This is an oral history interview with Bill Colley by Gay Jenkins on 12th May 2017 at the Old Town Hall, Richmond. Also present is Bea Moyes from the Thames Festival Trust. Could you please state your full name?

Yes, William John Colley.

And when were you born?

A secret [laughter]. A long time ago.

That’s fair enough. Where were you brought up?

Barnes.

And what were your parents’ names?

William and Kathleen.

What did your parents do for a living?

The old man was a waterman and my mother was a housewife.

Do you have any early memories of your father working on the river?

Yeah, I used to go with him, because the war was on then. You’ve heard about the war, haven’t you? It was in all the papers. And I used to go with him. He was what was called a pilot’s pilot. So all the ships that come up river with a sea captain can’t do the bridges, you know. The sea captain can’t do bridges, so you have what you call a bridge pilot, and it was the old man’s job to take the bridge pilot in his little boat out to the big ship. And they didn’t stop, and he had to keep going. The ship was steaming up river full thing and he had to put his little boat alongside the Jacob’s ladder, and the pilot had to go up and take charge. But that was all through the war. And then long, long after, he was too old really, he got promoted to be a pilot himself and got some real money [laughter].
Q: Were there any earlier generations of your family associated with the river?

A: All of them, yeah, both sides, Mother’s family and my father’s, all boat people [laughter].

Q: What were they doing?

A: My father’s family mostly were just watermen. Watermen and lightermen they were called, you know, anything on the river. But my mother’s family were more boat builders and oar and scull makers, Biffin, they were quite famous in their day. But they all got unfortunately-- my two sons, I mean, for my sins [laughter], when they came along, the Biffin family name was about to die out almost so I gave them Biffin as a third Christian name, both of them, with a view to them being in the boat race one day and having their four initials across their chest. They never showed the slightest interest [laughter].

Q: Was it your granddad, didn’t he build a boathouse or…?

A: That’s right. That was my mother’s father. I never met him. He died before I was born, very unfortunately. But he did build this lovely old Rutland boathouse at Hammersmith, behind the Rutland Pub, and many, many years later-- that was about 1880, I think, and in the 1970s I managed to get hold of it for my own workshop. I rented it from what it-- it cost £4 a week then. It was on three floors. It was about 25 feet wide by 70 foot long, three times, for £4 a week [laughter]. So it was lovely, lovely old boathouse. It was not in perfect working order but it was perfectly okay, but since I’ve left it’s gone to rack and ruin.

Q: Is it still standing?

A: Still standing, yeah, just about. I think the roof’s sort of fallen in and the pigeons have taken over the inside, you know. That’s the way it goes, I’m afraid.

Q: What age were you when you left school?

A: 15.

Q: And did you go straight to working in a boatyard?

A: Yeah, I was actually at work before I was 15, because the-- as soon as I was born in April, Easter-- as you know, it’s always moving around, isn’t it? But that particular year Easter was early, so the old man said like, you know, “You left school on Friday, start work Monday.” And it was another week or so before my birthday, so I was actually working at 14 [laughter].

Q: Were you training then?

A: Yeah, I had a very good old guv’nor, of the old school, very much the old school. He didn’t really like electric light. He preferred gas lights [laughter], seriously, yeah. Because they said that the-- Sims is the name of the company I worked for. He was an employee of Sims as
well, and he used to build all the forts, so I was sort of--, “You do as Geoff tells you.” And they said, “Oh, we’re going to change the lights, Geoff. We’ve got these--, the bulbs, we’re going to have some fluorescents.” “Grr, I want the gas lights back” [laughter]. He never did like those lights. And he did things like--, he was not ignorant. He was very, very clever, but in worldly wise he wasn’t that bright, and he couldn’t see very well. So his father died and for some reason he inherited a whole box full of glasses, and Geoff went through all these [laughter] and he said, “Oh, these are lovely.” But he never went to an optician, you know, he was that sort of man, “No, these will do. Ooh, these will do me,” you know. But when Geoff--, you learnt Geoff’s way, you learnt properly, yeah. Lots and lots of what he taught me I’ve managed to forget, or managed to find an easier way.

Q: How did he teach you?

A: Just by watching really and shouting and clipped me round the ear hole if need be, no messing. But when I’d only been there less than an hour, he gave me a lump of wood, only a thin bit, and he put it--, he said, “Right,” he put it over the edge of the bench like that, “Hold it down and plane,” with a big wooden jackplane that square and that long, very heavy. And I’m only seven stone at that time. “Get hold of that and plane the edges, son.” And I took the knuckle off my thumb, and his response to that was, “Don’t bleed on my boat” [laughter].

Q: So not much health and safety then.

A: Oh no, the health and safety then--, one of the first jobs--, when Geoff didn’t have something for me to do all the time he’d sort of farm me out to anyone else who wanted a boy, and we used to have a machinist, a wood machinist called Wally, and he had this great big [fixer 0:07:40] that you put a bit of wood through that thick and it [makes machine noise], and it planed it down. And as it’s planing, the chips like--, not sawdust and not shavings but somewhere in between, woodchips, they’d land on the plank. The plank would be this wide, going through the machine, and all these chips come, and I had to go behind the thing and stand under the chips and sweep it off with a bit of wood [laughter]. And I suffered from bronchitis when I was a kid, so breathing in the sealer dust all day was not good. But today they have extractor fans direct onto the plane so there is no dust at all. But, you know, then if there was something that Geoff wanted doing he’d get me to do it. And I was sort of--, on occasion I was farmed out to everybody. There was an old man, Harry, Strong Harry he was called. He was a weightlifter, a lovely old man, and I always remember, he was born in 1900, so whatever the year was, that’s how old Harry was. And he used to make packing cases--, because they would send boats abroad quite a bit then and they had these, you know, just rough wooden things, but sometimes I would be detailed to go and help Harry for the afternoon or whatever.
Q: How many of you were there in the boatyard, in your first boatyard? [Sirens] [Recording paused] So how many of you actually worked in the boatyard?

A: [Counting under breath] About ten, ten or eleven.

Q: Were you all doing the same sort of things?

A: Yeah. There were two men and a boy building eights, and there were two men and a boy building the fours, and I was the boy on the fours, and then on the far side was the singles and doubles, which were done by one person. And we had a-- poor thing, they used to call him a dummy. He wasn't quite the full shilling. He was a member of Sims’ family and he was called Dougie, but he was a bit--, he wasn't--, I don't know, he was just a bit simple. But he used to make up--, carve out seats, which was a hell of a job, a solid lump of wood and carve a seat out of it, you know, and he used to make the tea and sweep up and generally do things. But he was necessary, we did need him. And as I say, Strong Harry out in the yard as well [laughter].

