# Audio file

[Bob Smithies.MP3](https://msuclanac-my.sharepoint.com/personal/frobinson3_lancashire_ac_uk/Documents/Transcribed%20Files/Bob%20Smithies.MP3)

# Transcript

Keith Vernon

So thanks Bob for coming in. Just for the record, just say who you are and if you don't mind your date of birth?

Bob Smithies

Yeah. Robert Smithies known as Bob. And I was born on the 18th of January, 1938.

Keith Vernon

And and when did you first come to The Harris?

Bob Smithies

The summer of 1951, and I left in the summer of 53.

Keith Vernon

So was that to the was that the junior technical?

Bob Smithies

And. Junior Junior technical school? Yeah.

Keith Vernon

OK, so So what was it like at the tech? What was it?

Bob Smithies

Well, as I said, I was a bit of a loner, so I don't recollect that many items from then. And but yes, Mr Burckett was our formed teacher, and so the 39 steps is obviously one of the things that I always remember and I watched every film that comes out 39 steps. But Mr Burkett, it's probably the only teacher I really remember from. From my time at the school, but I enjoyed it.

Keith Vernon

Yeah.

Bob Smithies

I had just failed the exam for Balshaws and went to the Leyland secondary modern and there was a teacher there Miss Buck and she was the teacher you always remembered.

Keith Vernon

Yeah,

Bob Smithies

that sets you on the path that your ambitions. And she took me in hand really made me buckled down. So I actually passed the exam also for the Wigan Technical College and this one and the Harris and my preference was always for the Harris.

Keith Vernon

OK, so which is interesting cause didn't wig Wigan Tech have a sort of a better reputation at that time?

Bob Smithies

It had it had a better reputation, but it was in mining town and I didn't want to go in mining. And as I said, I went into the weaving side at at Harris.

Bob Smithies

I really don't know why I chose it, but I think it was the design and that sort of and I enjoyed that side of it. But when I left, I didn’t want to go into the weaving. It was a dying industry if.

Keith Vernon

You want, yeah. Just backtrack a moment you're talking about the exam. What? What was the exam like and what did that involve? Can you remember?

Bob Smithies

Well, what I've always done alright in exams so I can concentrate for a period and I I I seem to get better results in exams than if I was assessed over a year.

Keith Vernon

Yeah.

Bob Smithies

So the exams themselves didn't cause me any anxiety at all.

Keith Vernon

Was it like? A general knowledge kind of thing or maths or English.

Bob Smithies

There was maths and mainly general knowledge.

\*fire alarm sounds\*

Keith Vernon

Just see if it is a test.

Bob Smithies

11:00 is it?

Keith Vernon

Yeah. Yeah, it will be. And. And did you did you come here to take the exam?

Bob Smithies

Yeah, I came. I came here to the Harris buildings for the examination. Yeah. And it was a room full of all those students. And there was probably 3 or 4.

Keith Vernon

Yeah.

Speaker

So.

Bob Smithies

From the Leyland area that I was aware of. But the rest were all from Preston and that.

Keith Vernon

Yeah.

Bob Smithies

But again, for exams, the you concentrate on the job in hand if you want, and I didn't really take a great deal of the surroundings.

Speaker

Yeah.

Keith Vernon

Yeah. Yeah. And we was it, Miss Buck, did you say that?

Bob Smithies

Miss Buck was the the teacher in charge of Form 4 at the Secondary Modern, so it wasn't the highest class. It was down one step. There's five in each year and Miss Buck sort of took a fancy to me in the sense that. I was quiet. I didn't cause any trouble and. Tried to do my best and and she did encourage me a great deal.

Keith Vernon

Now. Where was she like a form teacher or?

Bob Smithies

Yeah, she was the form teacher for form four and she lived in Leyland, and she was a spinster. But she was a great. Woman. Yeah, yeah. Yeah, it's the one who's sets your ambitions going and and and she got all there was a few teachers in the Junior School but her. The PE teacher there was ex-army and those little ones didn't like him at all.

