Q: This is an oral history interview with Mark and Hannah Montgomery Smith on May 30th at Eel Pie Island by Bea Moyes. So can you start by telling me your full names?

HM-S: I'm Helen Montgomery Smith, I'm—,

MM-S: And I’m Mark Montgomery Smith [laughs].

Q: And can I ask you where you were both brought up?

HM-S: I was brought up in Chorley Wood and then Ealing.

MM-S: And I was born in Kent near Gatwick airport and I think I’m from near Peterborough. I spent the years from 11 to 17 near Peterborough in East Anglia.

Q: How did you first meet? When was that?

MM-S: I went to—, I did civil engineering at Imperial College in London, in South Kensington and shared a house with Helen’s brother.

HM-S: And I was still at school, so I was 17 when I met him, so we’ve been together a long time.

MM-S: So we first met on the first Christmas—, [both laugh]. I started university in 1983.

HM-S: Well remembered! [Both laugh]

MM-S: There you go.

Q: And what did both your parents do for a living?

MM-S: So my dad used to write computer software and my mum taught maths in a technical college.

HM-S: And my mum’s a gardener and my dad’s a university lecturer.

Q: So none of your parents have backgrounds on the river?

MM-S: My dad has sailed small sailing boats since he was a boy really, so I was brought up sailing. And his uncle, my dad’s uncle was a civil engineer, he specialised in marine stuff and built, or designed Woolverstone Marina, which is on the River Orwell on the East Coast, just something that I—, so I met him when I was about 17, went on his beautiful old sailing boat.
HM-S: You were kind of thrown on to sailing boats as a little child weren't you?

MM-S: I did, and then I become obsessed with sailing. So when I left school I bought an 18 foot wreck and painted it, which at the time I thought was equivalent to doing it up, and set off to the Mediterranean and got as far as Cherbourg before it had sunk twice on the way, and I got a tow back to the Isle of Wight. And then went to university—, oh, then I spent the rest of the year sailing other people's boats, then I went to university. Then I met Helen and she came the next Easter and we re-nailed that boat together.

HM-S: Yeah, it was a beautiful [SX1 Design? - 3:20]—

MM-S: It was called an [SX1 Design? - 3:21], it came from Southend, it was a lovely clinker boat.

HM-S: 1930s was it?

MM-S: Designed in 1919 and built in 1937. And then we sailed to Holland in it in the next summer holiday, and unfortunately left it there 'cause the anchor broke and it got wrecked on a beach.

HM-S: So, but that was my introduction to boats and my husband to be [both laugh].

Q: Really? So you hadn't sailed before that?

HM-S: No, no.

Q: So you were learning on the trip then?

HM-S: It was a complete learning curve [laughs], it was a complete learning curve [laughs].

MM-S: And then the next summer holiday we were going to go and get that, and then I saw an advert in Exchange & Mart, which was the eBay of its day, for a 24 foot [gaff rigged? - 4:12] cutter built in—, anyway, it doesn’t really matter—,

HM-S: 1929.

MM-S: It was an ancient, beautiful old boat built in the 1930s, and that was in Majorca with a broken mast, and it belonged to a guy who lived in Barnes. And between the two of us we, it was, we agreed a price of £800, and flew out on a two week return to Majorca—,

HM-S: It was quite funny actually because we took a tool bag, you wouldn't be able to do that now—,

MM-S: Carried an outboard motor covered up with a blanket—,

HM-S: And a bag full of tools, hand luggage—,
MM-S: Washed the petrol can out with bleach in Heathrow Airport so they’d let us take it on as hand luggage, got on a bus to this boat, swam out to the boat, which was in the middle of a bay, which was quite difficult for me ‘cause I’m not a very good swimmer, and it was beautiful, and rang Helen’s brother up and he handed the guy the £800. And we had to fix the mast ‘cause it was broken in two pieces, and then sailed it back to London.

HM-S: And that was kind of what, why we came here actually—,

MM-S: And that’s really why we started, why we’re here. ‘Cause we had a mooring in front of Battersea power station on a thing called Nine Elms pier, which is still there, so that was in 1986 at a guess.

HM-S: Four, five, five?

MM-S: No it wasn’t. Oh yeah, no, okay, well yeah, okay, five probably, and was there for two or three months getting rather bounced around, and it’s not a very great place for a 24 foot boat really. And then at the time there was only two boats on Nine Elms pier, there was us and there was a [spiritsail? - 5:47] barge called Trilby, and an Australian guy who I just know as Aussie John who has passed away since then actually, came to work on that and he said, “I know a better place for you to keep your boat,” and lent us an outboard motor, ‘cause the engine had broken in this [inaudible - 6:04] as we came out the—, anyway, another story really. And came out the Thames to Brentford to the Grand Union Canal behind Albion [timber? - 6:15], I bet you’ve interviewed people in—, to what is now [Wey? - 6:20] dock, but at the time it was [Scotsman? - 6:23], and there used to be a boatyard there run by a guy called John Woolley, do you know that name? So we were on John Woolley’s spot. There was a wooden narrowboat being built on the bank there and a few other people—,

HM-S: And Aussie John was there wasn’t he?

MM-S: Aussie John was there building a steel replica of the [Spray? - 6:44], which was [inaudible - 6:46] boat, the first sail single handed round the world in ages ago, anyway, like in 18 something.

HM-S: Yeah.

MM-S: And we stayed there, and then when I finished my university course, degree, Aussie John told us about this place, Eel Pie Marine Centre it was called then, and we came here for three weeks to make sure the boat was sea worthy before sailing off to Scotland. Do you want to pause it? [Pause for background interruption]

Q: Right, so we were in the middle of, when you were saying about being moored up at Brentford. Were they, was it kind of illegal moorings at that point?
MM-S: It wasn’t illegal, it was just not legal [laughs], it just didn’t, we didn’t—, I used to post a cheque to an address in Bristol that I had for John Woolley to cover what I thought my electricity usage was, 'cause I didn’t want him to be out of pocket on my account, 'cause I ran a little electric heater ‘cause there was snow on the ground. But nobody, I didn’t pay rent to anyone, and I’m not—, I don’t think anybody ever cashed the cheques, I don’t think they ever did anything. So basically that’s how we bought the boat, is I spent my rent money on the boat. And it’s really, it was [large oar? - 8:10] [inaudible - 8:11], it was a proper boat. I mean when we came round [Ushant? - 8:14] round the north coast of France on the way home, we had a full gale and we were sitting under the tiller singing sea shanties to stay cheerful and it was lovely probably [laughs].

Q: And is that your first big sailing trip?

MM-S: Yeah.

Q: How long did it take?

HM-S: Six weeks was it, more than that?

MM-S: Six weeks or something.

HM-S: Eight weeks maybe.