Q: Did you have your own tools or were they supplied?

A: Yeah. No, you had to buy your own tools, yeah. And I was given by… [Sirens] So there was a thing that the-- he was a, what do you call it, benefactor, a man called Thomas Martin, and he was saved from drowning by a waterman in Putney in 1700 something, and he was quite rich, and he left all his money to-- for the benefit of the children of Putney watermen. And then eventually they built a school, the Watermen School in the back roads of Putney, that was Thomas Martin. But then gradually, you know, state education took over so the school closed, so they didn't know what to do with all the money. It was-- we used to buy-- me and my brother and sister used to go and get clothes, horrible, horrible-- [laughter] we used to go to a shop where they didn't sell anything stylish at all, you know. It was called Daniel Neil in Kensington High Street, and we used to buy these, you know, blazers and trousers, and then we had to go to somewhere else for shoes. But part of the Thomas Martin thing, getting back to it, was they bought tools for apprentices. So I've still got some of the tools that they bought me in 1952. It was only fairly-- you know, I mean, today's money it might be sort of £100 worth of tools, but then it was the same sort of thing. It was, you know, enough towards to do your basic job. But then when-- unlike today's youth, on payday we'd go up the tool shop and see what we could buy. That was how we spent our 35 shillings a week [laughter].

Q: Do you still use the same sort of tools now for your boatbuilding?

A: Yeah, oh yeah, yeah, lovely tools, yeah. But a lot of them got destroyed-- I had a fire in '72 at Kingston. I'd only recently moved there and the whole place went up in flames, but some of the tools survived. I'll show you when we get back to the shop. Loads of tools are all scorched down one side where they were hanging on the wall and the flames got to one side but not the other.
Q: What was your most memorable experience from that time?

A: Ah, there’s one unfortunate experience. The old man and Mr Sims--, Roland Sims, he was the--, did like a drop, and he came back with his chauffeur. He wasn’t an official chauffeur, just a friend of his. He was called Dibber. And he come back on one afternoon and I’m standing, just standing watching Geoff, because Geoff said, “If we’ve got nothing for you to do, you watch me, watch and learn.” So I came in and I’m standing by the bench and the old man came in. He said, “What you doing, son?” I said, “Well, I’m watching Geoff.” He said, “Is that all you’ve got to do?” I said, “Yeah.” He said, “Here you are then.” There was a box of nails on the bench, little tiny--, threw them on the bench, said, “Here, pick that up.” That’s true. Can you imagine a job with little tiny half inch pins in the sawdust on the floor? That’s not a good memory to quote but it’s one that I certainly remember.

Q: I understand you--, didn’t you build the boat that won silver at the Olympics, is that right?

A: That was after I’d sort of qualified, or nearly qualified. I was in four years. A normal apprenticeship took seven but I managed to pass out in four. And there was a huge upheaval at Sims’ because-- I can’t remember the order of things. I’ve been trying recently to think of it, but... We had a terrible row with the eldest son. The old man was called Roly, his eldest son was Roly, and there was Dick and George. And I was working-- that’s right, I was working for Roly and Jack, who was a northern man, building eights, and I was sort of--, blowing my own trumpet, I was supplying everything they needed in the way of bits of wood, getting it all cut and planed and sanded and whatever, so all they had to do was assemble the boat. It’s not as simple as that. They were highly skilled but I took all the drudgery out for them, you know, getting everything prepared. And I was doing that quite happily--, and that shows you because they were mean, those people were mean. But they were on piecework so were paid per boat. And because I turned out to be so useful for them-- this sounds horribly bigheaded but it’s true, they said, “Oh, you know, you’re doing well, son. We’ll give you a quid a week from the boat.” They used to say “off the boat”, because they got paid per boat and I only got paid per week. So the fact that they parted with a quid, which was a lot of money then, you know, they must have been really appreciative of what I did, certainly in their pocket [laughter]. But just sort of out the blue one day this Roly, Roly Junior, who was my immediate guv’nor, said, “Oh, we need you to do some overtime. We’ve got to build an eight in four, five days,” or something stupid, you know. So I said, “Yeah, yeah, fine.” I said, “But not for a shilling an hour,” which is what I was earning then, £2.50 for 50 hours. And he said, “What? What? Get out of my job. Don’t touch another bit of wood.” That is the actual words, “Do not touch another piece of wood.” So I put my toolbox all together, and I had a pushbike, and I rested the toolbox on the back of the bike [laughter], walking from Putney to Barnes, because I couldn’t cycle with the toolbox, it was too heavy. Still got the same box. And anyway sort of three quarters of the way home the old man come up with Dibber, his driver, and stopped me at the side of the road and said, “Listen, what’s
going on here?” I said, “Well, you know as well as I do, your son sacked me so I’m going home.” “Oh, just give us your toolbox, put it in the car. Where do you live?” And he took the toolbox round to my house and said, “Now your dad’s got a phone,” because not everybody had a phone then. He said, “Give us your dad’s phone number and I’ll ring him tonight and I’ll decide then.” This gets terribly confusing because there was a Sims at Putney, there was another Sims at Hammersmith, but the Sims at Putney had a Hammersmith branch as well [laughter] across the road sort of thing. So anyway the old man phoned and he said, “Right, I’d like you to go to Hammersmith tomorrow,” which was no--, I was at Barnes, which was halfway in between, so it was no problem to me. I went over to Hammersmith and he said, “I want you to help Dick as much as you can.” He built sculling boats, single sculls, very, very well. Very nice man, Dick. And we was getting on fine. I was learning very good from Dick. And the old lady used to come-- she didn’t come to Hammersmith, but she used to go round the shop and ask those who were on piecework how much they wanted, because-- she would said-- I don’t know, an eight was £200 to buy, so they probably would have got £100 between them, so it might be £50 each a week, but they obviously never took that much money. So the old lady would say, “How much would you like from your boat?” And I mean the average wage was £8 or £9 a week then, something like that. So they’d said, “Right, we’ll have a tenner this week and save the rest.” So she was going round doing her usual Friday night thing and she happened to mention to Roly, junior Roly, “Oh, I hear Bill’s doing very well at Hammersmith” [laughter]. He wasn’t supposed to know. So with that he resigned, he went. He went to start his own business in Nottingham, where he died, you know. He went up there and he’d been quite-- well, very successful in Nottingham. So he having gone, and Dick was negotiating-- I can’t remember the sequence of it, but anyway Dick was negotiating to go to Canada and work there as a self-employed boat builder, but quite what sequence these events happened in-- but then the old man died. Old Roly went and turned his toes up and threw it all into mass confusion [laughter]. Young Roly’s gone to Nottingham, Jack, the other eight builder, was trying to manage on his own. I was at Hammersmith. Geoff didn’t do anything but fours and George, the youngest son, he built the sculling boats at Putney. So Roly obviously was out of the picture. The old man was dead. The eldest son had gone to Nottingham. Second son, Dick, was talking about going to Canada. So the next obvious recipient of the managership, of the job, was George, but he didn’t get it. Passed him by for this Jack, the northern man. And oh, it gets terribly confusing because George went. He went to work for his cousin at Hammersmith [laughter]. So it just goes on and on and on. You had George Sims Hammersmith and George Sims Putney. Now at one time I’ve actually seen-- I’ve got a picture as well of the whole family, because before-- I think about 1936 there was a-- called Uncle Bill, he was George Senior and Roly Senior’s father, and everybody called-- I don’t know why, they called him Uncle Bill. There’s a lovely old picture of them all lined up on the towpath at Putney with their tools in their hand and things. But when he died and the old Uncle Bill died, they-- I don’t know-- I’ve never got the story as to what happened, but Roly stayed at Putney and George went to Hammersmith and took over the aforementioned Rutland Boathouse, my granddad’s, and he did a hell of a lot of work in there.
But I’ve actually seen, I haven’t got it now, a piece of his headed notepaper, “George Sims, Rutland Boathouse, Hammersmith. No connection with any other company trading under a similar name.” That was his brother [laughter]. But I mean, when you’ve got it actually in black and white on your headed paper, that is serious. They didn’t get on [laughter]. So because they’d all gone now, I was allowed back to Putney and there was no one else to build sculling boats, because George had been-- Dick had gone to Canada, George had gone to Hammersmith and the sculling boat stops were empty, and they had orders, you know. There was loads of people wanting sculling boats. They said, “Well, you’ve done a bit of it, haven’t you?” I’m 19 at this time. He said, “So go on, try again” [laughter]. So first job, believe it or believe it not, was this man from Australia. And we had loads of foreign orders. It wasn’t unusual to have Australian and, you know, American orders or whatever. So this boy orders a sculling boat and they said, “Well, you try and do it.” So [laughter] I got it together and off it goes to Australia, and the next thing we know it’s got a silver medal in the Olympics [laughter]. And it was my first boat I’d ever built unsupervised, because the supervisors had gone. George and Dick had already gone so there was no one to supervise. I just had to try and remember what they taught me and bashed it together.