Keith Vernon

Yeah, yeah. And so was it, Miss Buck who sort of, did she tell you about the opportunity, the exam?

Bob Smithies

Yeah, she, she, she explained when I was coming to the Harris and the Wigan tech exams. What it really entailed and what the future was. And probably a little bit of her instruction was that. Yeah, we'll be better at Preston Harris than I will be at Wigan.

Keith Vernon

Yeah, were there many people from your school who took the exams?

Bob Smithies

No, there was nobody else from the second modern went for the Harris one. There was a couple actually did the Wigan one. Yeah, and that was in the well, it's now the library. I think it it was like the town hall that that that we had then. But Wigan was Wigan. If you want in those days so. As I said, I lost my dad in 1940, so my mother has always I’ve been an only child in that respect. Yeah. So and till I was 10, then she remarried. But. So I I didn't, sorry to keep myself to myself. I was brought up with grandmas and and all that. Sort of thing. Yeah, yeah. During the war years.

Keith Vernon

Yeah, and. Did your mother work at?

Bob Smithies

All well, my mother did all sorts of jobs. She worked in the. My great grandad set up the the London Birmingham Rubber factory so she went to work there and she was making gas master during the First World War and that and then she went to the ROF, Royal Ordinance Factory.

Keith Vernon

Yeah.

Bob Smithies

And finally, she finished up Layland Motors in the foundry office. Yeah. And during the 1st 10 years, I think I moved out 12 times. So we moved around. I had aunties and grandmas and that sort of thing to look after men while she was working.

Keith Vernon

OK, OK.

Bob Smithies

Which I remember fondly, I have a lot of.

Keith Vernon

So so when you came to the Harris can you remember anything about the subjects that you did, the curriculum?

Bob Smithies

Well, it it was General English, maths, science and we could do engineering or weaving. Yeah. And for some reason, I didn't get on with the metalworking teacher so I think that was one of the things that prompted me to do weaving. And that was the subject I really did enjoy. Yeah, particularly during the Guild year when we were sort of looking after all the looms and trying to tell the ladies who were coming in what it was all about. And they were weavers. So they used to poke fun at us from our lack of knowledge.

Keith Vernon

So that’s interesting, so it was sort of like an open day during the Guild.

Bob Smithies

Yeah. Well, during the the two weeks of the Guild that year, the Harris College was home every day and we were sort of stationed in the with the weaving room with the spinning machine. I was on the weaving machines more than they spinning, but local ladies certainly knew more about them than we did, but I think we got by quite.

Keith Vernon

Yeah. And, what was it? What was it like moving from the secondary modern to the tech?

Bob Smithies

It was a bit strange because while we did have a a uniform at the secondary modern, which was a brown jacket, you didn't have a cap or anything like that, whereas when you came here you had to be a little bit smarter if you wanted. But again, I had always been brought up to respect what it was so my mum always managed to get me the appropriate garments to wear, and I've managed them all right. And, I was never against uniforms in that respect.

Keith Vernon

Yeah, yeah.

Bob Smithies

I didn't rebel at that stage. It was later when I started rebel, and so I felt proud of the uniform when I came here.

Keith Vernon

Yeah.

Bob Smithies

Particularly as I I think there was only one other lad, John Hobbs from Leland, who went to the Harris.

Keith Vernon

OK.

Bob Smithies

So I used to catch the bus to Preston every day and I I sort of stood out if you will with having that uniform. And I was very proud of it I must admit.

Keith Vernon

Yeah. And and what were the teachers like?

Bob Smithies

Was that I can only really remember Mr Burkett, and while he was strict, he did give you the confidence that that if you listen, you know, particularly on his English, as a say the 39 steps as always stayed with me all these years. And we were down underneath if you want on the ground floor so we we virtually stayed there and there's a bit of a low move.

Keith Vernon

Yeah, yeah, yeah. The sort of thing about. Kind of. A different atmosphere or ethos or.