MM-S: We went in at [Set? - 8:36] and came through a thing called the Canal du Midi, which cuts off—, instead of going through Spain you cut the bottom corner of France off and come out in Bordeaux, so that’s the canal, you have the mast down, and this, when we bought the boat, well, the boat had an old Stuart Turner engine, which is an old [inaudible - 8:51] petrol engine and it worked extremely well with a few repairs, like any old engine, all the way through the canals. And on the day we—, as we came out of the last lock of the last canal, the main bearings on the engine, which are roller bearings, completely collapsed, so it was a write off until it was dismantled and rebuilt. And we then sailed every inch of the way, all the way back. We were goose winged in the Thames barrier for about 40 minutes ‘cause we’d just missed high tide, we had an east wind, no radio or any nonsense like that. And then we got towed through, I’m 99% sure we got towed through by a boat called the Scoundrel, or maybe it was the [Nickelon? - 9:38], it was a boat, it was one of the old types that belonged to a guy called Ron Livett, you’ll have heard that name, towed us a couple of hundred yards up through, and we moored up on the north shore in a [Sigma? - 9:52] paint yard factory, which is just not there anymore. And I go up there and I look and I’m not quite sure—, it’s what is now a derelict wharf but at that time it was, the way I remember it is paint silos. He gave us a [peaked cap? - 10:09] with [Sigma? - 10:09] paint written on it, which is how I remember the [Sigma? - 10:14] paint business. And we weren’t really allowed ashore ‘cause it was a high secure compound with dangerous chemicals. But he let us go ashore, got a bus to a shop
called Barner Marine, which was in Barnet at that time, the shop still exists but it’s moved, and we rented an outboard motor—,

HM-S: For the rest of the Thames.

MM-S: For the day, stuck it on the back of the boat and then drove up to Nine Elms pier and then took the motor back to the shop [laughs], so, which is how come Aussie John had to lend us an outboard motor to go to Brentford three months later.

Q: Wow, it sounds like quite an adventure to get up the river.

MM-S: And then when we came to Eel Pie we were here for three weeks and we took a couple of keelboats out the thing, they were so good, I think, I can’t remember if we replaced them or put them back, either way didn’t bother taking them all out ’cause they were perfect, got the engine working again—,

HM-S: Repainted her, did her up a little bit.

MM-S: In a rather garish red colour, and then sailed up to Scotland [laughs].

HM-S: So yeah, so we were here for three weeks, but in that three weeks we—,

MM-S: In that three weeks we became really firm friends with the guy that used to run it called Henry Gastell and then I went off—, then I had to start work to pay for all this stuff. It was all done on a bank loan on the strength of the fact that I had a job out of university, and went, and we moved to Dover where I was working on Dover harbour building concrete piers for Townsend Tourist and Super Ferry this was just before the Channel Tunnel got built. So the cross channel ferries did a huge, made bigger, better ferries to be more economical, which was all obviously in the long run a bit of a folly because then it got mucked up by the—, but nobody knew that anyway. Anyway, that’s kind of irrelevant. So there we were in Dover working 100 hours a week, and were you pregnant?

HM-S: Yeah.

MM-S: Got pregnant shortly after.

HM-S: Pretty shortly after.

MM-S: And a young family, and we sold the boat we had left on a mooring for the winter in [Pin Mill? - 12:13], which is on the east coast near Ipswich on the River Orwell, and when spring came round we got a letter from the guy that ran the mooring telling us to get rid of the boat immediately, it was in his way and there’s a waiting list, this is a lovely yacht anyway. So we didn’t know what to do with it so we advertised it and sold it, and have never seen it since. It’s sad really, you know, however we did make money on that boat. Paid £800 and sold it for—, and that’s the only time I’ve ever sold a boat for more than I bought it for [both laugh].
Q: So when you first came here to see it together, was it to get the engine you said?

HM-S: Yeah, to get the engine and give it a lick of paint before taking it to Scotland.

MM-S: Just to make sure it was sea worthy really. I mean I assumed we would have the mast. Like I say, when we bought the boat the mast was rotten in the middle, and we repaired it by laminating—, we just assumed we'd buy a tree, there are no trees in Majorca, it's a grubby low wooded place. But we laminated softwood planks into it, probably pretty ordinary floorboard type wood with [inaudible - 13:16], which is Spanish for black waterproof glue, which is what they call [cascofen? - 13:21], which is—, anyway, it's an old fashioned glue, and sailed it home. And then I started looking at the price of a new mast and it was completely out of—,

HM-S: It was way out of our budget.

MM-S: It was way out of—, we looked at telegraph poles and all that. And then in the end we oiled and varnished the mast that we had on it and it came up beautifully.

HM-S: Beautiful, yeah it was good.

MM-S: And it took us to Scotland and back no problem. It was actually a really super duper sea worthy boat, there was nothing wrong with it.

HM-S: But also, but having a relationship with Henry at the time, sort of instantly you and he got on like a house on fire really, it was, spoke the same language.

MM-S: Oh yes, and I made a joke, I complained about the price of craning a boat in, it was £40, so I made a—, I complained about the fact it was £40 to crane a boat in and he offered to rent the crane for £10 an hour. Now, it doesn't take an hour to [inaudible - 14:15] a boat so I jumped at this [laughs], and he gave me a couple of crane driving lessons, which were quite interesting 'cause he was dyslexic and didn't really know how to drive it, he just kept pulling levers until things did the right thing. And then when it came to time to launch the boat he was nowhere to be seen, so Helen and I got in and launched the boat and nearly dropped it at one point but didn't and stuck it in, and he must have been a little bit flabbergasted, but he still charged us the £40 anyway, called it crane driving lessons, but it was wonderful really. So then we went off, lived in Dover and started working.

HM-S: But I think that made an impact on him, 'cause he realised we were—,

MM-S: So then we stayed in touch. We used to come and have dinner with him almost every month really, just come and spend an evening here.
Q: What was he like, Henry?

HM-S: He was a character wasn’t he?

MM-S: He was a character.

HM-S: Some people described him as a barrow boy because he was a wheeler and dealer type really wasn’t he?

MM-S: He described himself as a—, he used to buy and sell clothes, he was in the rag trade. That doesn’t describe it, he was a nutcase, but he was a wonderful—, he had a Jensen Interceptor, he had old cars, he always had an old car, he never locked them, he wore flip flops, he chain smoked Marlboro Reds.

HM-S: His big fascination was people, not boats though wasn’t it? It was quite different, which is different from us.

MM-S: He was really obsessed with—, he had with help built a boat in Brentford out of the old steel from the gasometers in Brentford, and that boat is—,

HM-S: Still exists, yeah.