Q: Was there a big celebration?

A: No, no, no, they didn’t do things like that, no. I mean, if anybody wants to know, they’ve got to ask me because, you know, no one else puts it about. But later on, many, many years later, Stuart McKenzie was the name of the man, he came to England through his rowing success and he won Henley, he won the Diamond Sculls, which is the premier event at Henley for single sculls. I think he won it about six years on the trot. And I got quite friendly with him, and it turns out he was born five days after me, yeah. We were both 19 when he did his Olympic thing. But he then went away, went off to sea for a long time, and then there was a promotion at Henley. It was, I don’t know, 175th Henley or something like that, and they invited Stuart McKenzie to come back, and they built him a special boat, simply because he was huge. He was 20 stone by this time because he’d, you know, gone flabby. And they had a great thing with him doing sort of a row by, just going past all the crowd at Saturday lunchtime when the crowd’s at its biggest and things. He loved it. But he didn’t try to compete anymore because he’d just got so big. I mean, he was 14 stone plus when he was 19. He was, you know, a big, big boy, and it wasn’t-- no, I mustn’t say that. Never mind [laughter].

Q: It’s interesting that there were a lot of international orders.

A: Oh yeah, yeah. Yeah, because there was nobody else, you see. The American-- there’s an American boat builder called Bowcock, George Bowcock, but he was basically English. He emigrated to America. He went to Canada first and worked his way down to America, and he got to be very, very successful in America. And his son Stan, who’s about my age, I think, he continued the firm, but I think they’ve gone now, again beating out by plastic use.
Q: So where did you go from there, when you left Sims’?

A: Oh, I had a complete change and worked on motor scooters. I did 18 months, two years on that, Lambrettas and Vespas and things. Because this was at the time, ’56, ’57, it was the first, you know, popularity of scooters. They came by later on with the mods and the rockers, but this was before that. A friend of mine worked in a shop over Notting Hill and I went and got a job there as a mechanic. It was quite enjoyable but it was filthy, you know. You’d come home every night black up to here.

