Q: This is an oral history interview with Richard Seager by Rachel Hall on 20 June at Wapping Police Marine Workshop. Also present are Stephanie Smith and Bea Moyes from Thames Festival Trust. So Richard, can you please state your full name?

A: It’s Richard Seager.

Q: Do you have early memories of the Thames?

A: My earliest was when I was in Sea Cadets and we used to take part in rowing regattas and things on the river at Gravesend. That’s the earliest, that was back in early 2000 or thereabouts. A long time ago.

Q: Sorry, could you elaborate a bit about what a Sea Cadet is?

A: Sea Cadets is a division of the—, like the pre-entry for the Royal Navy. It gives you good skills in leadership and various training and to get you used to if you want to progress into the Navy. It’s similar to Cubs and Scouts but more marine orientated. Because I’ve always been interested in boats for many years.

Q: Was your interest in boats something that had to do with your family?

A: Not really, my dad was more interested in buses and railways, which I was, and a friend of mine at school introduced me to Sea Cadets and from there I kind of just grew into liking boats, working on them, and it was through the commanding officer at the time of the Sea Cadet unit that let me know about the vacancy here, which I applied for and won an apprenticeship here.

Q: So how old were you then when you first started your apprenticeship?

A: 14 years younger than I am now [both laugh]. I can’t do the maths in my head.

Q: And what did that training involve?

A: We did three years at college with a one week block placement per month and we studied all aspects of marine engineering, safety in the marine environment, welding, metalworking, some electrics, but predominantly it was engine based so working on engines and how to fault find, how to accurately measure, how to correctly disassemble something, reassemble, check it against the workshop manuals for the correct data and the correct tolerances. And then finally the reassembly and then commissioning of an engine to make sure that it’s fit for use.

Q: So you said that as part of your apprenticeship you were going to college as well. So I was wondering whether the things that you were talking about, were they very hands on? Like did you learn a lot of theory and then get to apply it very quickly or was it mostly like you were learning theory first?

A: At the college we did approximately 80 per cent theory and 20 per cent practical, but that was because here at work we were doing 95 per cent practical work with a 5 per cent sort of theory with what we were doing, and as part of our NVQ modules we had to complete a write up of
how we carried out the work here and submit those as part of our NVQ. So predominantly at the college it was theory based, and predominantly here practical based.

Q: And they were happening concurrently? So you were like spending some time at college and you were also working here at the same time?

A: Yes, so we did one week at college and then three weeks here, and then it would be back to college again for a week.

Q: Could you also tell us about the people that taught you both in college and as you were working here?

A: Predominantly I had one mentor here in the workshop who I used to work with who was--I'm trying to just think of the best way to describe him. He was very much you learn by your mistakes, so he would potentially let you make a mistake or just advise you, like he'd say, "Are you sure you want to do that? Are you sure you don't want to go and check this..." and it would just give you that little prompt to just go back and check, ah yes he's noticed something wrong, I'll go and do that properly. And then in your head you then remember that for the next time you do the work and you're like, I must remember to check that, yes I have done that properly. And I found that very good to work with rather than being sort of being very strict, you have done this wrong, you have done that wrong. He would be very more, "Perhaps next time you could do it this way, or potentially have you looked at doing it like this?" It's quite good because it's quite sort of backwards and forwards with ideas, certainly with problems we haven't experienced before. He'd be quite amicable for discussion over it. And college, they were quite similar but they had to go through the set syllabus that they had to go to, so that was if it was in the syllabus it was taught to us and that's the way that we were taught how to do it, whereas back here we might have had to change something to be able to carry out our work better or to do the job a little bit quicker. Yeah.

Q: So would you say you were treated well as an apprentice then?

A: Oh, very well.

Q: And do you have any memorable experiences from when you were still an apprentice?

A: I can remember one time that I'd made a mistake with fitting a rocker cover gasket and the gasket had slipped out, so it would have leaked. And I came in in the morning to find one of those luggage labels on there saying, "Are you sure you want to leave the engine like this? Don't you want to sort your rocker gasket out?" and I was like ah, yes. I've never made that mistake again, but it's always stuck in my head that one and I always remember it whenever I'm putting the rocker cover gaskets on, I'm like yes make sure they're all in, yes it's all lined up nicely. That's always stuck in my head that one, just seeing this big large luggage label tied to it [laughs].

Q: So you were kind of given room to sort of like make mistakes but at the same time you'd be kind of stopped before you made a really big mistake?

A: Yes, if you didn't learn from the mistake the first time then you were told off for it the next time because you should have learned from the first one. But you were given the opportunity to learn by your mistakes.

Q: So why did you choose to work in boat building and not another industry? Was it because of the recommendation you got? Was there any possibility that you would have chosen to do something else?

A: At the time I was working for a company that manufactures processed microwave meals, and I used to maintain the machinery that would put the food in the trays and then seal them with a plastic film and then box them, weigh them, freeze them, everything else. And I was working with that. Not what I wanted to do, but it was a job and I was earning money. I did want to go
into either the Merchant Navy or the Royal Navy, and unfortunately with the Royal Navy my asthma and my short-sightedness stopped me from doing so, and with the Merchant Navy I just couldn’t find a cadetship to join into. And then my commanding officer at my Sea Cadet unit suggested this job which I applied for, and I thought well this could be the best of both worlds, I don’t need to go out to sea, I don’t need to worry about my asthma and my eyesight so much because I’m perfectly well to do the job here. I get to go home of an evening, so it’s kind of the best of both worlds.

Q: So have you been working at the marine workshop since your apprenticeship then? Like have you worked elsewhere or have you continued working here for the past 14 years?