MM-S: The boat called [Money Box? - 15:43], which is the boat that’s on the far side of the yard behind the gate, I don’t know if you’ve seen it, it’s still there being used as a houseboat. So his idea was to sell that and go round the world, but he could—, so he got towed up to here by a tugboat called [Thaw? - 15:57], which is still here, and then he—, and the previous yard had just recently gone into receivership or bankrupt or something and was being sold in two bits. And him and somebody else managed to buy what was where we are now, the bit in between that isn’t quite a boat yard, and then Ken’s bit next door.

HM-S: He didn’t buy that bit, that was separate.

MM-S: So he didn’t have that, that was separate, so it was Eel Pie Island Slipways and there was Eel Pie Marine Centre, which was what is now Eel Pie Boatyard and Phoenix Wharf, whatever—,

HM-S: Phoenix Wharf.

MM-S: Phoenix Wharf.

HM-S: Although it didn’t look like that.

MM-S: And he ran that, and he filled it--, it was beautiful-- , in that old oil painting there it was that bit in the middle [both talking at once], which doesn’t exist. And that roof that got gradually fitted out by people fresh out of art college and whatever, and little businesses, and it’s a rabbit warren—
HM-S: Yeah, he was wanting it to be a cheap place for people to start up little arty crafty businesses, and that's how it started that side of--,

Q: This is Henry?

HM-S: This is Henry, yeah.

MM-S: And it was very fun.

HM-S: Yeah.

Q: So did he know a lot of the artists already or did he just--,

MM-S: No, he didn’t know anyone.

HM-S: No, he was about cheap spaces, do it yourself, yeah, yeah, yeah, it’ll be fine.

MM-S: He advertised in practical places, for the boatyard, for the boat moorings it was--,

HM-S: Yeah, I mean it was very much the do it yourself type of attitude though wasn’t it?

MM-S: All the boats were--, I mean we still are, there are people fixing boats for a living here, but mostly we rent spaces from people who fix their own boats, and that’s what he did and that’s what we did when we were there. And not everyone manages, some people are there for years fixing their boats, but people love doing that.

HM-S: But it's about that kind of affordable side of boating isn't it?

MM-S: Yeah.

HM-S: It’s a different kind of, yeah, market maybe.

Q: So when did you come to take over the boatyard from Henry?

MM-S: Well we came back in--, ‘cause we stayed friends with him he kept thinking he was going to buy another--, we came here not to run it. We rented, we bought this thing, the barge that we’re sitting in, when did we buy that?

HM-S: '92.

MM-S: Okay, when we had three children, the youngest was six months old, and I worked for a marine engineering company.

Q: And what were they called?
MM-S: Shoreline Engineering, they don’t exist anymore. They went into receivership during one of the recessions when Mrs Thatcher was in power, there was a big construction recession, so I was made redundant, we’d just bought this.

HM-S: We decided to be self employed and come to the river and start a little business, yeah, yeah.

MM-S: And I just decided to, instead of applying for a job, just see if I couldn’t be, make a living self-employed. And Henry had an old crane on an old barge tucked up a creek in Wandsworth called the River Wandle, and an old boat that wasn’t really a tugboat but worked, which is --, and well I went and towed it up here and got away with it and did some piling, started a piling business on the Thames.

HM-S: Which was Montgomery Smith’s Civil Engineering at the time wasn’t it, yeah?

MM-S: Called Montgomery Smith Civil Engineering.

Q: And that was with who?

MM-S: Me. So there are photographs of the barge and a crane and the piling hammer and a pile hanging up there, and there’s nobody in the photograph ‘cause I’m behind the camera! [Laughs] And I put some piles in near Kew Bridge on that basis.

HM-S: And you did sort of a few jobs round the [island? – 19:53] didn’t you?

MM-S: There’s a house--,

HM-S: So it was a bit like the Pat Walsh concept.

MM-S: It was a bit like Pat Walsh, well no--,

HM-S: Concept, yeah.

MM-S: With less, that’s a bit unfair on Pat Walsh, okay! [Laughs] It was a much smaller crane and much less well put together, but one of the houses on the other side called Shamrock, the steel sheet piling in front, we put in with that rig and it’s still there and all lovely. And then I met Jake--, then I was building some pontoons to go on the housing on the other side of the island--,

HM-S: We didn’t have enough space to--,

MM-S: In the dry dock.

HM-S: Yeah.

MM-S: In here, and Jake Oliver MSN Marine came--,
HM-S: Well no, he wasn't MSN Marine, just Jake.

MM-S: Well no he wasn't, but you know him as MSN Marine now, so that guy came and looked at what I was doing. He used to live on a boat here years before, so he was here for whatever reason visiting old friends, and looked at what I was doing and told me I was doing it all wrong. So I asked him to show me how to do it right and he did, and we ended up working together for quite a few years.

Q: How long did you work together?

MM-S: That's a very difficult question. I would say probably between '95 and 2002.

HM-S: Probably.

MM-S: What do you think? Prospect Reach was '96.

HM-S: Yeah, similar time. But then put together your engineering brain and his practical brain and it all came together.

MM-S: He had a far greater knowledge of hydraulics and engines and welding and stuff, and I had the civil engineering, I could actually design gangways, so I had the confidence to choose what size bits of metal to stick together and let members of the general public stand on them.

HM-S: So it worked together in a kind of, yeah, so--, and also at the same time, yeah, the river was becoming, there were places where people wanted to live on the river, so it was about building, yeah.

MM-S: And it was about the same time that houseboats were--, there'd been a--, as far as I could understand it you'd got Cheyne Walk, which was, houseboats started being used there after the Second World War as Blitz overspill housing, and a few other places that had happened, but since then there's been a little bit of an explosion in the numbers of them, and unfortunately the who things changed from being Blitz overspill housing to costing a bucket load of money [laughs], reflecting London house prices. And Jake and I built several moorings on the River Lea and on the Thames to accommodate that.

Q: So your business you feel was working on that?

MM-S: Largely, yeah it was piling and building pontoons and putting them in. And then in the process of that we took over what was just becoming--, had just been taken over by a property developer, the site in Brentford that we took over that Jake is still running that used to be called E C Jones & Company. And the property developer just wanted to obviously turn it into flats and we rented first a corner and then took over the whole thing, and look at it now, it's a pretty thriving busy boatyard isn't it? Have you been there?
Q: Yeah, yeah.

MM-S: Yeah, it's humming isn't it?

Q: Incredible.

MM-S: And then we had a slight difference of --, 'cause Jake wanted to employ lots of people and make it bigger and bigger, and I wanted to enjoy myself driving boats and cranes in the river, and they're not quite the same thing. So we work together when he gets site jobs, building these things, he calls me in and we still work together.

Q: Do you still part own the business?

MM-S: No, no, no, when I left I just wanted to separate it completely, so no, I've got no --, just friends.

Q: So when you were doing all of that you were also starting to work at the boatyard here?