Q: So how long was it till you went back to--,

A: Oh, I was on holiday. Typical stupid boatperson got a holiday from--,. Wilby and Whalley, they were called, the company [laughter]. That was the actual--,. the two men's names. There was Tony Whalley and Gerry Wilby, but they were called WW Scooters. And I was on holiday, they gave me a couple of weeks off, and I just--,. I had no money to go anywhere so I just wandered down Hammersmith and saw George, the one who’d gone to join his cousin when his father chucked him out, as it were. And I just went in to socialise with him, you know. He said, “Do you want a job while you’re here?” And I thought, this is nice, it’s all clean, you know. There was no filthy black oil under your fingernails every day and everything. “Yeah, yeah, alright George.” And I come back and worked there, and stayed there until they moved out. They moved out of--,. another bloke called Sims, would you believe, nothing to do with the family--,. same spelling, one M, Sims. He was from Twickenham. And he was a bit of an entrepreneur in boats generally, and he saw this company at Hammersmith that weren’t doing terribly well, because--,. well, none of them, including me--,. we’re not businessmen, you know. So he looked at this company and he saw what was going on, and he said to Frank, who was the runner of the--,. he was the son of the original George. I know you can’t remember but it’s [laughter]... But Frank, he was a one off. He was the best boat builder in the world. He told me, and if he says so he’s got to be, hasn’t he? [Laughter] But he was absolutely hopeless at making any money. And this Bill Sims, the new intruder came and he went over the books and he said, “This is stupid, you know. You can up your prices by 10 or 12 percent and break even.” We were making nothing up until then. So Frank said, “No, no, I’ll lose all the orders.” And they didn’t. It was amazing. There was plenty of margin to put like 12 and a half percent or more on and nobody cancelled an order, because they had at that time--,. I mean, when I was successful in the ’60s and ’70s, I'd have anything up to four or five months advance orders. You know, if someone had come along with a big pile of £1 notes and said, “Can I have a boat tomorrow?” “No, I’m sorry, I’ve got to do three or four months' work to other people first.” But that’s how good it was. That’s what I loved the plastic people so much, because they just completely knocked it all out. I’d have still been rich now if it hadn’t been for them. But that’s what happened. But as I say, Simsy from Twickenham decided he’d take the company over. George didn’t want to stay. He left and went to be a--,. I think he bought a model shop and sold model aeroplanes and things. But Frank was... He just didn’t really want to know. So Bill Sims got George--,. they’re all Sims [laughter], but George was a proper
Sims, Bill wasn’t. He bought a property on Eel Pie Island, eight to 60 foot long, and they’d build eights. This is what they’d do. So he bought a property that was 45 foot square [laughter], so they had to build the eights diagonally from corner to corner, so all the other boats had to be built in these two triangles at each side. Funnily enough it worked. He made a lot of money. But I mean, who in their right mind buys a 45 foot square shop to build 60 foot boats in [laughter]. But I didn’t stay there very long. I didn’t like him and he didn’t like me. The feeling was very, very mutual. I suppose I was there for two, three years. And it was complete--, the interesting part there as well, because just recently they’ve started to have a museum at Eel Pie Island, mainly the music thing, you know, and I was there right through that, from 8am till 6pm every day, not Saturday, and never saw any of the music. Because by the time you’d been working there for eight hours a day in the sawdust and muck and--., you didn’t want to go to a jazz thing, you know. Although I was into a bit of music, I never thought of going there and I used to go straight home, jump on the old motorbike and go home every night. But the big, big names were there in that time, in the early ‘60s. So then I got an offer to go to Eton College and work for them, and I think they paid sixpence an hour more than Sims’, seven shillings an hour, I think, instead of six shillings--., no, not shillings an hour, pounds a week. I think they paid £7 a week against £6.50 at Twickenham. So I went all the way, in my little old minivan, to Eton every day, from Hammersmith to Eton and back every day, and it was so bad there. I can’t exaggerate how bad it was. There were no machines. If you wanted a bit of wood you had to walk, you know, right to the far end of the boathouse, probably best part of 100 yards, pick up a bit of wood, carry it back, saw it up by hand [laughter] and try to build a boat from--., you know, but they had, they’d done it for 100 years at Eton. They’d built loads of boats, but they’d all--., you had what they call a bow saw. A bit of wood in the vice and you’d cut the ribs of the boat out on a bit of bow saw. And consequently I didn’t stay there very long [laughter]. I think I was there for ten weeks and I didn’t finish a four. Started to build a four and never finished it in ten weeks, whereas if I was at--., later on, working for myself, I’d finish in three weeks. And it was just absolutely--., you know, there was no business there at all. But they didn’t need it, you see. Eton College, almost the richest company in the country, I think, and everything they turn to turns to gold, doesn’t it? They bought their--., you know Dorney Lake where the Olympics were in Maidenhead? Well, Eton College bought that hundreds of years ago, a long, long time ago, and somebody came along and said, “It’s rich in gravel. Could we excavate the gravel out of your--., what we call Dorney Lake?” And they said, “Yeah, okay, but we want it cut in a straight line, 2,000 metres long, six lanes wide.” And got them to retrieve the gravel, which they had to pay for obviously, and in doing so built them a lovely Olympic rowing course. And they had loads of money already [laughter]. But as I say, that didn’t last long. And then I was persuaded by my uncle and my dad really to start on my own, or start out with Uncle. That was at Hammersmith again, across the road from Sims’ [laughter]. This all gets interwoven. It was--., literally you could see the Rutland Boathouse from where we were, at the back at the West End Boathouse. And I was there for a few months and we had a row.
Q: What were you building then?

A: Everything, eights, fours, singles, doubles, all--, everything. Good--, doing very, very well, very well, because there was no--, there was no independent boat builder at all at that time. You had the two Sims’, you know, opposing one another. You had Phelps’ at Putney, Edwin H Phelps, who was very good, and you had Banham’s at Cambridge and Salters at Oxford, but there were no other entrants in the field. So me and Uncle started. We did very, very well, because people wanted, you know, a chance to, you know, not go to Marks & Sparks every time, let’s try this new young fellow. And very, very luckily we did very well. But then I had a row with Uncle, because he wasn’t the easiest man in the world to get on with, and I finished up going to--, oh, again it comes back full circle--, Frankie Sims, who Bill Sims bought the Rutland Sims’ boathouse from. He was the one who had the model shop, right? He’d now gone round full circle and he was employed as the boatman for University College School in Richmond, where the canoe company is now. And he said to me--, I don’t know quite how it came about because we didn’t socialise. He was ever so miserable, Frank. But [sirens] [recording paused]. Right, so I’d just--, Frankie--, I don’t know, I can’t remember how, but he’d heard about the row between me and Uncle, so he said, “Why don’t you come and work with me in the University College School boathouse?” But I don’t know, I’ll never know because they’re all dead now, whether I was there with permission of the school or not. There were tons of room and it was a huge great shop, 120 foot long with just a dirt floor. And I managed to get in there and erect all the stocks and things that you need to build a boat with, and was very, very successful there. And then it’s all going on nicely and Uncle goes and dies, so we’re left with this just--, like I say, we did very well in building boats for the few months that I was there. And of course when he died the accountants came and wanted loads of money. And I can’t remember how it went but I know that my accountant, because I had to employ an accountant by now, he said, “Well, best I can do for you.” He said, “I’ve been to the collector of taxes.” And he said, “You’ve got to pay 400 quid,” which was a lot more than that now. I don’t know what the equivalent is but a hell of a lot. Well, as an example, a new eight then was £525, they’re £40,000, so 400 quid was a lot of money. So the old accountant said, “Look, what can you do? Can you manage £100 a month?” I said, “Yeah, I’ll have to, won’t I?” So he said, “Okay, I’ll arrange with the collector of taxes that you pay £100 a month.” So I had orders for four eights. I was very, very lucky in having these back orders. So I built four eights in four months, which today--, well, nobody does them in wood any more but even--, you’d be hard pushed to do them in plastic at that time. And I really did fly along, but managed it. And then all of a sudden from there Frankie says to me, “Oh, you’ve got to go.” “What do you mean? I’m not even officially here.” “Well, it don’t matter, you’ve got to go out this week.”

Q: Did he say why?

A: Hey?
Q: Did he say why?