A: I’ve worked here for the past 14 years.

Q: So do you know anything about the history of the yard that you could tell us about?

A: This particular yard was built in or was opened in 1973. The original workshop is now the museum at the police station just down the road, which is actually quite interesting to go and look at all the artefacts and things in there and I thoroughly recommend that. And that was predominantly for working on small rowing boats and skiffs that the Marine Unit had and they could also bring them up just outside the workshop there onto a grid iron to work on. Then with the modern times and the larger boats and things, then this was purpose made with a one-off special synchro boat lift which is actually the smallest one I believe in the world. And that has evolved into this workshop, and the boats have evolved and we’ve adapted what we have here to cater for the new boats. And yeah, work carries on.

Q: Can you tell us a bit more about how the boats have kind of adapted over time since you’ve been here? You mentioned that there was--, I guess there’s some change.

A: Yes, the first boats that were here, they were on the--, when I started the first generation of Targa fast patrol boat, the first two that they had were just being decommissioned at the time and they ordered the second generation of Targa police boat. We also had an old inboard shaft driven launch which was up for disposal at the same time, and that’s quite old technology with shafts and propellers on the back and not very fast. It used to do about 25 to 28 knots, but compared to today’s fleet it’s very slow, and some of our old patrol boats were just a single engine and they would do a maximum 16 knots and they’d be very heavy in the water and quite slow. The modern day boats that we run now will run up to 50 knots with the fast ribs and 40 knots for most of the Targa fast patrol boats. They all come right out of the water and they have an outdrive on the back rather than an engine shaft and propeller, it’s just the engine straight out to a drive shaft on the back of the boat which provides the propulsion so it minimises the components needed, which also minimises our down time so we can change things a lot quicker. So the fleet has advanced a lot in the time that I’ve been here.

Q: So are you also involved in the building of pontoons and moorings on the river?

A: No.

Q: What would the different roles at the yard be like? So besides your role what are the different jobs at the yard as well?

A: The jobs here, we have marine engineers and we have boat builders. The boat builders predominantly do the fibreglass woodwork and repairs on our Hypalon inflatable boats and any bits and pieces like that. The engineering side is generally engines, drives, any welding that’s needed, general fabrication, and any electrical work, plumbing, I think that’s about all of it. We do just about everything in house here, there’s nothing outsourced. And then we have our managers and our stores department which orders all of our parts in for us.

Q: So when you say that you do everything in house, do you build the boats here as well?
A: We don’t build the boats here, but once we have the boat we will generally equip it for service and make sure that it’s ready to enter service, carry out any modifications to it, do all of the maintenance, upgrades, repairs, retrofits, refits, anything that needs to be done to the boat during its working life we do 99.9 per cent of that in house. There’s very, very little that we send out to other companies to do, very little.

Q: Would you say that’s something that’s unique about the Police Marine Workshop, that so much of it is done in house?

A: Very unique. It’s not very often that you find that in just one very small location you can get every service a boat requires, whether it be actual mechanical servicing, welding, electrical work, painting, fibreglass, everything we do under this roof pretty much.

Q: And in terms of like the different groups of people working together, do you also work very closely with police officers as part of your work?

A: We do. We do and we don’t. We don’t work with them here in the workshop, but if there is a running repair or a fault on a boat that is in service then we will work with them and liaise with them to find out what the problem is, how it started, whether it’s an intermittent fault, and work through a repair to the boat to put it back into service or liaise with them if it’s a more serious fault that the boat has to be removed from service and to be able to supply them with another boat so that they can carry on policing.

So, the down time for the boats is much, much less than it was. And lately we’ve seen more usage on our boats because of the recent events, so they’re out working a lot harder. So the knock-on effect is that they need servicing more often now. So we see them a lot more, and some of the larger jobs have to wait until the big servicing to be done rather than be done on an interim service. So we have to just change the way we work and adapt things according to the need of the policing unit.

Q: So I’m guessing you have to kind of react to events that have been changing as well, and I was wondering about in terms of apprenticeships. Are there differences in the way that people are trained now as opposed to before, like when you were still being trained as well?

A: I think the differences now are our new apprentices have-- the colleges are much more set up and I think they’re a lot more professional now, the colleges. When I had my apprenticeship the college we went to was brand new, it was the first course that they’d run so they were learning as much as we were learning as to how the course was being run, what was the best training syllabus for us. And now I think that it’s much more settled and I think that our new apprentices will have a much better skill set at the end of it than we had coming out of our apprenticeship. So I think the apprenticeship programme now is much better than it was sort of 14 years ago or ten years ago when I finished mine.

Q: And do you have an apprentice yourself?

A: I do occasionally train or work with both of our apprentices doing various different jobs. With our boat builder I normally work with him to do Hypalon repairs on our inflatable boats. It’s one of the things that my boss says I’m very good at doing so I’m trying to pass on as much information as I can with that. And with our engineering apprentice both of us recently completed changing and building up two new engines for one of our boats and we managed to do it within six days. The boat has been out in service now for over a month with very minor down time afterwards. Yeah, so we do work together fairly often.

Q: That’s a lot of work you must have put in for that, so you must be very proud of that, yeah. So if someone from the next generation wanted to work in marine engineering, would you have any advice you would give to them or something that you’d like to say?

A: Work hard, learn hard, and have an interest in it. You must have an interest in it, and you must be ready to have plans constantly change and constantly have to adapt to the environment because it’s different every hour of every day. There’s no two days are the
same. It’s very different, you’ve got to be able to think on your feet and work hard and get through it.

Q: Is there anything else that you’d like to talk about that we haven’t mentioned?