MM-S: Yes, and that was also a time problem 'cause it meant I worked Monday to Friday in Brentford and Saturday and Sunday here, and that was another reason why I didn't carry on with that all the way through, so, just too much.

Q: So taking you back a little bit to when you took over here, what kind of year was that?

HM-S: That was after the fire, 'cause the fire was in November '96, so after that we --, so what was left of the land, so the bit that wasn't actually fire damaged we managed to get some loans, get some money together, there was Mark and myself and another couple, so four of us. And then April '97 I think we actually managed to buy it, so, and the idea behind it was to keep everybody who was still, who hadn't been burnt out and --,

MM-S: Yeah, that was the whole thing, anyone who hadn't been displaced by the fire wasn't going to be made to go 'cause we were redeveloping the buildings or anything like that.

HM-S: It was about preserving the boatyard, keeping it.

MM-S: It was about fire damage. Rather than knocking them down they were patched up with gaffer tape [inaudible – 25:08].

HM-S: Yeah, it was about, yeah, it was about keeping the heart and soul of Eel Pie together really. And after the fire it was, yeah, 'cause emotionally it was quite a big thing, the fire was for the sort of --,

MM-S: Well all these young start up businesses had all their stuff burnt.

HM-S: Burnt down, and a few gorgeous boats were just --,
MM-S: There were some beauties, there was a Dunkirk ‘little ship’ that has just--, been there for three years, he’d just finished, just like putting the last dab of paint on the last little bit and then that caught fire.

HM-S: You know, it was one of those, it was on of those kind of emotional times.

MM-S: There was a wooden Dutch sailing barge, same thing, ten year restoration, oiled to perfection and the oil went up like a candle. And others, there were lots of very nice [both talking at once] shredded, it was--.

HM-S: So it was quite an emotional time. And also Henry at the same time as that--,

MM-S: Had moved, he’d bought another premises in Hastings.

HM-S: Had kind of moved to another property in Hastings, so we were already, you were already driving the crane--,

MM-S: I was already driving the crane and launching boats [both talking at once].

HM-S: And doing lots of bits and pieces, so it kind of, it kind of all came together didn’t it really?

MM-S: So he went out of his way when he was--., he wanted to sell it ‘cause it wasn’t insured for fire, there was an exemption in the insurance for fire because he was in the process of building various breezeblock fire walls and stuff but it wasn’t finished yet. So he felt that he had to sell it, and he’d kind of lost--., he’d already moved away and his heart wasn’t quite like--,

HM-S: He’d already lost, yeah, his heart and soul into it, yeah, he’d lost it.

MM-S: So what he did was, we couldn’t, he wanted [clicks fingers], he decided what he wanted for it and he wanted to sell at least some of it to us, so he spoke to several property developers and all of them, made them talk to us as well and see if we couldn’t, something. And the deal that we eventually, the one we went for was the only one that was offered where we were able to buy all of the stuff that wasn’t already burnt, so basically the ashtray site, which is obviously, was bought by the next door neighbour--,

HM-S: That’s Phoenix Wharf now.

MM-S: And everything that wasn’t an ashtray, Eel Pie Boatyard managed to buy. So yeah, that was--., so that was very successful in that sense.

Q: Were you both here when the fire happened?

MM-S: Yeah. Well we were at a party at Trevor’s, nearly everyone was there, it was a kind of bonfire night and there was a fireworks party. Somebody came running into the party saying, “There’s a fire!” And then we walked round and low and behold there was, and it was all--., by the time we saw it, it was already huge flames, it wasn’t going to get put out.
HM-S: Well actually my side of the story was slightly different for that wasn’t it? ‘Cause somebody came and said there was a fire in the boatyard and my friend was babysitting the kids, and I’d said to her--, ‘cause--, and she said, “Well I’ll either be on the boat or I’ll be in my flat,” and when somebody said there was a fire I thought, [inaudible – 28:06] my kids on the boat! So I just ran before anybody could stop me from Trevor’s party to the yard. So when I ran past, yeah, there was, I looked up at [the bit? – 28:19] where there were just a few flames and then by the time I got to the-- and this boat was full of smoke, then there was a huge bang ‘cause the gas bottles went up, then [makes explosion sound] the fire was massive and I knew that I couldn’t get past. But the kids weren’t on board anyway so it was all fine, but I needed to know that [laughs].

Q: So they were in the flat?

HM-S: So they were in the flat on the mainland. And then I spent the rest of the time going back and forth, ‘cause it was draw off so most of the boats couldn’t move, but one of the boat’s, [inaudible – 28:56] could, so he was on the moorings and there was me and a couple of others. And we basically went back and forth for the firemen with their pumps, and they were-- and spent the whole night just ferrying the firemen across. They didn’t actually put it out but they did contain it.

Q: How long did it take to kind of--?

HM-S: It basically burnt itself out to be honest, ‘til there was no timber left.

MM-S: Yeah, ‘til five ‘o clock in the morning roughly.

HM-S: ‘Til five ‘o clock in the morning until there was no timber left, yeah, you just like watch it, yeah, burning out. But it was an emotional time wasn’t it, sort of, for the community I would say?

Q: So when you took it over the next year and you actually bought it, what were you buying, what was left?

MM-S: Half an acre of land with the dry dock, some, two or three wooden sheds that were being used for studios, and one brick-- two lines of four brick built studios.

HM-S: And the machine shop, the shed, the wood working shed.

MM-S: Wood working tools, quite big, really good wood working tools.

HM-S: And the crane.

MM-S: And the crane, and hard standing for a dozen boats depending how big they are, and the moorings on the water, yeah, with electricity, water and sewage. And a toilet block, there you
go, quite important. So yeah, so basically with a few ragged edges and needing to rewire, we were buying a working boatyard.

HM-S: What we thought, yeah, and it is.

Q: So, okay, bringing up to now, what do you do here? What's the boatyard now?

MM-S: We provide space for people to fix and use their boats, and we provide studio space for people to run little pottery and painting, glassware artist, a furniture restorer, a stone carver, small businesses in the arts and crafts side of the world. One guy has just recently taken over a studio does woodwork specialising in fitting out boats, so obviously it's always nice to try and steer people towards that but it's not---, so I mean the glass lady's wonderful at the back. She does huge industrial glass for churches and things.

HM-S: Yeah she does. But, and yeah, the storage and crane [inaudible – 31:50], and also there's two or three people who are self-employed and they're living in the yard working on people's boats that don't, you know, there's that combination of a bit of--,

MM-S: And I did run, up to 2011 I ran a little team of two or three people and we used to fit out Dutch barge fitters like this, do the interiors and engine installations--,

HM-S: You're great at engines, you do lots of engines.