A: No, no. I don't know if it was him or the management of the school. I suspect it was Frank. I suspect--I'm not--I don't know. I can't say this, but I think there was a bit of the old green stuff, you know, because I was doing very, very well and he wasn't doing--well, he was only getting his little boatman's wages there, which wasn't much at all. So anyway I managed to find other premises the other end of Richmond, near where I am now. And this goes on and on and on. I think I've had 12 different boathouses and each one is, you know, a big, big shop fitted job to put up the benches and stops and move the machines and--you know, it's quite a--most people start off with a small one and they get successful and they get a bigger one. Nobody has 12 [laughter]. But anyway I got chucked out of there and I came down to this end, and there was a lovely old man then called Horace Redknapp, the famous old boating family name, and he was a lovely old man. He was very short and he smoked continually. Didn't drink although he ran a pub at one time. He had a pub, the Vineyard, but he never drank at all. And that was quite nice. I was there for, ooh, a good few years, seven, eight years, and I took on--on the strength of a friend of mine who was a business manager. He worked in America but he used to come visiting. And he said, "Do you want me to look at your business plan, what you're doing at Richmond and how could we better it?" So he was much more clever than I was, and he said, "Well look, you're paying the rent on this boat house and only one of you in there. If there was another person in there you could build twice as many boats and would cost no more rent." So I managed to get the fella that I'd worked with a lot, called Dave, and persuaded him to come and work with me. So if we were building boats we just used to sort of build half each, him standing one side and me--instead of--it was quite a saving, because when you're building a boat and they're quite long and you want something from over there, you've got to go right round the end of the boat. So he could pass stuff--and when we were actually building a boat, he'd build that side and I'd build this side and it worked very, very well. We made a lot of money there. That was during the '60s and early '70s, which was--.

Q: Normally though you were working single handed prior to that, were you? You were building a boat.

A: Yes, yes. And when Dave came then we shared. And he worked--I always think the fairest way is piecework, so he got paid per boat, and it worked very well. But then we were persuaded to move to Kingston. A certain Mr Turk, who's sort of an infamous water family, nice man, I admit, but he said, "Come and work in my--we've got this new refurbished lovely big shop in Kingston." "Yeah, alright then." So up we go, set up this whole--it was lovely. It was a much, much bigger--big flat area with high roof, high ceiling. And at the same time it had been--prior to our occupation it had been a rowing club. Kingston Rowing Club had it and they'd got dressing rooms and changing facilities out the back. So I was a single parent at this time and didn't really live anywhere [laughter], so I converted the rowing club facilities into a little flat, which was lovely, and I opened the door, literally opened the door and went to
work. No travelling at all, it was absolutely gorgeous. Quite successful there with the… [Chimes] And all of a sudden I’d been--, used to go and see my daughter. She was living with my brother at the time. And I’d just come back sort of, I don’t know, 9pm, something like that. “What’s all them fire engines down the riverside at Kingston?” It was our boathouse had gone, the whole lot, burned to the ground. Loads of boats, all the tools, everything was gone, and the flat as well, all my clothes, everything, lost the whole damn lot, and had nowhere else to go. I mean, because boathouses as such needed to be quite long and not--,, if they’re long they’re usually wide, and if they’re wide they’re expensive. But what you want is like what I’ve got now, this, you know, narrow sort of cave thing. But I was over a year trying to find somewhere after the fire.

Q: What did you do during that time?
A: Not a lot [laughter]. Luckily I had some money because I’d been very--, you know, I made lots of money in the few years previous, and just sort of wandered around, doing a bit of this and a bit of that, but not much. And poor old Dave, who’s obviously lost everything as well, he needed supporting, so I bung him a few bob to keep him going. And finally--, I think my dad suggested it, that the Rutland Boathouse had--,, since Sims’ had gone from there it had been used by rowing clubs. There was a big school, I can’t remember what they were called. They were a famous school but from over sort of Ruislip, somewhere like that, but they’d used the boathouse for their rowing club and then--,, I don’t know why they went, but then London Rowing Club from Putney had their place completely refurbished so they rented the Rutland Boathouse whilst London was being done up. And that was the reason--,, that was in… ’73, ’74, something like that, when the recession was on. And they’d agreed--,,Watney’s had agreed to let London Rowing Club have it for £4 a week for a concession, because they were a non-profit making organisation. And then with this recession thing going on, the--,, we’d got these people saying, “We can’t charge you anymore. We can only charge you what they were charging London as a concession.” But because of this thing that had gone on, you know, the three day week and all that sort of thing immediately prior to that--,, so I got it for four quid a week, it was lovely [laughter]. Not for very long I’m afraid. And I stayed there until ’83, but the writing was on the wall by about ’77. We’d got into Rutland Boathouse and it was working very well. It was a beautiful boathouse, tons of room, and I tried at one point--,, because the top floor was more or less obsolete. We didn’t need it. But there were changing rooms and showers and cooking facilities up there, and I said to Watney’s, “Can I buy it? I’ll live there,” you know, because I had no house. And to this day it’s the same, you can’t sublet or let the boathouse because the only entrance is through the pub yard, and if the sort of publican turned nasty and said, “You can’t come in,” you couldn’t get in your own front door. So it was a terrible shame. Because my brother in law, who was a bit of an architect, he designed--,, he changed this top floor into a lovely two bed flat, which would have been absolutely lovely, but it wasn’t to be. And as I say, gradually from ’77 onwards the nasty plastic people started to edge their way in and the average idiot boat buyer thought because they were more money they’d go faster. And that’s the same today, exactly the same today. They think if they spent
£10,000 on a sculling boat as against £3,000 for a wooden one, they’ll go faster [laughter]. There’s no such thing as a quick boat. There’s plenty of slow scullers, yeah.

Q: Could you just talk me through what a typical day in a boatyard consists of?