A: I don’t think so.

Q: Thanks very much for your time.

A: You’re welcome.

[END OF RECORDING – 19.39]
Q: This is an oral history interview with Ganesh Gandharba by Rachel Hau on June 20th at Wapping Police Marine Workshop. Also present are Stephanie Smith and Bea Moyes from Thames Festival Trust. Could you please state your full name?

A: Ganesh Gandharba.

Q: Will you-- would you say you have early memories of the Thames-- or do you have-- or would-- okay, maybe I'll ask a different question and that would be do your family have associations with the river?

A: Er, yeah, yeah, there's a kind of, you know, just because-- but I'm not from this country, you know, so I'm originally from Nepal. And yeah, my family-- so my parents are situated by the river, you know, just my dad was associated with fishing, you know, that's how we raised up. Yeah, there's a-- yeah, it was-- my playground was a river anyway [laughs], that's where I was raised, you know, whenever I have time, just [to swim in the river 00:01:03]. There was no cinema, you know, just [laughs], no TVs, what are you going do, go to the river and swim.

Q: So did you always think that-- so I think you say your dad was a--,

A: Fisherman.

Q: Was a fisherman.

A: Yeah.

Q: Was that something that you intended to do as a career as well?

A: Well, I love to-- that's one of the things I miss here so much, you know, just-- every year when I go to Nepal still I've got all the kits, you know, I love going fishing and-- yeah, I just, erm, I love to do this and still now, sometimes I think, you know, that I will do a holiday and so that I can do some fishing, you know, it's-- it's so much fun, I love it, I really, really do miss it, you know, just-- I would love that, you know, fishing, yeah. That's one of the things, as I said, I love to, as I say. Sometimes I think yeah, [inaudible 00:01:51] can I go in the boat with the fishermen and they say no [laughs]. Alright, it's fine, yeah.

Q: So how did you get into marine-- sorry, boat building then?

A: Oh, yeah. Just, er, it was-- I was self-employed as a builder and decorator in this country since 2004, and like 2009 just I'd been just working myself, you know, the same individual [inaudible 00:02:20] a few other people. I just thought actually I want to do work under somebody else, you know, with more experience maybe I can do something different. And then I was just looking for job kind of thing and just saw-- it popped up, you know, in the computer, alright I said, why can't I just apply, you know, just-- and so I applied and after a few months they said yeah, you can come, you know, just for interview obviously, but yeah, just... I didn't hear actually for a long time, this place, and just I went on holiday, and I went three, four weeks holiday somewhere and just came home and there was a letter with just some... I came home Sat-- no, Sunday after near four o'clock, opened the letter and Monday morning, next day, I had an interview here [laughs]. I have no idea what it was [inaudible 00:03:12] and just, yeah, I had-- I just came here and [inaudible 00:03:16]. Yeah, in the same place, I was there, I was on your chair, [inaudible 00:03:22] don't worry [laughs]. Yeah, I was here, there were three people and they said yeah, fine, you know, so after a month later they
said okay, I was successful and then... So, but I was here not as a boat builder though, I was appointed first as a garage hand, yeah, that's what I applied for, right? And then I was doing other bits and pieces as well here, you know, [inaudible 00:03:50], he saw something in me, you know, and just said I think, Ganesh, you can work somewhere else instead of doing just garage hand. I went okay, so what do you think, and he asked me if I want to go to college to study about the marine boatbuilding, you know, just... So I went to the East Anglia Lowestoft Boatbuilding College and just, er, it's called IBTC International Boatbuilding College. I studied there three years, you know, then just--, now I'm here as a boat builder, working a boat, [inaudible 00:04:28] the boat, okay, [laughs], that's just what we do, we repair the boat, you know, make sure it's sound, it's safe, yeah, for the policemen, our customers, you know, to use. So I repair the boat, whatever damage it is, you know, just make sure it's alright and I test the boat, and then, you know, just whenever the policemen need the boat we handle it for them, you know, so that's what we do, you know, just... That's what I'm doing, you know, so yeah. That's how I end up here, sorry, just--, I talk too much, I can talk less, sorry.

Q: No, that's good [laughs]. So you say you went to--., you went to training college for three years, so what was that experience like, did you--., you were working here as well at the same time?

A: Yeah, the idea was I was working nine months in this workshop as a garage hand and three months in--., sorry, three months in college studying. That's how like it took me just nearly four years, you know, just almost four years, that's how I finished my college, you know, just... and it was great, I always wanted to go to college--., university anyway, just back in Nepal, but there was just so many factors I couldn't do it. But now, it's a, you know, a dream came true and I went, I enjoyed my life there, it was really good [laughs], having the university life or the college life kind of thing. You know, yeah, always wanted to do study, but later in life it happened, I'm glad, you know.

Q: You said that it was like a very good experience, could you tell us about the people that taught you and then like I guess the people that taught you in college or the people that you met?