MM-S: And I do lots of mechanical installations. Then I had throat cancer in 2011 so I did six months without not doing that and I de-registered for VAT 'cause I wasn't paying the wages, and I actually haven't quite moved--, I don't know if I'm going to, quite like--, so then they all went self-employed. So they've taken the skills they learnt while they were working with me for a few years, it's rather lovely, they're actually building a steel house boat without, you know, occasionally they come and ask me a question for moral support but they're running their own steel fabrication business now.

Q: Who are they?

MM-S: They're two guys called Will and Andy, so, and, which is really nice, and also much better for me 'cause I was not very good at running it [laughs], I didn't find it a very profitable exercise, running a business compared to-- it's very easy to run around and pay the wages and forget to charge yourself.

HM-S: But then a lot of your work now, which part of the boatyard is the towing and stuff that you do.

MM-S: A big part of it is towing. So along the way through working with, when I, me and Jake bought a beautiful wooden tugboat from a guy, the person we bought it off was one of the Port of London Authority launch drivers, and it was a boat that was purpose built for--, probably the last wooden boat built, I don't know about the last or anything like that, but it was built in 1957, by which time most boats were being built out of steel and fibreglass, for towing barges.
around in the Albert docks, and we bought it from the Albert docks and drove it up here and used it for towing our [crank? – 33:57] barge that we put together around, and then I took that with me. It was rather rotten [laughs] at that point, and--,

HM-S: The boat was rather rotten, yeah.

MM-S: And that was the settlement of me leaving our business that we started together, was I took that rotten boat and then probably--., and then a few years--., the Port of London Authority licensed it each year for, I forget the exact [inaudible – 34:22], and then one year they turned round and said, “You know what? We really need to fix this, we can’t license this anymore,” and we did, we had it fixed. Well, one of our guy’s here who’s doing up a trawler, took time off doing up his trawler and spent a year fixing up [St Fiona? – 34:37] and she’s absolutely gorgeous. And then in 2010/11, at the same time as I was having my little spell being ill, there was, they introduced a new rule for boat driving licenses, which lots of the--., so traditionally boat driving licenses were--., civil engineering wasn’t covered by the lightermen and watermen business, so by doing civil engineering we were allowed to tow our own [inaudible – 35:14], and then they introduced this boat masters license scheme, which you’ve probably been told about by other people, and I have got a boat masters license, whereas I wasn’t previously able--., I made enquiries about getting a waterman’s license. Nobody ever said no, but nobody ever said, come along and do this and that either, and it never happened, but I did finally manage to get a boat master’s license. And so now I’m allowed, it’s all very--., to drive my tug and it’s all licensed and it’s all above board and it’s lovely actually.

HM-S: And you like skippering as well don’t you?

MM-S: I really, I never thought I’d be able to--., it’s not like, I’ve heard Ken on other interviews saying he was born to be a waterman, and I’m not really in that. So I was from like a really early age, before I could walk I was sailing little sailing boats, but I wasn’t driving boats commercially. And to have ended up running a boatyard and driving boats commercially is a bit of a dream come true for me. I mean I wanted to from an early age, I just didn’t think I would, so it’s great, I love it.

Q: What’s the process of training to get the license?

MM-S: Well if you do it as a young person now, I can’t speak from knowledge ‘cause I didn’t do it like that, so I think that you have to get a job with a company, like the clippers I know have a, you know, they do [inaudible – 36:31], so I did it by knowing how to sail a little boat and then buying a little tugboat and developing the extra--,

HM-S: Experiencing, yeah.
MM-S: To be honest, and then working with other old, some guys, the two Hastings brothers, Jeff and Bob Hastings drove tugboats with us, and working with other tugboat drivers who were already in the civil engineering world, Ron [Livett? – 36:56], I went out on a tug with him, and you’d watch what they were doing and picking it up as fast as we possibly could, years of practice. So it was our own apprenticeship scheme of running a civil engineering business on a barge, so it’s not really a recognised route actually, the one I went through.

Q: Do you have to do an exam at the end to get a certificate?

MM-S: You have to do--., actually you do an oral exam in terms of demonstrating you know your way up and down the river, you do an oral exam in terms of, to get the license, chart work and weather forecasting and various questions, but the actual boat driving side of it is largely done by demonstrating experience, so letters from employers and customers.

Q: What do you feel about that change from the kind of old apprenticeship schemes to what--,

MM-S: Well you see I have a slightly different take on it, in that I can entirely sympathise that if you had been brought up with generations of people doing it the old way you’d feel it was unjust and blah, blah, but for me it was wonderful ‘cause it enabled me to stand up tall and not have to slightly hide on the corner, you know, be proper, so I’m very happy about it. And I think, I don’t think it’s a complete disaster, people still have to do apprenticeships. I mean the Tideway Tunnel business, people go on, they’re all being trained up as far as I can see. I mean I have first hand experience of it, so I’m only talking from talking to other people and watching video films about the Tideway Tunnel, same as everyone else, but I think it’s all in good, everyone seems to be good at it out there, nobody’s driving their boat backwards into bridges every day [laughs], so.

Q: That’s always good! So in this boatyard do you both take on different roles within the boatyard?

HM-S: Yes, well I’m very much just the paperwork side of it to be honest, because Mark’s so practical. I mean obviously I help with bits and pieces but I’m not, yeah, I keep the books.

Q: Is the paperwork and the health and safety quite, has it changed?

HM-S: A little, not massively, not massively, and I think probably the fact that we don’t employ loads of people, because people are self-employed there’s lots of areas where we don’t have to get quite so involved in paperwork because people have their own responsibilities for things to be honest.

Q: Do people come here and some people who come up to get the boats or fix the boats themselves, not really know what the rules are and you have to kind of educate them slowly about how it works?
HM-S: Well I mean the DIY is lovely 'cause it's very organic 'cause people--, I mean there's lots of, there's a whole community of people and everybody's got an opinion about how to do this and how to do that, you know, so I do think people, you know, if they are complete novices they will take advice.

MM-S: Yeah, we haven't had, complete novices don't walk up to the woodworking equipment--,

HM-S: No, no, you have to be, you have to have--,

MM-S: I mean there is a big off switch to the woodworking equipment so I can just turn it all off.

Q: Have you done that?

MM-S: Yeah [laughs].

HM-S: But also, yeah, I mean as far as health and safety's concerned you would only have somebody who you thought was competent and able to use any of the--,

MM-S: And we are visited by health and safety every year and they come and they look over all the equipment--,

HM-S: And the crane is tested every year and you know, all that sort of stuff.

MM-S: And they do, occasionally they make recommendations, I mean you know, a few years ago they commented on ladders not being attached to boats and, you know, and they're all quite good comments. And since then I'll go round and if I see a ladder leaning on a boat we tie it up so that people can't fall over sideways.