Bob Smithies

Yeah. One of the things that every sports if you want, we used to go up to the art part on the park there and the across the old tram bridge and play football on the field on the other side of the Ribble.

Keith Vernon

Yeah.

Bob Smithies

It's always had cow pats in it. And football was never really one of my yeah, as I was more athletic running. And cricket and even hockey was a game and I took part in. But running was always my privilege.

Keith Vernon

Yeah. And so was it just football in the games sessions?

Bob Smithies

Well, if you weren't picked for the team, you had to run around the field, so that suited me the I wasn't. I was picked occasionally, but more often than not I just running around the fields and there was sports there and and that was more to my liking that played the came..

Keith Vernon

But there weren't really. Weren't really opportunities to do other sports?

Bob Smithies

Not in those, you know? Yeah, football was it. And you were impressed and it was football. Yeah. Yeah. Tom Finney, of course. All the lads that heard over that man.

Keith Vernon

Yeah.

Speaker

Yeah.

Bob Smithies

And I did. I thought he was probably the finest football player ever, even though I was a Blackpool supporter. So between Stanley Matthews and Tom Finney, I I couldn't really distinguish a great deal. But. As a complete football, there's nobody to touch him. Definitely not, until probably Duncan Edwards a few years later.

Keith Vernon

And UM. Just thinking again. So it was quite a broad curriculum, but you have. The opportunity did did you, did you kind of? When you, specialised in weaving was that right from the beginning or did you kind? Of.

Bob Smithies

No, it was about 6 months in before we got to the vocational type thing yeah, science and maths and English were really the and the three subjects. I was lucky in a way because probably was towards the top of the learning. Unfortunately in 53 I had Asian flu.

Keith Vernon

All right.

Bob Smithies

So I was off school for two months in the five year so. I think I did well enough in my exams. I had a lot of catching up to do. But I finished at the top three courses if you would. So I was very happy with my results and.

Keith Vernon

Yeah, good.

Bob Smithies

It does say that the education I got was very good and I had no complaints of anything like that.

Keith Vernon

Had you done? Had you done any science before? I mean where there maths?

Bob Smithies

Yeah. Again, in secondary modern school, we had done science, chemistry. In our first two years there, so I was resonably conversant with the the wording of in the equations and so forth.

Keith Vernon

OK. And. Any incidents or pranks or anything? Or was it?

Bob Smithies

Well, I was quite, quite and I didn't get into trouble, but yes, I was detained once because somebody was trying to bully me and I retaliated. And I actually brought the thing.

Jodi McCombe

Hi, sorry to bother you, I'm just going to go and but I’ll be back in about 20 minutes or so.

Keith Vernon

That's OK thanks Jodi.

Bob Smithies

So yeah, there there's one instance where I was in trouble.

Keith Vernon

OK. I mean was. Does that seem to be a problem, bullying or? Was it just someone just didn't get.

Bob Smithies

No, no, no. I didn't like fighting, but I had ginger hair and people used to say, oh, well, we'll rile him up and see if. And it took a lot, but once I was rattled, I'm afraid I usually would.

Keith Vernon

Yeah. But by and large, do you know the boys get on together?

Bob Smithies

Most of the lads we got on, I kept myself to myself, but I did. Uh. Sort of make reasonable friendships with colleagues and so forth and. Again, nobody really picked on me other than a couple of occasions when I proved myself they they backed off. But yeah, most of the lads were OK. Didn't have anything to do with the girls. They were always upstairs and. We knew our place, they always won let's put it that way.

Keith Vernon

So is this true that the boys and the girls never met?

Bob Smithies

Ohh no we we particularly when the girls were doing PE and and when we were in sports we we mingled but. I was probably a naive 13 year old. It didn't register a great deal to me in those days.

Keith Vernon

Yeah. So when? So were ill towards the end. When it came towards the end, were there any? What did you do next and how did you decide what you were going to do next.