A: Oh yes, oh man, so one of my instructors called lan, he has got magic in his hand, honestly, just he can [inaudible 00:06:28] anything by using a piece of wood and one tool, just his hands [move and transforms 00:06:32] anything to whatever he likes, it's the best experience. And he taught me, you know, just that--., I was a bit annoying, you know, if I don't understand I would keep asking him, asking him, just pushing [laughs]. And yeah, [inaudible 00:06:46] people were so friendly, you know, even just the owner of the college, you know, an actual manager of the college was telling me if--., Ganesh, if you need anything at any time you come over here, we'll sort you out, you know, they're really good, friendly, and just they're so, so friendly people, you know, you know, just the teachers were amazing, you know, they can be like your friends, you know, so kind of thing. And just whenever you need help they were there, you know, especially for me, you know, as English is my second language I do know that possibly there's millions of mistakes while I'm talking about, you know this, but yeah, just it's hard for me to understand English, you know, just even the [inaudible 00:07:32], so I have to keep going to them, you know, I had to just, erm, asking them so many times because I wanted to understand everything, you know. So yeah, it was really good, they were supportive and the idea of being in college and, you know, just being with, you know, other lads and just, you know, that’s another type of fun, okay, I’m not talking about this one. But yeah [laughs], yeah it was a pretty good experience, you know, so I loved it, I loved it, I wish I could go back again [laughs], I don’t know what I’m going to study [laughs]. Yeah, would be lovely, yeah. As I said, it was really, really good experience, as I said, I loved it.

Q: How about your time as a garage hand, you said that that was--., was that the role that you first entered as, was that--., were you--., did you have a positive experience in that role as well?

A: Well yeah, it was really, really good, because I was self employed, working myself sometimes alone, sometimes with other people, you understand, there’s a bunch of people here, it was nice and just, er, my boss, Bill, was quite supportive, you know, just, er, I don’t know, why did he like me, but he liked me that time, but he still likes me [laughs]. Yeah, just--., it was Bill who positive feedback, you know, just--., and so I enjoyed, you know, and just the one thing for me, you know, whatever I do I would like to do my best, you know, it doesn’t matter, you know, just a [inaudible 00:09:01] I never told that I can be a boat builder. I’m from Nepal, landlocked
country, you know, just [why 00:09:08] am I learning here [laughs]. You know, just whatever it comes in life, if you take happily, you do it, you know, so you’re blessed, you know, that’s what I think, you know, that at the end of the day, you know, that’s your job, you know, so everyone goes to school, everyone… All the jobs are as equally as important in my life, you know, yeah. Yeah, I’m glad--, I’m lucky, out of millions and millions and I’m so lucky, you know, just whatever I end up [inaudible 00:09:37], yeah, I never thought that I would be just next to the river [laughs], I’m happy, yeah, it’s good--., good life.

Q: I’m not sure about [inaudible 00:09:51]--., why you chose to work here actually, was it--., did you just do it like randomly or--,

A: Oh, random--., yeah, just the idea for me was, er, let me work somewhere, because I was self employed, I used to just take the contract, you know, if someone wants me to just put a radiator here, or plaster this wall, put a new ceiling, put a light there, this and that, you know, just they wanted to do it, okay. I had to give a quote, okay, so I had to do it myself first of all, or I’d employ other people. I just thought--, one day I thought there must be someone, you know, who knows more than me, just--., at the moment I’m asking them to do it, I’m teaching them what--., what needs to be done, you know. Maybe I can learn a bit more, that’s the whole idea it came to my head, you know, that if I can work somewhere [inaudible 00:10:41] and just have some, you know, some experienced people I might learn something. That was the idea and, er, that was just--., I just applied for this sort of job, you know, and just, yeah, and just lucky I ended up in college, you know, some more experience. You know, I don’t know how experienced I am now, but yeah [laughs], but it’s alright, yeah.

Q: So what you were doing previously when you were self employed, was that--., did that have to do with boat building at all, or was just a completely different industry?

A: Oh just--., when I was self employed?

Q: Yeah.

A: No, I was a builder and decorator--,

Q: Oh.

A: That was just putting a ceiling, putting a light, putting central heating, you know, just plumbing, electrical, tiling, plastering, painting, you know, so. If I work once for you and if you like my job you call me again or you tell her, right, and that’s how I expanded, you know, just… And it felt good, it was six, seven years it was nice. And that’s the thing, but later on I wanted to work for somebody else and I felt I like it, you know, so.

Q: So, erm, since I guess that would have meant that switching industries was very--., was a very different experience, I was wondering what kind of skills that you learnt when you were training since it would have been kind of quite a different kind of--., maybe a different skill set?

A: Yeah, it’s like each skill is a bit different because, you know, I was building--., constructing on a building site, now it’s a marine site, that’s one of the skills that’s completely different. But the main thing for me is working with the other people, you know, okay, just like the teamwork, you know, some of the engineers, they have to do their engine, I have to do my bodywork on the boat, you know, and it’s timing and cooperate with each other, you know, these are the kind of skill, you know, which is important and enjoyable as well at the same time, you know. The technical--., the skill is a bit different, but again it’s still the same, you know, just like--., just thinking, you know, how you can solve the problems, you know, okay there’s a problem so you think, that’s the whole idea of learning as well, you know, there’s a--., you see problems, okay. Er, yeah, just a few years ago my boss, or my supervisor or my teacher, instructor, used to have me do this way, now this is the time, you know, my time, okay, if there’s a problem how can I do it, they did it and I just [laughs], that is the thing, yeah, that’s the kind of skill [inaudible 00:13:12], yeah, that’s--., yeah, that’s what I think, I don’t know, just what have I learnt, it’s still the same.
Q: So would you say-- you mentioned that some of the skills that would be required have changed, so would you say that there are boats that you have worked on, like the types of boats that you have worked on have also changed since you-- since you first started as well?

A: Er, here building was similar, but I learnt-- I studied at college how to build a wooden boat, you know, the traditional type wooden boat, you know, but here we get loads of [inaudible 00:13:50] and fibreglass and all of these things, yeah? But in college I learnt seaworthy wooden boat, forget these ones, so you have to make these joints watertight with wood, you know, just... You know, these sort of things, that's the skill I did learn there but we haven't got that many wooden boats here, so [inaudible 00:14:11] the composite boat, inflatable [river 00:14:14] crafts, you know, these sort of things. Yeah, it's lucky just I could learn this skill there and I learn here as well, but basically this whole-- the similar ideas, you know, there's-- and yeah, it's a wonderful thing, you know, I think this kind of skill or knowledge it's, yeah, we work, it's fine, I'm just so glad. What was the question, I don't-- I forgot the question you asked [laughs].