Q: What is the community like for the people who are moored here or are also working on their boats or in the workshops?

MM-S: Very supportive.

HM-S: It's really supportive, yeah. I mean I often say this 'cause I think it's quite like a club really 'cause it's sort of, in a funny sort of way, yeah, people will share their knowledge, they will chat about things, yeah, it's got a really good vibe on that sort of front, definitely, yeah.

Q: Have the same sort of people been here since you started running the boatyard?

HM-S: Do you know what? You think--, there is a turnover, there are some people that have been here the same time as us, but not that many now actually.

MM-S: When you look through the books and look at the boat names they're not, apart from a couple of honourable exceptions, they're all different.
HM-S: And they're very honourable exceptions [laughs], it's like inheriting people, as we were talking about earlier [brief pause for background interruption].

Q: So you were talking about the community up here and who's here and who comes back to the yard. Can you tell me a little bit about the types of people who are here?

MM-S: They're all loonies!

HM-S: [Laughs] Types of people here. Yeah, they're--, I guess it's a bohemian lifestyle for some people. There are lots of practical people.

MM-S: What does that even mean?

HM-S: I don't know what it means.

MM-S: If I don't know and you don't know what's the point of saying it?

HM-S: Okay, fine [both laugh]. What sort of people?

MM-S: They're all boat nuts. Kind of not allowed to be here if you're not a boat nut.

HM-S: Yeah, not allowed to be here-- , I mean basically-- ,

MM-S: I mean I get asked every day, people come and say, "Can we come and stay on a boat here?" And I just say-- , and they haven't even got a boat, and I say, "You're not buying a boat 'cause of here. If you want to go and buy a boat, buy a boat 'cause you love the boat and then you can come and see if there's space to do anything here if you even need it." And people go and buy boats on that basis and they don't come in here, some of them, 'cause they work and they go and love their boats and go cruising, so I'm quite pleased with it.

HM-S: Yeah, I think that's a very important part of it, 'cause part of Mark and I, we-- ,

MM-S: I mean I'm motivated completely by playing-- , for me if people are actually using their boats, it's my biggest aspiration is for people to use their boats, which you know, is actually really difficult to achieve, it's not-- ,

HM-S: But I was telling Bea about the builders, 'cause they're a really important part-- ,

MM-S: Yeah, they were here yesterday, they're lovely.

HM-S: I was telling you last time wasn't I about these builders that come from North London, and they get the train down here and they have a boat at the top moorings, it's a cheap hold fibreglass boat that they bought for peanuts. But they get on the dinghy here and they go up there and they spend, you know, some days going up here and then they come back and they go, "That was the best time ever!" You know, and they just really enjoy being on the river and you know, and I think that's one of our motivations isn't it, being able to-- ,
MM-S: Yeah, it's lovely.

HM-S: But it's about affordable boating, that's a really big part of it, it isn't about the glamorous shiny fibreglass yachts and things, it's about--,

MM-S: Yeah, winning some transatlantic race, 'cause it is what you can do here isn't it?

HM-S: Yeah, it's about being able to enjoy this beautiful stretch of the river and yeah, using your boat and doing your boat up and whatever it is, I think that's our main motivation that keeps us going.

MM-S: Yeah, I've slightly lost track of the question there.

HM-S: Yeah, me too.

Q: What is it like being on the river? I mean, you know, you say how much you enjoy being out there, but what's it like? If you were describing it to someone who'd never been out on the Thames.

MM-S: Okay, quite large stretches of it round here you can't see any buildings, so it's like potentially being 300 years back in time, you can just see trees and the towpath, that's rather nice.

HM-S: It's a beautiful [inaudible – 45:05], yeah, it's lovely.

MM-S: This is a very pretty bit of the Thames.

HM-S: It's just about being in the environment, the natural environment, being affected by tides, wind, you know, everything really, it's just sort of--,

MM-S: And the river, you've got an interesting view 'cause you've got trees and stuff and people and cows in Richmond, and pretty buildings--. and you've got a long view 'cause if you look up and down the river, so your eyes can relax, you're getting a long view and you've got fresh air and rain and--,

HM-S: Yeah, I think it's mental health at the end of the day [laughs].

MM-S: And you've got all the tinkly, tinkly noises of water splashing on the side of the boat, obviously feng shui is all perfect isn't it?

HM-S: And it's a joint effort, it's like, you know, that whole kind of waving at people going by, it's all part of it, it's like we're all having fun together.

MM-S: I've heard comedians in their sketches, you know, all laughing and teasing people who wave at people on boats, oh, totally. I never laugh at their jokes, it's like obligatory to wave at all the other boats, it's part of the pleasure of it.
HM-S: Yeah, there is a camaraderie sort of in just being out there. And people feel brave and doing things and that's good for your soul, you feel like you've done something.

MM-S: And like you've really achieved something, and you sort of have 'cause it is a little bit difficult, it's not, you do have to make an effort and if you leave your boat in the wrong place the tide does go out and leave the boat tipped up on its side with ropes twanging and--.

Q: Your kids, they were brought up on this barge?

HM-S: Yes, yeah, yeah.

MM-S: Yes.

Q: And always at the boatyard?

HM-S: Yeah, but with this barge, well all our holidays were--,

MM-S: When our--, we went on our holidays, just, it goes, this barge, so we drove to the seaside, either Kent or Essex.

HM-S: We've done all the rivers of Kent and Essex basically.

MM-S: Parked up a little creek. So you get essentially a free holiday, use about £50 worth of diesel, drive down the seaside, anchor in a creek.

HM-S: Put the anchor out, kids would just throw themselves off the boat, swim round the boat [laughs].

MM-S: Swim round, chuck the dinghy over the side, we lashed a ladder over the side so they could climb on and off easily, it was really nice [pause for background interruption].

Q: Yeah, sorry, your children.

HM-S: Well part of running the boatyard and having children at the same time is that we have an open hatch policy, the boat is always open, so the whole community can come in and out, ask questions, this, that and the other, so that's how our children themselves have a very kind of, sort of open minded very sort of, kind of--,

MM-S: They're all very good with people.

HM-S: They're really good with people because they've had to share their home and their space with--,

MM-S: Yeah, they're not used to shutting the door behind them and the world goes behind them.
HM-S: Yeah, so I think it did open their eyes to, yeah, they saw lots of different people during their bringing up. And I think that helped who they are really and how they’re--., yeah.

Q: Did they grow up with the boatyard just here?

HM-S: Yeah.

Q: Walking through it and--.,

MM-S: Yeah, yeah, yes, all the way from--., so the oldest was five and the youngest was six months.

HM-S: Yeah, so Ella doesn’t really know any different, yeah.

MM-S: Well yeah, but you don’t have much memory do you before you’re five?

HM-S: Yeah.