Bob Smithies

Well, as I say that last year, the last six months, I really did sort of buckle down and and swat to get the results I did. My mother had married in ‘48 and my step-dad, Colin. He was electrician and worked at Leyland Motors. And it was sort of automatic because all my uncles and all that were all into cars and and so forth. So cars had always been part of my upbringing. So it was a a job at Leyland Motors was virtually guaranteed if you want in those days.

Keith Vernon

Yeah.

Bob Smithies

And I started there as I left college and. Had a very good apprenticeship. It was renowned, was Leyland Motors for its apprenticeship. I started in the drawing office there. As a boy just to get things and then I moved into what we call the pen, which was a training centre and they had their own foundry. And that's where we went first. And we were actually called in one Saturday because of the pattern shop and won the contract to make the lightweight Jaguar engine. And we cast the prototype unit, the first one ever, on a Saturday morning. Alf Butterworth was the man in charge there. And. Again, probably took a liking to me because I was the lead apprentice if you want in there and I helped cast that first block on it and we had to go in on over time at that time to do it. Then I moved into the pen. And I went on to the fitting side there. And again I was lead apprentice under Mr Newton Idden when we renovated the Leyland Straight 8 and I rebuilt the engine for that. One little thing that probably not many people will ever know is. It was a beautiful engine. It really was it. It had leaf springs for the rockers, for the overhead cam and he'd had eccentrics and rods for driving the camshaft. And there was no external piping on it. It was all in in, but the Pistons were cast iron, and they were a slipper design. And the decision had been made well worthy. We're gonna make new panel aluminium Pistons for it. Yeah, and I said no, no, we shouldn't do this. We should just put new rings on these Pistons. But they put panel aluminium Pistons as a later design in and it really well, but it always niggled to me that it wasn't to Barry Thomas's original design, but uh, it was a beautiful engine that. So again, engines and that I've been, I've been in engines ever since if you will.

Keith Vernon

Yeah, yeah.

Keith Vernon

Did you? When you're aware of any kind of employers coming in to talk to you when you're in the college?

Bob Smithies

No, I don't recollect ever during those years that the local businesses took a great, I know there were Strand Road and English Electric and all that and in fact one of my uncles. Worked in Strand Road, but we didn't seem to have. Anyone coming in trying to take us, or whether it was the fact that I was already, yeah, made-up my mind that I was going to Leyland motors anyway, which was a big company in those days.

Keith Vernon

Yeah.

Bob Smithies

Whether I didn't take any interest in anybody talking to me or not. And again, because I was in the weaving industry class, I don't recollect anybody coming and asking me to go into the weaving side.

Keith Vernon

Yeah. But it was.

Bob Smithies

One of my friends did John Hobbs, who was from Leyland as well. He he went into the weaving side. So whether he was interviewed or not I can’t I’m getting old now.

Keith Vernon

Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

Keith Vernon

You know some people you know other people I’ve talked to seem to remember that. Some of the employers came in. I was trying to order [inaudible], but others don't, so I don't know whether it was a routine thing or.

Bob Smithies

I don't recollect anyone coming into into me in that respect, because even Layland Motors the job was sort of arranged for me and. And it I wasn't even involved in that, to respect.

Keith Vernon

But they're quite happy, even though you've been sort of doing the weaving side here to take you in presumably it was an engineering apprenticeship.

Bob Smithies

Yeah, it was an engineering apprenticeship and I went into the fitting side. It was fitting and turners it in the elements. And then there was student engineer who came from abroad and all so and went into Wellington House. So. Uh. We had day release to come back to college for our well, we we did S1 S2 National Certificate in Layland Motors own technical school.

Keith Vernon

What's the S1 sorry?

Bob Smithies

It was mechanical engineering engineering S1 S2 S3 was National Certificate, then A1 A2 was Higher National certificate.

Keith Vernon

OK.

Bob Smithies

So that's was your qualifications. When we were, we were in S3. The university selection was in A1. When we moved into A1, they unfortunately moved it to S3. So our year missed out on the opportunity of going to your university if you want. Not that I'd probably. I by that stage I was in. A A protected engineering, I was in working for motors on military vehicles and so forth. So I was deferred from National Certificate.