Q: I asked about the type-- about the types-- yeah, we were talking about types of boat, yeah.

A: What type-- yeah, okay, yeah [laughs]. Sorry.

Q: No, that's good [laughs]. So would you say that working at the marine workshop's very unique then, because you said that the kind of boats that you learnt about are actually quite different from the ones that you work with?

A: Yeah, I think it's unique, you know, here, and I think just because of the timing, people-- more people using this fibreglass boat, you know, it's easier to maintain this and it's, you know, wooden boats it's quite dangerous, it could leak anything [inaudible 00:15:25], this one is much easier. I think, yeah, it's a different-- well just, er, I don't know, just like yeah, you know, some people prefer the wooden boat, some people prefer this one, you know. So my job is here so I'm [inaudible 00:15:48] with this one and hopefully, so far, I'm okay, you know, just they're happy with my job. And the main-- the main aim for me now, you know, is to make my customers happy, you know, the policemen, so far they're okay so yeah.

Q: So do you have to work very closely with the police officers then?

A: Oh yeah. Yeah, yeah, definitely, because if anything was to happen [out there 00:16:14], you know, [inaudible 00:16:15] they're responsible, I'm responsible, you know, so why did it get damaged on the river and just I know what was it before, you know, and then how are they going to repair that, what they [inaudible 00:16:24] next time, you know, when does someone leave with the boat, you know, these all of the things, yeah, we work together. Yeah, yeah, definitely.

Q: And do you get to-- do you build boats at the marine workshop or--?

A: No, we don't build a boat here, we buy the boat from outside. We did build the boat but [inaudible 00:16:46] a skill I learnt how to build a boat in college, you know, as I said, that's [inaudible 00:16:50], we don't build a boat here.

Q: Do you-- are you also involved in building like the pontoons and moorings on the river, is that--?

A: No, I haven't-- I haven't [inaudible 00:16:59], no, just we have contractors, you know, so they come and do that and, erm, yeah, something like this, okay, sometimes this window is [broken 00:17:06], I can make this one, I can do the plaster but I'm not allowed to do this one, they have contractors [inaudible 00:17:11], so I'm not making these sort of things, yeah. So it's just a different company, completely outside company, you know, just-- we have to just contract some other companies, you know, so they will come and do it, just so we're not allowed. We have a really specific job, that's my job is if the boat gets damaged I make sure I repair well, sound, and just, you know, it's safe to just take the boat on the river, you know, that's what I do. And just when the boat comes just say you have-- as you've seen before, boat came, now my job is take [all it apart 00:18:14], you know, it's okay, you know, to send it back. You know, if not then I've got to work it out, you know, just what I need to do, you know,
so when the boat goes out again it will not sink, you know, that's my role [laughs], and things, you know. If the boat sinks then I'm in trouble, okay, otherwise I'm fine, I can go home happily.

Q: Who--., who would be the people that you work with to make sure that doesn't happen, like, erm, that doesn't happen?

A: Say it again?

Q: Like who are the other people that you work with besides like the police officers and--., yeah?

A: Okay. We would have like three boat builders here and just four engineers, you know, so the engineers do the engine bit, okay, they make sure the engine will not fail, right? And just our job is, okay, the boat is not sinking--., our boat is not leaking inside, you know, [the water does not get through 00:19:15], you know, so all the safety things are there, you know, that's my job, just.... And at the end of the day it's teamwork, you know, that we put together, you know, [theirs is the engine bit 00:19:24] we are [putting our bit 00:19:26], you know, the stuff we do, it's not--., it's not one single person's job, you know, because the boat to be just a boat, it's the boat [inaudible 00:19:35] tomorrow morning, you know, so there's a--., we, four, five people--., four people and one of my apprentice, you know, [the boy 00:19:43] is my apprentice, so he's studying exactly the same college like me before now, you know, so. So yeah, you know, we are going to be there, all day, and tomorrow, you know, [inaudible 00:19:55] and test ourself and then that's okay, hand over then [inaudible 00:19:59].

Q: When you say you have to test the boat, do you--., do you take it out on the water or do you test it inside [the workshop 00:20:05]--.,

A: No, we take to the water, you know, so we [inaudible 00:20:08], possibly what they might do, you know, just okay, and we'll do [inaudible 00:20:16], you know, it's about ourself, you know, so and then when it's okay that's fine, it will not get damaged or it will not sink and then alright, it's fine, you can have it, that's what we do [laughs]. Plus we put ourself first in that position, okay, just when we sort everything out, all the problems here, we put our first then okay take the boat and just [inaudible 00:20:38] the worst they possibly do and then just, er, and when we find everything's okay [inaudible 00:20:44] if there's still some problems and we'll bring the boat back here, we'll let them know you cannot take the boat now, still there are some issues, we need to sort them out. And then [inaudible 00:20:55]. That's fine.

Q: And you mentioned that you have an apprentice, so I was wondering though, how--., is there a difference in the way that you were trained and how you train an apprentice now?