Q: So was it okay with them, I suppose with people working in tools and--,

HM-S: We were really, I mean I think, we were the only ones that had children. When we first came I think people thought [gasp], oh my God, what’s going to happen here? And I was very conscious that I didn’t want that, ’cause I wanted any work to be able to be done and keep going. So when they were very young I would, there’s lots of parks nearby, I would go to the local parks and do that sort of thing. But once they got old enough to realise things then--,

MM-S: Once they got to the sort of age when they’re doing woodwork at school and stuff--,

HM-S: Yeah, I mean they, you know, they’re very sensible, very practical, they knew, we had guidelines, they knew what to do.

MM-S: They all built their own beds.

HM-S: They all built their own beds, they built--,

MM-S: As soon as they got big enough to need a bed as opposed to a shoebox in the corner, we gave them a hand saw and a cordless screwdriver and a hammer and nails and a pile of wood [laughs] and they all built their own beds. They’re all very proud of that aren’t they?

HM-S: Yeah they are, yeah, so yeah.

Q: And have they followed you guys into this industry?

MM-S: Well our oldest one was never really interested, all through his young teenage life he was thoroughly sport mad, but right now he’s going to be 30 later this year and he’s working in a boatyard full time in Greece actually.
HM-S: ‘Cause he married an American.

MM-S: He married an American, which is quite a difficult thing to do ‘cause she hasn’t got an English--, she’s not allowed to work here, he’s not allowed to work in America, and the way the rules are, weirdly, they’re both allowed to work in Greece--.

HM-S: Or any European country that isn’t [both talking at once].

MM-S: Or any European country [laughs].

HM-S: Whilst we’re still in Europe.

MM-S: So he is working in a boatyard right now, hopefully being trained up to take this place over at some point, but we’ll see! [Laughs]

HM-S: And the other one lives on a boat up in town.

MM-S: His younger brother, with a bit of help from us, bought a small Dutch barge in bits and we fixed it up and he is cruising East London.

HM-S: Yeah, and Ella, when she went to college in Bristol--,

MM-S: Spent her money on a sailing boat.

HM-S: [Laughs]

MM-S: And lived in that for a few years and did some epic sailing voyages down the Bristol Channel to the Scilly Isles, and we met her at the Isles of Scilly once, it was really cool meeting your daughter on a sailing boat, and then we sailed back to Bristol. But she’s actually sold that and lives in a house, which has got obviously advantages, full height doors and things.

Q: But they’ve all got the bug in some way.

HM-S: Well they’re all who they are, they’re all affected by their upbringing.

MM-S: Everyone’s affected by their upbringing aren’t they?

HM-S: Yeah, yeah, they are themselves though, they are themselves at the end of the day.

Q: When did this [inaudible – 51:32] here?

HM-S: ’92. Well when we came, I mean Henry was like, “Yeah you can come but you’ve only got three months mooring,” which is fine, “cause--,

MM-S: Yeah, we were told, yeah, that was the deal, we were allowed here for three months.
HM-S: If you want to start your business you can do that but you're only here for three months and the boat's got to go. So we didn't have any--, we just thought, well we'll just go for it and see what happens.

MM-S: We're still here.

HM-S: And we're still here. But yeah, no, this boat's, I mean it's a great boat.

MM-S: But after the fire when there was total uncertainty as to what was going to happen, and I was--, I don't know whether--, we did discuss it. If this place hadn't have, you know, if the whole lot had been bought by another property developer, our plan was to drive up to Suffolk in the boat and try and find somewhere else to moor it. That was kind of, that was the home was the boat more than the land really, I don't know what the significance of that is.

Q: So you could have been somewhere completely different if it wasn't, you were attached to Eel Pie?

MM-S: Could have been. Quite happy to be here though, it works 'cause it's, you know, there's lots of work, earn a living driving and fixing boats, whereas don't know how true that is outside London. It is true, I know, I mean I have other friends who run little boatyards in Suffolk and they get on don't they?

HM-S: Yeah they do. I think we did feel a kind of social responsibility, I did anyway after the fire--,

MM-S: Oh definitely to keep on, 'cause we were in a position and able to.

HM-S: And also I guess, oh I don't know, there weren't--, boatyards going, you know, up and down the Thames 'cause it was that kind of, we didn't want another boatyard to go, that was a motivation wasn't it?

MM-S: Yeah, definitely.

Q: Yeah, I mean what's the relationship between you and other boatyards now on the Thames, do you know, are you friendly with other boatyards?

MM-S: Sort of friendly, well we know MSO Marine obviously.

HM-S: And anywhere you tow to don't you?

MM-S: And anywhere I tow to, so Steve Woods. I don't really--, I have a relationship with the Thames driver--, it's slightly different, the Thames driver [inaudible – 53:54], I have actually driven boats in and out of there and I've worked with Jack Deverell a couple of times, so a totally friendly relationship but it is the other end of the river, so we don't come up, but when we do come up against each other we work together.
HM-S: But Hermitage, you towed boats down the Hermitage don’t you? And what’s the place opposite Hermitage called? I can’t remember.

MM-S: Downings Road moorings.

HM-S: Downings Road, yeah.

MM-S: They’re moorings rather than boatyards still, but it’s--, the towing side of the business is quite nice actually ‘cause it gets you about to meet other places. Also I do a bit of travelling boat repair, so I mean down at Downings Road for example, I’ve gone in, in the tug, using a tug as a mobile, ‘cause the parking in the middle of London is terrible. So on a few occasions I’ve used that as a floating toolbox and gone down there, laid up all the tools, and especially for carrying heavy things like batteries, and gone and moored up at the mooring, do whatever the job is and then come home again. Also I can sleep on board because it has berths and a kettle.

Q: How do you get that kind of work, is it through word of mouth?

MM-S: It’s word of mouth, yeah, ‘cause we’ve been here 25 years--,

HM-S: Yeah, there’s quite a lot of that really.

MM-S: So there’s enough word of mouth going on.

Q: And from seeing the whole river, what’s your thoughts on what the boatyards on the Thames are like now?

MM-S: Go on, what do you mean, as opposed to what, sorry?

HM-S: I think that’s a really difficult question to answer.

Q: I suppose as opposed to when you first came here, you know, how they’ve changed.

HM-S: Well I think the boatyards themselves--,

MM-S: Well there more here--, this little spot here, this slightly raggle taggle DIY thing, there’s some people have been fixing their own boats, da, da, da, there used to be two in Richmond at least that I know of, and there was Toughs yard that was kind of similar in Teddington, and they’re houses now, so there are just less. On the other hand you’ve got Mark Edwards in Richmond who wasn’t there, so that’s more, that’s [inaudible – 56:02], and the way it’s been put to me by somebody else was, Bill Sims said this, is that also what there is now that there perhaps wasn’t in the past was up river gravel pits being converted into marinas, so you’ve got Penton Hook and Shepperton Marina where you can, I mean just by the nature of the way boats construction has changed, modern boats are plastic and you don’t have to muck around doing woodwork on them so much, but in Shepperton Marina you can repair wooden boats if you
were so minded to, although they don’t particularly encourage it, but you can, so--, but the ones that are left, so us, who else, what else, is there another one? Emmerson Marine are pretty, when they--, if they go, not when they go, if they were to go they wouldn’t be replaced and it would be a shame.