A: Early start, at 8am usually. I used to have this routine at Richmond and I used to walk in, pull the switch, which turned the lights and the radio on all in one go, and then go across to the bench and roll a fag. I used to smoke them awful rollups at that time. Light the fag up then get to work. Nothing specific, just whatever boat I was doing, I just went at it from 8am till 10am. Then we had a cup of tea. It was an unwritten law, you have to have tea at 10am. And you’d go through from 10am till 1pm, shoot off for lunch somewhere, not more than an hour though. Even though I was my own guv’nor I never spent more than an hour at lunch. Too mean to get on with the work, you see. And then 3pm, cup of tea. That was it, you know. And in between time, after ’78, this gets more confusing, I got employed by the Vintner’s company doing their swan thing. So an average, overall average of about an hour a day I was out catching swans and boats had to look after themselves [laughter]. But actually if the--., I don’t know if I could have done it if it wasn’t for the plastic thing sort of cutting my work down by a lot. I don’t think I could have afforded to go catching swans at literally any time, 24/7, including Christmas Day and New Year’s Eve. But I enjoyed it, yeah. But then by ’83 things had really, really quietened right down, and again we go back to dear old Frankie Sims [laughter]. He’d been the boatman at London Rowing Club, which is the biggest club in the country really, a lovely, lovely big club. And I knew he was retiring because I knew how much older than me he was, so I put into their management and said, “Look, when Frankie goes, can I be considered for the job?” Because I thought that would be ideal, the sort of bread and butter money and not too much hard work, just maintaining their boats. But anyway, yeah, it came true and I managed to get in there in ’83 and got it all set up, and I was building the odd boat as well in there. They didn’t mind. I was just sort of to one side. I had a lovely, lovely big workshop that was for the maintenance of the boats, but to one side I had a nice little set of stocks where I built a few boats in there as well. But there again, that was interrupted by plastic. 1991, eight years I was there, and there were one or two personalities that clashed a bit, and this particularly nasty creature, who was a know nothing, do nothing [laughter], couldn’t row or scull but he had himself made captain. And we never got on. From the very beginning we never did get on. And he got me chucked out. That’s it, they said, “You can have redundancy but we don’t need you anymore because there’s no wooden boats.” There were tons of wooden boats still, and I can mend plastic as well if I have to. I don’t like it but… [Phone ringing] [Recording paused] So chucked out of London Rowing Club, with a little bit of redundancy money, not really knowing where to go. So I built a shed in my back garden to build--., in theory to build the odd boat in, just sculling boats. So the shed was 30 foot long. Still there, got motorbikes in at the moment [laughter]. Nothing much came up, you know. I really was sort of just wandering round, unemployed, and then I managed--., wandered down to Richmond. And I knew young Mark, who’s still there now, and I used to help him, because he was--., well, he’s much younger than me, and I gave him some help with
experience, you know, and things. And he said to me, “Do you want to come and do a bit for me?” But it was completely alien, you know, skiffs and things, nothing like sculling boats and eights and things. I was able to do a bit for him but not very much. But that lasted a good--., I don’t know. And then me and Mark had a fallout, or he had a fallout with me. It was again money, of course. I built a load of them, this is sad, plastic cutters. They’re plastic hulls and they’re fitted out with wood for six oars for racing. And I’d done a load of them, piecework, but of course he never had the money. And when it came to getting the deposit for the next one, “Ooh, I haven’t got any money. I’d better let you go.” So I was left there, again not knowing what to do, and then some lady come along to Mark and said, “We’ve got a load of boats in our club at Malt Lake, need mending. Do you know anybody?” So Mark said, “Yeah, there’s Bill. He can do that.” And she said, “We’ve got a place you can do it in.” So I thought this is good. Anyway it turns out that they’d recently boat a property across the river from where they were. It used to be… Horseferry, which was the sporting side of the North Thames Gas Board, but they weren’t very successful as a rowing club, so they put the building up for sale. And Malt Lake Anglian Boat Club bought it, moved across the river, left their--., again another rowing club with a changing rooms and a shower, and the bar, would you believe, and pool table. Because my kids loved the pool table, didn’t they? But that was about 90 foot long, that shop, and I had to again do all the shop fitting. Built a couple of boats in there, not much. That was where the triple was built, because that was one of the things that I was--., the picture I showed you of the triple, one of the things I’d always wanted to do. I thought, right, now I’ve got a shop and it’s for nothing, let’s have a go. So I did it. But then after--., they did say--., we had a contract, three months’ notice either way. No money, they didn’t charge me at all for the rent. It was lovely. But it wasn’t a very nice place to work, and nobody walked past there much. And at Richmond, as you can see, there’s lovely people all day and every day, but it was just the occasional dog walker and things who’d go by there, and it was a bit boring. But all of a sudden the lady, who was very nice, rung me up and she said, “Look Bill, I’ve got to tell you, you’ve got three months’ notice, but we’ll do it in writing.” Her husband was a solicitor and he said, “We will do it in writing but you do have to go. I’m just giving you, you know, a head’s up on it.” So I had to get out of there [laughter]. And then again dear old Mark came to the rescue and gave me tenancy of number four, under Stan, who--., Stan owned number four. He was a very old bloke who had a--., and he was over 90 when he died. But he was my landlord up until the time I finished in there. And then he sold it, just before he died he sold it, to the man who’s got it now for the bike hire. So he’d previously had the bike hire in number two. I was in number four, so we had to do a swap, again all this mountains of stuff, the shop fitting and the stock and the benches and machines and everything. This time I said, “That’s it, that’s the last time. That’s number 12, that’ll do” [laughter]. So that’s where we are currently.

Q: So what sort of relationship do you have with Mark--., Mark Edwards, is it?
A: Yeah. Oh fine, yeah. He goes off on a hissy fit sometimes, you know, because he’s got so many brain-dead children round him, you know. They really are. He just feels--, he’s an odd--, that shouldn’t be recorded. Never mind [laughter]. You can always wipe it off, can’t you? But he feels--, because Mark was adopted when he was a baby, by some lovely people. I knew his adopted parents. They’re of course dead now. But because he was given such a wonderful chance in life, he feels he owes it to every other waif and stray, and they really--, he can find them, I promise you. They really are bad [laughter]. Got a couple of good ones, a couple of--, maybe three or four good boys, but dozens of others, and he pays them all. He pays them cash daily.

Q: Do you sort of work together at all on any projects?

A: Not much, no, no. No, I do all his transport for him. I think I’ve got to go to Cambridge tomorrow and deliver---, his boys build boats and I deliver them on the trailer, which is quite lucrative, nice enough, but other than that, that’s virtually--, I am no longer [inaudible 1:00:27] item [laughter].

Q: And are you still catching swans?

A: Not officially, but if the swan sanctuary in Shepton, who I have a very good relationship with--, I’ve known them a long, long time now. Blimey, I don’t know how long, but a long, long time. But they’ll still call me, but I very often can’t go, because I mainly come to work on a bus because it’s cheaper [laughter] with a bus pass. But, you know, I can’t afford to drive here every day, so if they ring and say there’s, you know, a swan somewhere, I say, “Well, if you can wait while I get a bus up there…” But really no, it’s not practical. But I do the odd one that perhaps other people---, particularly around Hamm Pond.