A: Yeah, just--., yeah, just this place, there's loads of kind of like apprentice, what I've seen--., 'cause I haven't been that long to be honest here, I've been, what, 2009? That's eight years. Er, yeah, and just I've seen just all the boys, you know, there's like--., there's a one, two, three, engineers, they were all apprentice before they started before me. And there's one boat builder before me who was apprentice in this place and just--., then just me, I started as a garage hand and just [started to kind of be 00:21:47] apprentice, you know, as a--., I become like that. And now there's a one in engineer apprentice and there's one boat builder apprentice, you know, so yeah. They learn the skill on the job and in college same time, I think it's good, yeah, [inaudible 00:22:03].

Q: Do you think--., so do most people tend to stay here at this yard, most of their careers, you have mentioned that there were--., they're people who like start off as apprentices and what they're doing now, do you know if people tend to like stick--., just continue to work here throughout their career?

A: Erm, most of them [inaudible 00:22:24], what I was told when I started here, Ganesh, [inaudible 00:22:31] to dig a hole, you're gonna die here, right [laughs], that's what they said to me. People do not want to leave, but I have seen just one engineer has left already, right, he left and is working somewhere--., he has a great job, he works sometimes Japan, sometimes America [inaudible 00:22:53], that's brilliant. I'm talking. Okay.

Q: So do you think if you could--., if you could like relive the moment that you chose to work here would you change that decision or you think you would still work here actually?
A: I work here just--, even just if--, I think I would work here, just depends, you know, all my--, how this, erm, how I treat this place, how this place treats me, [inaudible 00:24:25], you know, so. I’m quite happy because I appreciate what they have done to me, you know, so I appreciate that, you know. I came as a garage hand and they put me in the college, you know, so this is a nice thing what they did, you know, so now I want to just do something good and just I like this idea, you know. So I’m not directly helping this and that but sometimes the people is rescued from the river, you know, and the idea is oh, the boat was taken to rescue the people but I repaired that boat. You know, so I was just a tiny part--; tiny, tiny part of that, and that makes me really happy, yeah, it’s something nice. And when you want something, you know, there’s--; sometimes it’s so nice to be rewarded, you know, for your stuff, nothing money, nothing--; forget everything else, as part of society you are contributing something nice and that’s really pretty good feeling, that’s lovely. I love that [laughs], but most of the time I’m rubbish.

Q: Would you say that you have a proudest achievement then, from having worked here since 2009, would you have a proudest achievement from like having spent your time here?

A: Could you tell me again, yeah please?

Q: Yeah, okay. So you mentioned that you get--; you’re really happy when you know that a boat that you repaired rescue--;

A: Yeah.

Q: Would that be--; would you have like a proudest achievement from like working here, is that--; would that be your proudest achievement that, you know, that you--;

A: No, just--; it’s a [proud 00:26:00] achievement I’m just [inaudible 00:26:01]--; I think just, erm, I’m lucky, just that’s my lot, just I end up here. Or, again, it’s not only just because I’m here, right, it’s I got--; I’ve got other things, you know, when I was [working on buildings 00:26:14] one of my clients called me and just, er, the [inaudible 00:26:19] was flooding, you know, and then it was concreted underneath the part was broken, you know, [inaudible 00:26:25] the middle of the night. And so I went and just drained it and it stopped the water, and that was, you know, something again, I did something, you know, and just--; they gave me money, okay, that sort of thing. Yeah, but, you know, you can do something, you know, so that all depends on you, you know, how you feel, [inaudible 00:26:42] what you can do sometimes, it was--; yeah, I’m happy, you know, so I’m glad just what I can do here and so, you know, [inaudible 00:26:50]. So you cannot [inaudible 00:26:54] yourself anyway just, you know, so you’re getting so much love and support from everywhere so I’m sitting here, I’m getting support from everywhere, so that’s the same thing if you can, you know, it makes you happy, don’t you, just like if you do something tiny. You know, so it’s just a lovely thing here.

Q: So if there was someone who--; from the next generation who wanted to work as a boat builder as well in this boatyard--; in this workshop, what advice would you give them?

A: Oh, I think they will know better than me, okay [laughs]. Definitely, the [young lads 00:27:33] must know better than me, trust me. Er, I think it’s a good thing, you know, just--; but first of all you happy--, can you see what I can see, you know, just like yes you work hard, you’re sweating, you know, you’re working with the fibreglass, you know. Of course it’s a job, sometimes up, sometimes down, you know, it happens, but at the end of the day, you know, someone has been saved out there in the river, you know. Maybe it could be your sister or someone’s sister, what difference does it make, you know, just some human life been saved or something, you know, the bad things happening it can be stopped. You know, that’s your [inaudible 00:28:14], you know, it’s--; So it’s up to you, you want to work or not, you know, there’s, you know, you come just for money--; of course we need money to work, right, [inaudible 00:28:23] at the end of the day, but I think this is a great place to work, you know, it’s a great place, you know, and it’s something that you contribute, you know, to society or just helping each other, you know, [inaudible 00:28:40]. That’s what I think, you know, working here, it’s a good idea, that’s what I think, you know, [inaudible 00:28:48] I don’t know about other things.
Q: Is there anything else that you’d like to talk about that I haven’t asked?

A: I think you have asked everything possibly I can imagine in my life now [laughs]. Sorry, no I just—, no, it's just that I haven't got anything else... I never thought I would be here, I never thought—, I'm just—, you guys going to be here, I'm going to be talking with you guys and thank you, it's all, you know, just a surreal things, you know, what happened in my life. And it's just a fantastic life, you know, some beautiful things, you go and so you only just—, I [inaudible 00:29:34] in my whole life, you know, [inaudible 00:29:36] there was not even a bicycle in my life, you know, just nothing, you know, and just I end up here. I know it's a beautiful thing, you know, I'm grateful for everything, every moment I've got and I'm happy and I appreciate this place and all of you guys and thank you for coming over and just... Er, and, you know, just sort of let me talk for a while, you know, so most of them maybe you haven't even understood, because my—, you did [inaudible 00:30:10], okay, [laughs], sorry. Yeah, just thank you for coming over and just trying to understand this place, you know, there's—, I love this place, yeah. And just hopefully just other people will see, you know, what I see in this place as well and so we can keep it well so I can help the society a little bit. That's all, nothing else to say, just thank you.