HM-S: Yeah, but I mean we’re always full aren’t we? We’re always full.

MM-S: We’re always full, yeah, we’re not going to go ‘cause of lack of business. The only reason this would go would be because somebody decided to cash it in and sell up, so that’s not going to happen on our watch, there you go, said it in public, so not allowed to, so [laughs].

Q: So you think lots of the boatyards that have gone have gone through redevelopment or--,

MM-S: Totally, it’s the only reason they’ve gone isn’t it?

HM-S: It’s London housing, yeah, definitely.

Q: What’s the relationship between you and Eel Pie Slipways now?

HM-S: The relationship?

MM-S: It’s good, we don’t--,

Q: I mean as being your nearest boatyard.

HM-S: Oh it’s fab, we do different things so it’s good.

MM-S: Yeah, no, it’s very good, I mean we’re not in competition ‘cause we’re not, you know, they do-- , there’s very few-- , so we help each other if we want--, they’ll let us use their steel rollers if I need a bit of bent plate, and they use our trolley ‘cause there’s got stolen a few years ago and they can’t be bothered to buy another one, they just use ours [laughs].

HM-S: You do some towing for Ken don’t you?

MM-S: I tow for them, we’ve done tow jobs together where they want two tugs and their tug’s bigger than mine, and they go on the front and I go on the back. We get loads of enquiries-- , for some reason our website seems to, well, just, it attracts enquiries about Dutch barges being [slipped? – 58:22] so I just reply saying, go to Ken, you know, so it’s all very hand in glove, we’re very friendly, there’s no animosity whatsoever.

Q: That’s actually an interesting question, is what, you know, you created this wonderful website and you were doing things digitally, kind of what-- , is that bringing in a lot of business?

MM-S: Well we haven’t actually got any room for any more business ‘cause it’s quite a small site and it’s full, and I got the website because there was a period when it felt like if you didn’t have a website you didn’t exist, so, and we, the man who did our website, the reason I met him is
because I was buying a boat part off him ‘cause he is a keen dinghy sailor and he ran a little website selling small boat parts. So I met him through that, so I bought this burgee, which is a little flag that goes on top of the mast of a small boat, and which is a very super burgee, which I’ve still got, and he said, “Oh I see your website’s rubbish, would you like me to come and do something about it? ‘Cause that’s my real job.” [Laughs] So that’s how come we got a website.

HM-S: Yeah, but to be honest word of mouth being--, people pop round and the people that come, the people that come and visit are the people that get their boat here rather than the people who leave a message on the info on the website. It’s about coming and doing and seeing and that sort of stuff isn’t it really?

MM-S: It is, yeah.

Q: How’s the boatyard affected by being on the tidal river?

HM-S: Well it’s essential because you could only [inaudible -1:00:01], no, but I mean the thing is about it is this little stretch is only semi tidal, so you could still have the sort of recreational aspect so it doesn’t go all the way out, so you still have got some movement of boats floating around.

MM-S: Yeah, so there’s enough tide for range, just, to float boats in and out of the dry dock, but not--., I mean further down the river the tidal range is six metres, say, or seven or eight around the bottom, whereas here it’s three metres. And really in the full, once you get below Chiswick there’s not really any recreational boating ‘cause it is just a little bit too difficult for most people. There is a tiny bit, there are some moorings down as far as Battersea railway bridge.

HM-S: Yeah there are, but it does mean that people, non, you know, amateurs can enjoy the river in this little stretch because above Richmond lock--,

MM-S: Above Richmond, whereas below that you’ve got to be pretty good at it to not end up in a pickle.

HM-S: Sideways on or in a pickle, yeah.

Q: And if someone came up to you and said, “I really want to start a boatyard on the Thames, or work in a boatyard,” what would your advice be to them now?

MM-S: Well they’re quite different things aren’t they? So if you want to work in a boatyard, wow. Well here the way to do it would be to turn up with a little boat and start fixing your own boat really, and then show such an exceptional work ethic and da, da, da, da that people would offer you work, I mean that would--., just do it.
HM-S: Because there aren’t that many people with practical skills anymore to be honest, and it’s that kind of, there’s so many people who you know, yeah, so if you’ve got those skills you’re pretty quick to spot them when people have them.

MM-S: And to buy a boatyard, well, you’d better start saving up hadn’t you? [Laughs] There’s no space available is there?

HM-S: Well they will, I mean if somebody wants to buy a boatyard then it’s, yeah, there’s no space in this area to spare land.

MM-S: But you’re competing for land value against someone who wants to live there, so.

HM-S: Yeah, that is--,

MM-S: So it’s not really feasible is it?

HM-S: Unless you’re really eccentric and you’ve got a--, [laughs]. The Medway.

MM-S: Or the Medway, just recently--, we’ve got a little wooden sailing boat, which we keep on the Medway, just ever so recently a slipway in the middle of nowhere that’s been derelict for several years has been taken over by someone and restarted as a boatyard.

Q: Who’s that?

MM-S: I can’t remember the name, I don’t know if I know the name. It’s half--., do you know where I mean?

HM-S: Yeah, I do know where you mean, I can’t remember either, sorry.

MM-S: It’s on the north shore downstream of--., upstream of [who? – 1:03:15] in the middle of nowhere [laughs]. You’ll have to walk along the Saxon Sore and have a look [laughs].

Q: But the Medway is where something’s happening.

MM-S: On the Medway, yeah.

HM-S: Well it’s ‘cause it’s still, for some reason it’s affordable, the land, it’s cheaper down there.

MM-S: I’ve actually got someone who really wants me to look at their boat electric so do you mind if we--, sorry.

Q: Oh no, yeah, it’s fine.

MM-S: [Laughs]
Q: I can, just one last question, is there something else you want to speak about?

MM-S: Well no, I’m not saying--, yeah, I don’t want to go on for hours.

Q: No, no, it’s fine. Is there anything else you’d like to say that I haven’t covered, which is important to the work you do?

HM-S: I don’t think so, no. Is there anything you think, oh I haven’t said anything?

MM-S: Go and play with a boat, there you go, use your boat [both laugh].

Q: Perfect way to end.

MM-S: There you go.

Q: Thank you so much, brilliant.

Q: [END OF RECORDING – 1:04:07]

Eel Pie Boatyard