Keith Vernon

OK

Bob Smithies

until I was 23.

Keith Vernon

Yeah. OK.

Bob Smithies

And then when I got to 23, I missed it by 18 days because my Birthday was in January and they stopped it in the December, so I never did National Certificate, National Service.

Keith Vernon

Ah ok. Yeah, yeah. The thing that so it was the S1 S2 you did at the motors.

Bob Smithies

We did that in Leyland Motors own technical school, Billy Preston, was the the engineering teacher there. And then we had day release to Harris College for the S3 and then the A1 A2 where it was the day released into the old building there.

Keith Vernon

OK, alright. And that was actually sort of a day during the week.

Bob Smithies

Yeah, it was usually Wednesday where we we were released Wednesday for S3 and then Tuesday for A1 and again Wednesday for A2.

Keith Vernon

OK.

Bob Smithies

Yeah, it was. And it was a full day. And again I enjoyed every minute of it I must admit. By that stage I was into trying to improve me education.

Keith Vernon

Yeah. And how? So when you first went so you would have been about 15 when you went.

Bob Smithies

I was 15 and half when I went to Leyland Motors was when I left the Harris College.

Keith Vernon

And you went into the drawing office first.

Bob Smithies

I went into the drawing office for three or four months then we went into the training centre for er nearly a year. Then, we were put out into various departments in the factory. In a way, I was lucky because while I was in the training centre, we made what we called a collar structure, which was for pulling pallets along with stuff in and we we as training centre, we're making them.

Keith Vernon

OK.

Bob Smithies

And I had to go across the North works from the South works. And. I went across one day and this this really just sticks in my mind. I went through the gates through the security at 2 minutes past 3. And was walking down to the entrance to the North works where I was going to pick some stuff and I saw the North uh safety notice. So I stopped and read this and the next thing I knew, there was a gentleman standing by me. Saying what was I doing? I said I'm reading the notice. “You've been reading that for 5 minutes,” and I actually looked at the clock that was up, I said “No, I've only been here 3 minutes because it's only 5 past now.” So he sent me back to the training and to surrender me spirit. So I was lucky to carry on working if you like. I was suspended for one day. But I went on the aircraft with him a few years later and he was quite happy. But that always stuck in my mind that I stuck up for myself even to to the big boss.

Keith Vernon

Good, good.

Bob Smithies

So we went into various departments. I went in, building axles in the comic shop, and I went into the Truck Assembly area, which was the BX. And we built a lot and then the. A lad who was a bit older than me was looking after me. We moved outside and we we did the power steering's on the few vehicles. And I actually managed to blow an engine up in that by over priming when I was starting it up and I've never seen somebody move as fast in my life. He was a big lad, was who Will Pull. And he was down on the floor before I was. And we were outside then outside the typing pool, so that was happy days, chatting up the girls.

Keith Vernon

So the apprentice, the apprenticeships, who you were kind of moved around.

Bob Smithies

Yeah, we were moved around and then while we're still doing. Uh. The day technical so they asked me to move up into the drawing office when I was 18 1/2.

Keith Vernon

Yeah.

Bob Smithies

And that's when I I moved up to Spurial works which was the MOS factory then building the Centurion tank. What they’d just about finished we designed DHS and some of the fighting vehicles I did all the hydraulics on the crane version of the truck. I've been doing power steering pump.

Keith Vernon

OK.

Bob Smithies

Uh. Then. After a while I moved over to Engines under Norman Tattersall. Again, I rebelled a little bit then and he asked me, did I want to carry on working because I went to work in a black err a red shirt. Ever since then, I've always sort of dressed more formal, it was a white shirt, black shoes, dark shoe. If you want to be in the drawing office, so and ever since then I have. Even when travelled abroad with directors and I was always the one who was dressed up, so if there was a an issue with seats, I was always the one that chose to give the better seat to so I upset a few directed in that respect. Even now if I'm travelling now always I'm always dressed up. I always have a suit on.