BM: Thank you so much. Stephanie, do you want to ask Ganesh a question?

SS: I just wanted to ask, if I may, a little bit more information about the practical repairs that you do, so you spoke of feeling very proud of having repaired the boats. So can I ask you to say a bit more about what that would practically involve?

So you've got the materials here to rebuild the side—,

A: Yes, yeah.

SS: And the tools to cut the whole side—,

A: Yes, we have got everything for that, yeah. We have got [inaudible 00:32:13] we've got the tools, we have got a special boot we call a boot, you know, just a special room there's extractor everywhere, you know, so whatever—, so we have got a PP, you know, so all everything's alright, we have [inaudible 00:32:28]--,

SS: What was that last thing you said, a P…?

A: PP.

SS: What does that stand for?

A: [Inaudible 00:32:32] protective equipment, yeah. We have a mask, we cannot [inaudible 00:32:37], so we can't expose our body, you know, so everything has to be covered, you know, so breathing, so yeah, so we have it all in this room, yeah. It's nice [inaudible 00:32:47].

Q: Okay, thank you very much—,

A: No, thank you, thank you for coming over...

[END OF RECORDING – 00:32:58]
Q: This is an oral history interview with Adam Thornborrow by Stephanie Smith on June 20th at Wapping Police Marine Workshop. Also present are [Rachel Howe 0:00:11] and Bea Moyes from Thames Festival Trust. Firstly, could you please state your full name?

A: Adam Thornborrow.

Q: Adam, can I ask you about your earliest memories of the river Thames?

A: Oh blimey. I don't know I've always, sort of, known the river Thames 'cause obviously I live local to here so I only live Bexley Heath, Erith way so whenever I've done my shopping in here I've always seen the Thames. I've done a little bit of sailing and that on the Thames but I've never gone swimming or anything in it so yeah, it's just the way it's, sort of, noticed it really. Never paid particular attention to it, I have to admit.

Q: So, it's just a normal part --,

A: Yeah, it's just a normal part of my life. That's about it really, so--,

Q: And when you were a child, you knew of the river Thames?

A: Yeah, I knew of the river Thames, yeah.
Q: And have your family have any associations with the Thames?

A: Not particularly, no. They all work-- the majority of them work up London so-- in like office buildings and all that so it’s just-- you just notice it really [laughs].

Q: And so now you’re an apprentice marine engineer, so how did that come about?

A: Well funnily enough when I was young I was always interested in cars and bikes and working mechanically on them--. [sound of siren]

Q: Can you pause for a second?

A: Yeah.

Q: So you were saying that you were interested in other kinds of engineering like bikes and--,

A: Yeah, so ever since I was young I’ve always been into my motorbikes so I’m a motocross rider and have always looked after me own motocross bikes, me own cars, always worked on me mum and dad’s cars when I was younger with them. And yeah, so I was always getting something mechanical ‘cause I’m a, sort of, hands on person and it’s quite a funny story really. I applied to be a car mechanic on cars ‘cause obviously bikes were my main passion and I didn’t want to work on my main passion ‘cause sometimes if you work on your main passion every day it becomes quite mundane and you get a bit bored with it in your spare time. So, thought I’d apply to work on cars and then went for the interview, that all went all right and then after the interview it ended up that I got offered the job to work on the marine police boats instead of the cars. And obviously that’s quite a bonus really ‘cause then I’ve never really worked on boats so something new for me, and just so happens that the boats
run on the Thames so I get to drive them up and down the Thames to test them and yeah, it’s brilliant. So that’s, sort of, how I got into the marine industry.

Q: So it was a bit of an accident really, you didn’t actually intend to work as a marine engineer.

A: Yeah. It was a good accident though [laughs].

Q: Yeah, it was a happy accident.

A: Yeah.

Q: Excellent. And then how old were you when you started the apprenticeship?

A: 17. So I come straight from sixth form to the working world.

Q: So, when you first became an apprentice as a marine engineer, was it here?

A: Yeah, yeah so this is my first place I’ve worked on boats.

Q: At this boatyard.

A: Yeah.

Q: And can you tell us some of the early memories of those first days of when you were an apprentice? What did they have you do or what were you asked to do?
A: Blimey. It’s a bit scary I have to admit ‘cause you’re coming straight from school to the working world so you’re with all these men and you’re still a child really [laughs]. But-- first memories-- just seeing boats and big engines really so it’s, sort of, right in my element, so working on big machinery, big engines, lots of power and seeing all nice tools and just getting to work with the lads really and get dirty and greasy on the boats.

Q: So, was it quite hands on like quite early on?

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: It's 'get stuck in'?

A: Got chucked right in to the deep end really so was quite nice ‘cause then get used to everything quite quickly and then, yeah--,

Q: And it was new to you, seeing boat engines? They’re very different to the other engines that you’d seen before? Motorbike engines.

A: I won’t say they’re quite different. They’re quite similar to operate and everything, [spools of 0:04:00] boat engines to car engines and truck engines, they’re just marinized so you’ve got different cooling systems on them and obviously, you’ve got different environmental protection systems on them as well, compared to cars and bikes and that. But yeah, it’s quite similar but it’s just nice to see ‘em using a different application compared to bikes and cars.

