was with three inspectors, and my duty I had to do, was take some paperwork from there, twice a day, over to the main office, it wouldn’t happen these days would it, you, tap a computer and that was it, that was my main job, so I was in the old engine shop and I enjoyed that, because I was only a little lad and I used to go and work on the test benches and I got to know them people you know, and er…can’t think why I started this now…oh yes – when I went there, I took over from a bloke who was going into the training centre, who was a bit older than me, and I was instructed that I was going to be the pie lad, because outside the gates in Northgate there used to be three vans, and people used to go out there for the pies. Now, there were two queues, one for the people to get a pie, and one for the lads with a box, and I used to go round in the morning, get the orders off all the blokes in the morning, make a note of it, go to this pie van, in the lads queue, this that and the other, put them all in, then I’d go back and pay them, and they always gave me a pie for me dinner, or two pies, and in those days, I’ve done it, I couldn’t do it now, I’ve eaten 4 meat and potato pies for my lunch [KV and HH chuckle]. I got that many once I boxed ‘em up and took one ‘ome for me tea, but now, if I get a pie, you know, I’ll cut it in half and have half fat a time, but you know when, all I can think of is a diet of pies made me grow so bloody big, you know.

MW I have one other question sorry. You were James, you are James formally, but you’re known as Howard, were you Howard when you were at the Harris, or?

HS I was always Howard.

MW Ah, James is your Sunday name?

HS Yeah, well, me father was called John, and his brother was called James, me mother wanted Howard, so they stuck the James in front, which has been a constant source of bloody trouble, you know. I go to hospital, and they say ‘James?’ and well that must be me, you know. Er, I’ve got the doctors to call me Howard now. Any new ones come I say ‘Hold on a minute, it’s not James, it’s Howard,’ and they get to know in the end. And they’ve actually, they’ve underlined Howard on the computer ‘Ah, we’ve got you now.’ So that was that, you know. I have another friend, he’s died now, he’s called John Martin Fish, and he came here and did his HNC I think, and he was the same. He’d go anywhere and ‘John Fish?’ His name was Martin, you know. Why they did it I don’t know. So there we are.

KV Thank you very much.

HH Thank you.