Keith Vernon

Yeah.

Bob Smithies

It's just something that's in built in me, I'm afraid.

Keith Vernon

Yeah. So, I've got to keep going back and forth a bit. When you did the day release was it was it the same as when you came back to the Harris, was it the same teachers who did the day release as I taught in the tech school?

Bob Smithies

No, no, no, no, the. Some of the teachers in the tech school were getting on a few years and Mr Burke had moved on if you want, the entire position. And they were more younger people who moved in. I think they did teach in the technical school, but they they were fresh teachers if you want in the later use for us.

Keith Vernon

OK. OK. And. Sorry, I’ve lost my train of thought.

Bob Smithies

I knew that to people.

Keith Vernon

So I suppose. What did it mean to you coming to the Harris?

Bob Smithies

In the 1st place it was a a big honour because I was a working class lad, an only child if you want at that stage. And I I felt really up at the top that I had managed to get to the technical school from the secondary modern school in Leyland, so I was always proud about it. We moved down to a council estate which was Broadfield estate which was built after the war. And all my mates if you want were usually a bit younger than me, but they were happy to just plod along, whereas I've got the ambition then that I'm going to make something of my life.

Keith Vernon

Yeah. And you said that you you took the 11 plus.

Bob Smithies

I took the 11 plus for Balshaws Grammar school while I was still at the Junior School. Yeah, and none of the teachers there really sort of pushed me.

Keith Vernon

Yeah, yeah.

Bob Smithies

I was a milk boy, I always had the milk, but none of the teachers were really stand out as being you know you must, you must go for it. So I didn't make it that for the Balshaws.

Keith Vernon

Yeah, yeah.

Bob Smithies

Uh, and it didn't really worry me then because uh, I wasn't over ambitious if you want. So I was quite happy to go to the secondary modern, but it was when Miss Buck sort of instilled me with this you can you can do things.

Keith Vernon

Yeah. And that's. So when you when you went for the Balshaws exam was that was it your Mum who encouraged you to do that or did you sort of did it off your own?

Bob Smithies

No, it was just. It was just that when you were 11, you were we all were in the in the schools that sat the exams to the grammar school. And I said yeah and it was something that you'd never done before, so to sit in a big room with everybody sat at their own little desk, doing away was a new experience if you want and I thought is this for me? And and that stage, no, it wasn't. But when I got to the secondary modern I thought, well, let's give it a try. That's why I I sat the Wigan one first. Before I sat the Harris one.

Keith Vernon

Yeah.

Bob Smithies

And. And just got the inklings of ambition then you know.

Keith Vernon

And. How did? How did did you get a sense of how others regarded you when you're in your uniform and going off to the tech?

Bob Smithies

Yeah, well, the as I said, most were just local ones and they didn't take the Mickey in because I I will look smart. I didn't have holes in my pants or owt like that. Which a lot of them did, you know, they it was a council estate so not everybody was on a big wage in those days.

Keith Vernon

Yeah, yeah.

Bob Smithies

And there was class if you want so uh, probably got a little bit of toffee nose, but uh it just went over top of my head if you will because I knew that if I did have to stick up for myself, I could do it.

Keith Vernon

Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

Bob Smithies

I wasn't big structured or anything, but I was wiry if you want and I didn't look for fights, but I could own my own if I needed to.

Keith Vernon

Yeah, yeah. And. I'm sorry. What did? Sorry I'm flitting around now. So how long did your apprenticeship last?

Bob Smithies

No, it’s alright. So in those days your apprenticeship to get to be an engineer was five years 15 to twenty- 6 years, 15 to 21. Then if you're in the drawing you were a junior draughtsman until you were 30. You only came out of your and you only became a a senior engineer at 30. And because I'd done all the A2 hand endorsements for mechanical engineer. I qualified to be a senior member of the Institute of Engineers at 21 when I could only become one at 25. So you always look at those and say, well, I did, I was probably one of the youngest people ever to get all the qualifications, endorsements on English and management studies to qualify as a senior engineer. So young, admittedly. It was only introduced in 1948. I think the Institute of Mechanical Engineers as such.