Q: So is that what the swan catching is, it’s--,

A: Just generally if they’re tied up with a fishing line or been run over, or landed in a road instead of a river, just literally anything. But the last one I did, I do so few now, I remember. A lady on Hamm Pond, they had six cygnets last year and they need to go, you know. They have to be chased off so they can get on with this year’s breeding. And there was one cygnet wouldn’t go and they beat it up and they ostracised it, wouldn’t let it eat. So she phoned me and said could I do anything. So again I’m on the bus, so she said, “Well, if you come up here”---, it’s only a little way to Hamm Common on the bus. “We’ll use my catch. We can catch the swan and chuck it up the car, and just take it down the river.” That’s all that needed doing really. That’s the last job I did. That was a couple of months ago.

Q: Do you get trained to deal with the swans? Because they’re quite hefty birds.
A: Yeah, well, you have to be careful. You learn the hard way. A swan’s wing is about as powerful as that, okay, seriously, like that, and get one or two of those in the wrong place, it does hurt [laughter]. Dear old Harold, you know the one I said who got me into the swan job in the first place, he had his right index finger went right out and then went that way. That was broken by a swan when he was trying to catch one [laughter].

Q: You said at one of the places you were at, I think it was Malt Lake, that it was quite lonely. I mean, what was the sort of general social life of the yards like? Did you all sort of meet up and…?

A: Where there was lots of people there was not a problem, but when I was, you know, only--, what shall I call it--, sole proprietor, how’s that, you had to rely on people coming in. It was--, but again when you’re busy, you’re very busy you don’t worry to much about socialising. As long as the radio--, must have a radio. But that’s all really. But down here, Richmond, it’s magic, you know, because there’s so many people and there’s--, I’ve got regulars who come-- , like I’ve got a John in the morning and a John in the afternoon. That was John on the phone just now, but that was the morning John. See, just to confuse you [laughter]. He goes out house sitting some people in Kent and he goes quite regularly, and he’s just come back from that so he’s ready for tea now, he says [laughter].

Q: Could you just tell me a little bit about Frankie Sims?

A: Yeah. He was the son of George, who went to Hammersmith in the ‘30s bust up. His father was George. I knew George, he was a lovely old man as well. But Frankie was a strange, strange fella, very, very miserable, very miserable. Sort of a--–, he used to drink quite a lot but he never got drunk. He never got happy drunk, you know. He got even--–, as he got drunk he got even more miserable, poor thing. But he also--–, again he was a brilliant boat builder. I don’t know about the best in the world, but he said he was so you’ve got to believe him, haven’t you? But he again was an ignorant man. He smoked, smoked a hell of a lot, and he wasn’t well at all, and he used to go to St Mary’s Roehampton Hospital and they told him, “Look, if you don’t stop smoking you’re going to die.” He carried on smoking. That is ignorance, isn’t it, really? But when I took over from him at London Rowing Club, he didn’t last a year or so. He was only 65, yeah. I think he died about ’66.

Q: Could you just tell me a little bit about how the industry’s changed over the years?

A: Not much really until the invasion of the plastics and that changed everything. But up until that point really there was no boat builder proprietor who was a businessman at all, so we all really undersold. And one of the--–, oddly, when the plastic happened in ’77 or thereabouts, they came in at enormously bigger prices than wooden boats, which--–, you know, you would have thought, well, if you’re trying to get a new business going, we’ll go in, undercut them. No, much dearer, much dearer, so it gave me the opportunity to put my prices up, not quite as much as them but I mean till--–, oh, I can’t give you an example… I suppose I’d build, shall we
say, a sculling boat for about £750. The plastic would come in at £1,500. So I was able to go up to £1,000, still undercut them but make a lot more money, but there wasn't a lot more money because there wasn't a lot of boats then. But it did give me the opportunity to up it a bit. But again it was our own fault. It's back to the Bill Sims thing in 1959, when he sort of stepped in and said, “Look, you're not doing it right,” which is basically what the plastic people said to me without saying so, you know what I mean? Came in with a much dearer thing. I thought, right, okay, we'll up it a bit. And I don't think I lost any work through putting the price up because I was still well under the plastic, you see. But I mean, today the current price of a single sculling boat, like the one you saw in my shop, that's 10 grand in plastic. I can still do that for £4,000 and make a profit, but no one wants one so it don't matter really [laughter].

Q: Why do people want plastic boats as opposed to your beautiful wooden crafted--,

A: They believe they go faster. They believe the more money you spend, the faster you'll go, but it's not true. I promise you it's absolutely not true. The same sort of thing, I keep on saying this, with pushbikes, you know. If your name is Sir Chris Hoy and you've got thighs like that, you'll win on a bike that costs 200 quid. But people will sell you a plastic one--, do you know what the record--, I've just seen it in a motorbike magazine, pushbike by a Bugatti. Have a wild guess. I mean, go mad for a pushbike.

Q: I haven't got a clue.

A: £1,000? £10,000?

Q: Five grand.

A: £38,000. £38,000. It's got no gears, one brake, no mudguards, fixed wheel, 38 grand, but it does say on it Bugatti, you see. Ain't that mad? Mad, but that's exactly the same thing but taken to the extreme. I mean, as I say, the right man on a cheapo bike would still win the race, and they say exactly the same in boats, but I can't make anyone believe that. But it's not that they're stupid. People who row generally are academic, you know. Sounds very sensible people, but they do not understand basics.

Q: Do you think you're going to be able to keep it, the tradition of the wooden--,

A: No.

Q: You're not going to be able to keep it alive?

A: No. I ain't got much longer to go anyway now so…

Q: Do you think there is a place for it though?

A: No. There's a man called Carl Douglas, who's a good friend of mine, he builds boats that look like wood. Basically they're moulded, not--, moulded as against what we call---, my own
method of construction is tortured ply, where you get a bit of wood and just bend it round. With Carl's method it's loads of veneers laid over and they're all exactly the same, you can't alter them. But the basic structure underneath the wood is Kevlar so it's very, very strong. So he's got basically a plastic boat that looks like wood. And he does do a fantastic job in finishing. They look like a piano, you know, that sort of depth of gloss. And he sells, although he sells those wooden boats but strictly speaking they're not. But I tried, I did try to put them up to a ridiculous price but no good at all [laughter].

Q: So from what you've said, it sounds like there aren't that many-- there aren't any young people coming into the--,

A: No, no. There's certainly no young racing boat builders, none. I think I can fairly say I'm the last in the world.

Q: Looking back, what would you say your proudest moment's been?

A: I don't know, just doing it really, yeah, not my particular thing.

Q: And have you got one thing you'd like to achieve still?

A: Yeah, I'd like to build another boat before I die, just one more, yeah. I don't even know if I still can, because it's ten years since I did. And what you don't realise when you're doing it all day and every day, you don't have a chance to forget anything, but I've now had ten years to forget and I have to think--, when I'm doing a repair job even, I think now, how did we used to do that? It's surprising how ten years destroys your memory. I mean, I never ever had to think even slightly about what was the next step. Right, you do that bit, then you put that bit, then you put that bit and then you go there, then you go and get some of that. I never had to think about it. But if somebody said to me today, "Right okay, start a boat now," I've got to go through all that shop fitting business again--, because I've never actually built a boat in where I am now. I've only been there about seven years and the last boat was ten years ago, so... Naughty [laughter].

Q: Have you sort of perfected any techniques over the years?

A: Oh yeah, lots, lots, but they're very sort of difficult, impossible to explain to the layman. But, you know, one particular process, which I can't really explain, but when you're fitting a plank on a boat, that's the whole outside, half of the outside, it had to be fitted--, when I worked for Sims' and things--., it's 26 feet long and it has to be fitted with no, absolutely no tolerance lengthwise. Wood is glued up into one length that's 26 foot long, and it has to be fitted into a cut out in the stern post, which had to be absolutely exact, not half a millimetre out. It had to fit exactly. And then all the way along the keel and into the stem, where there was another cut out, what we call a cut in, in fact, with absolutely no margin for error. But we did it, we did it. Everybody who built racing boats did the same thing, fitted them into their cut-ins, in the stem and stern, never thinking. And I managed to perfect a method, which doesn't stop the boat
going any--, it doesn’t make it any slower. It doesn’t make it any quicker either, but it does
away with--, completely does away with this absolutely no tolerance. You can be half an inch
out my way and it still works. But I mean, that was--, took a long time to figure out. Never got
any credit. And what I did get for it was copied. As soon as everyone else saw--, “Oh look,
he’s managed to put a plank on without a cut in here, we’ll have to do that.” And that boat
that’s in my shop now is one of dear Mr Bill Simms’, and that’s got my stem on, and the stem.
The stem and stern are--, but he would never--, he’d never say that they copied me. “Oh no,
no, we evolved our own way.” But I promise you--, I did steal it. I’ve got to say, not totally my
invention, but I just happened to see an American boat, but it was only one end. He only did
one end. I did both ends. But yeah, that really was a revolutionary thing, for me anyway.

Q: And Richmond, I just wondered, how’s Richmond waterfront changed over the years?

A: It’s much--, many, many less people. There used to be--, I think there were four or five
families of boat letters, all getting a living from hiring boats, hiring skiffs at Richmond, skiffs
and punts and everything else, but there’s only Mark now and he doesn’t do ever so well. But
I mean, in the old days… [Sirens] [Recording paused]

Q: Yeah, you were just telling me how the waterfront at Richmond had changed.

A: Yeah, yeah, so I’d seen--, it was a video, somebody gave it to me, and that was on--, between
the bridges--, between the locks, sorry, Richmond Lock to Teddington, and they did a study,
and I was part of that and they sent me a copy of the video. And in that was a shot on the
towpath up by the canoe club, and they would--, on a good Sunday were ten deep all day
long, walking past there. You’d get a lot of people down there, but not that many. But on a
big rugby day, because they all congregate here before they go to rugby, you get a lot of
people then. And on one or two boating occasions, like the Great River Race in September,
you’ll get a lot of people here for that, right across the bridge and everything, you know,
absolutely hundreds and hundreds of spectators. But it’s not as good as it should be. I’ve--,
now that I don’t really work much, I spend a lot of time looking at the river, but you can go
three hours and not see a boat moving, and that shouldn’t be. It should be busy the whole
time. There’s a lot of money to be earned moving goods on the river, but they don’t much any
more, no.

Q: Was the river very polluted back in the ‘60s?

A: Yeah. It’s not very good now [laughter]. Mogden Lane Sewage Works discharges thousands
of tons of sewage into the river on a weekly basis.

Q: I’ve just got one other question, just for the tape, do you know what Dave at Kingston’s
surname was?
A: Dave?

Q: Was it Dave at Kingston? Dave at Kingston, his surname.

A: Oh, Dave Veale, V-E-A-L-E. He died a couple of years ago, poor thing, very sad. He was completely a loner. Very, very, very good boat builder, possibly the best. But he lived on his own, he died on his own. Never really achieved ever so much. But me and one of my sort of associates down here, Richard, who didn’t even know Dave, came with me--, because Dave’s nearest relative was a second cousin, his father’s cousin, strange little man. Ssh [laughter]. But me and Richard went over there every Tuesday for about three hours for six months trying to clear the house out, what Dave had accumulated. And of course I don’t have that much room in my shop down there, but since Dave died I’ve had to double the capacity to all his stuff in. It’s stuff I don’t need, I don’t want. I’ve got enough nails and screws and things, and of course Dave had thousands. And I think when Sims’ closed on Eel Pie Island, and they went in--, I think it was ‘99, I think Dave went there and helped clear it out. But I think what--, he didn’t steal it. The owner, or Bill Sims’ son who ran it, just couldn’t be bothered and he just turned his back and walked away, so Dave went in there and emptied a load of stuff out that would have just been abandoned. And then of course I got the job of finding somewhere to put it now.

Q: Right. Is there anything else you’d like to talk about that I haven’t asked you about?

A: No, you’ve been very good, yes. I think I’ve said most of what there is to say, yeah. Just, you know, go on a bit more about plastic, if you like, against plastic [laughter]. Can’t go on enough about that. But there again, you know, it’s the people who buy them who encourage it, isn’t it? If they didn’t buy them they wouldn’t be able to build them. And the thing is, there are so many of them at it now. The main, main person in plastic boats is the German Empacher, who’s huge, makes absolute millions, but there’s quite a lot of lesser people. There’s a big Chinese one now as well, a big, big, big--., and good, because they’re good, Chinese are good. When they do something they do it properly, and they’re challenging the might of Empacher, if you like, at half the price, which is lovely really. What I should have done had I been a bit shrewd was to get a hold of the Chinese import rights. I’d have been alright then, but hey [laughter].

Q: And Bea, have you got any other questions you’d like to ask?

Q2: No, I think that’s everything. Brilliant. Well, thank you so much.

Q: Thank you.

A: Right, we’ll go and get a cup of tea now [laughter].

[End of recording 1:22:06]