Keith Vernon

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Bob Smithies

And the fact. That you knew you were not going to be on the top wage if you want until you were 30, you knew your place if you want in those days.

Keith Vernon

Yeah. Sorry, so betraying my ignorance. So, so were you designing engines? Or were you involved in the construction of them?

Bob Smithies

No. And then we went in the engine to assemble engines. Until I went into the design office. And I I started on the military trucks. And it was on the fringes. And then I moved into the engine Department design office and I was a draughtsman there, designing stuff and unfortunately I was involved with the menu called the 500 engine, which was the Leyland Motors disaster.

Keith Vernon

All right.

Bob Smithies

And I got told off on that one because. Uh. I’d already started to be what you call a development engineer, which was doing going down into the prototype department, making sure and it was tested. And that our designs were working right. It was something that had started up at that stage. And. One of my personal projects was the Leyland 400 engine. At that stage was costing £1,000,000 in warranty a year because the cylinder head gasket kept failing after 20,000 miles and I was given the task to stop that. So personally, I looked at all the bits and pieces of the engine and I did pressure tests on gaskets and realised that the the gasket was absolutely dire built and it was blowing out the back because of the clamp loads were disappearing. So I redesigned the block to make sure that there wasn't any pulling up her. So I counter board the block and put the studs a little bit lower up only an eighth of an inch. The studs were cheap, so I got them to change to a roll thread, so I got a good quality stud.

Keith Vernon

Yeah.

Bob Smithies

I changed the gasket with a different supplier where we hot pressed the the gasket before we put it on the engine so it didn't settle as much and I I did all that and I managed to change it. We did a what we call a uh a shock tests where we run the engine at max power and then we flush it out with cold water and that way they're giving it shot loadings. Yeah, and. The old design failed after 20 hours. And when I'm finished, I got 300 hours out of it without it, so the warranty trials disappeared and I had to go out to all the operators and say, this is what I'm doing. And [inaudible] and all them. And I really made me name if you want then. And I saved the company a lot of money, I must admit. So when it came to designing the 500 engine I sent to the chief engineer, Mr Tattersall. Whereas the one before him Stanley Martland I always classified as a better engineer if you want, than Norman Tattersall. I think Mr Tattersall sort of got his reputation on the shirt tails of Mr. Martland. But that's a different story. And Mr Tattersall said first of all, he he designed what we call the 700 engine, which 700 cubic inch. And the 500 engine was a smaller one. And the company decided that we wouldn't go with the 700 engine AEC with her V8 would be the big engine and the 500 engine would be the Leyland engine if you want.

Keith Vernon

OK.

Bob Smithies

And the Leyland engine was called the headless wonder. And the factory manager said it's got got what you call the throw away block. And my God, we've thrown a lot of blocks away. And the reason why we threw a lot of blocks away was the fact that, uh Norman Tattersall said I don't want something with red studs, it's got to be a fixed head. And he didn't look at history. The Rolls Royce, the Merlin engine set off as the headless wonder if you want. But they took the decision that it was difficult to manufacture it during the war years. And they put very long studs on and that came to be a magnificent tension. If you want the Merlin. And when we got to the 500 engine Norman Tattersall said we're wrong here, he said. No, I don't want cylinder heads. And I said, look, I managed to do it with 400 engine. Get the gasket right, I said, and what we've got with the 500 engine and we've got short studs holding block down. I said you're not going to blow the head. You're going to blow the crankcase, and I was proved, right. But I was told I didn't know what I was talking about. That might be one of the reasons I don't really rate Mr Tattersall as a brilliant engineer. But the the engine being a machine in the valve seats and all that, and the the the line is. They spent a lot of money on machinery and it was a disaster. That engine. There's no two ways about it. It could produce the power. We got 500 horse power, but he couldn't move, it just wouldn't move.

Keith Vernon

Yeah.

Bob Smithies

And other things like he wanted the engine to be either left and right hands were for military use. So the crankshaft had big M fittings and we had lip seals running on which was the linear speed, and the lip was. The limits of what technology we had in those days, so we've got a lot of leaks and.

Keith Vernon

Yeah.

Bob Smithies

We're trying a lot of ways, but no, at the end of the day cost us.

Keith Vernon

So where did you end up in the company?

Bob Smithies

Well,after the 500, we we kept the 680 or 690 and the 400 going. So I was put in charge of looking after the 400 engine.

Keith Vernon

Yeah.

Bob Smithies

And then when in 1988. They stopped producing engines art Leyland. And I was given the task of introducing externally purchased engines, so I was responsible for Cummins and Rolls Royce engines coming.

Keith Vernon

OK.

Bob Smithies

And the B series engine was a new engine from Cummings and I introduced that into the Leyland truck range. And then when we amalgamated with DAF, I was classified as an external engineer with Leyland so I had an association with our friends over in Holland and looked after the 620 engine that went in our trucks.

Keith Vernon

OK.

Bob Smithies

So I was in charge of externally purchased entry. If you wanted them.

Keith Vernon

OK.

Bob Smithies

And then when the Cummings engine became the only engine, included into the DAF trucks, I was responsible for the liaison with Cummings.

Keith Vernon

OK.

Bob Smithies

On that range. And that's when I retired in 2003, but I still carried on working because then became. A semi consultant if. You want, OK. With radiator people Mordean in in Europe, suplying radiators to Leyland and I was employed as the Leyland champion to make certain of the quality of the product and any cost reduction etcetera.

Keith Vernon

OK.

Bob Smithies

So after me retirement age I spent another six years with Mordean and was made redundant in 2009 during the financial crisis, if you want.

Keith Vernon

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. I think that's everything I want to ask you, Bob. Is there anything we haven't covered or anything you want to add about your your time at the Harris or what it meant to you or it's place in your life?

Bob Smithies

Like a say unfortunately when I last year, gave you my appraisee, if you want to go to do. I couldn't think of anything else about it. I was a lone wolf. I enjoyed it and it set the seed for the rest of my life. There's no two ways about that. But the actual time. At the Harris College. Is a bit of a blur. I didn't make any real friends. I was a.

Keith Vernon

Yeah.

Bob Smithies

Lone wolf, there’s no two ways about it and if you want, that was a mother's boy because she brought me up during the war years as that. But I'm always proud, and as we say with all reunions, yeah, I still enjoy and and that's you. Because I would didn't manage it and his friend didn't make it. I sat on a completely different table and made a lot of new people and had a really great time this last year.

Keith Vernon

Yeah, excellent

Bob Smithies

But yeah, I'm proud of being a Harris College lad, definitely.

Keith Vernon

That seems a suitable point.

Bob Smithies

The grandson, James. He got his masters with you in ‘22.

Keith Vernon

Ohh what did do?

Bob Smithies

He he's well, he now works for DAF in the Netherlands, but probably in a couple of years he might come back to Leyland as a reasonably high level of manager there.

Keith Vernon

OK. So it's carried on in the family.

Bob Smithies

Yeah, I think our James has surpassed what I technically he's got the real determination whereas. Me my wife, who was a brilliant person until she died last year. Wanted some slightly different things, so after a while I sort of backed off. If you want on personal ambitions because she was the boss, she was the boss. Only 5 foot 2 but she was one hell of a person.

Keith Vernon

Yeah, yeah, yeah, sure.

Bob Smithies

Yeah, I've had a good life in in that respect, personally. I've always been fit, ok, I've had cancer. But that's nearly 20 years ago and so again, I'm one of the lucky ones. Personal life, yeah we've had a few ups ups and downs. We lost both our children. But it it affected Irene more than it affected me. Yeah. She was a she was the extrovert if I'm the introvert, if you will. And we did alright together. We had 61 years together.

Keith Vernon

Oh lovely. Thank you so much, for that

Bob Smithies

Thank you very much for having me.