Q: So, you used the word ‘marinized’--,

A: Yeah.
Q: So, I imagine that’s part of your training as a marine engineer as opposed to another
engineer.

A: Yeah.

Q: Can you tell us a bit more about that?

A: So a part of being trained as a marine engineer you get to know the cooling systems ‘cause
obviously on a car you’d have coolant cooling the engine but on a boat you have the coolant
that’s cooled in the heat exchangers via the river water. So, the river water travels round the
outside of the engine, in through heat exchangers and it cools the engine’s liquids down for
you. So instead of being cooled by the air, it’s cooled by the river water.

Q: That’s fascinating.

A: I learned all that from my college and my training.

Q: And so you did have to go to college as well as part of your training?

A: Yes, yes. I’m currently still going to college at the moment, so I started college--, I’m now
heading into my fourth year of my apprenticeship after August but for the last three years I’ve
been doing my Level 2 and Level 3 City & Guilds Marine Engineering along with Level 2 and
Level 3 NVQs to support that up as well in the workplace. And this coming year, so starting in
September time, I’m hoping to do my electrical marine qualification as well as backup my
mechanical side which will make it more versatile in the workplace and give me a better
skillset.

Q: Very thorough training in all the aspects it sounds like.
A: Yeah definitely, yeah. Can’t knock it all the training I’m receiving here, it’s brilliant. So, I travel up to Portsmouth and I’m put up in a hotel ’cause Portsmouth’s got the brand new CEMAST college that specialises in marine engineering and that’s also conveniently enough, the closest college to London that does marine engineering. ’Cause in Portsmouth marine engineering is quite popular being on the seaside and on the coast and that with all the big ships in the harbours over there. So yeah, I go to college and it’s pretty good over there. I get good support from all the people at the college and all the management over here at Wapping, really supportive and if I have any issues I know I can speak to them and-- , yeah, so that’s really good.

Q: What kind of things do you do on a typical day at college? Is it like a classroom where you-- , what kind of things do you do?

A: It’s not normal student life for me at college ’cause obviously at the college you get the full-time students that do the course and when I do block release I go down to college in a week block, so I normally do every five weeks I go to college for a week. So my, sort of, course is bespoke one-off and that’s organised by the college. On a typical day I’d normally do a bit of theory in the classroom and then have to do a practical in the workshop where I take photos ’cause in the workshop they have all marine engines that I work on and I’m assessed on how I work on them. I have to take pictures of what I’m doing so I’ll be set a task so the tutor that’s with me might say, “Can you do a service on this engine?” So I have to do a risk assessment before I do any job, then I have to do a workplan of how I’m going to carry the work out, write down what tools I’m going to need. Then I carry out the job but whilst carrying out the job I have to take pictures so I normally use my phone to take pictures. And then carry out the job and whilst I’m carrying out the job, my assessor’s over my shoulder assessing how I’m doing a job. Then once that’s done, I have to write a report on the job so any issues I’ve found with the engine, the tolerances of the engine, working specifications, any issues I come across whilst doing that job. Yeah, then I hand that in and that’s part of the qualification. So on City & Guilds you have to do about, I think seven or eight units and in some of them units you have to do two or three practicals in each of them units to show that you can work on the different systems that you’ve just studied in the classroom.

Q: So the skills that you’re learning, can you tell us about a skill that you’ve learned as an apprentice, so something that you didn’t really know how to do at the beginning and that you’ve learned how to do?
A: I’ve learned quite a number of skills but, sort of, speaking generically, it’s refined how I work. Before I worked here I didn’t work in--I worked but--, how can I say this? I wasn’t as refined as I am now. So, here I was taught how to work accurately, work to the specifications that the manual state and make sure a job’s carried out properly and it goes out looking good and to a good specification as such.

Q: And you said as part of the tasks at college you’d have to choose the tools that you need, so would different skills always need--I need different tools for different jobs?

A: Yeah so every job you carry out you’d need different tools and it’s always important to make sure you pick the right tools for a job. Obviously, you can damage the components if you use the incorrect tools and you can snap off bolts etc, etc. So, it’s quite funny ‘cause working here where our fleet’s standardised so we use mostly the same equipment on all the boats, if you’re asked to do a certain job say service an engine, you know exactly what tools in your head you need. So, you just put them on your tool tray, go on a boat and then you ain’t jumping up and down to your toolbox to get the tools all the time. ‘Cause when I first started here I’d be up and down that ladder constantly getting all different tools out ‘cause I couldn’t remember, but now I just take all the tools out I need and then I don’t burn as much energy [laughs].

Q: So you said you’ve got a tool tray--,

A: Yeah.

Q: And a toolbox.

A: Yeah.

Q: So, can you just tell us a bit more about what those things are.
A: So obviously the boat's pulled into the workshop and we have to get up onto the boat using our ladders. When you're down in the bilge in the engine bay you have to jump out the engine then go down to your toolbox. We have a toolbox with all our separate tools so everyone in the workshop has their own dedicated toolbox full of our own tools. And then what we normally do is-- so everyone works differently in the workshop but the majority of us will have our toolbox and a tool tray and then the tools that we need for that job we put in the tool tray and then take that tool tray up onto the boat 'cause we don't want to be hauling heavy equipment onto the boat and scratching the decks 'cause at the end of the day they're quite expensive and we should treat them as if they were a customer's boat in the real world, so we don't want to get oil all over the decks or anything. So, yeah--,

Q: So, you've got your own toolbox and do all of the engineers have the same tools in it or do apprentices-- do you start with a few tools and add to them as you go on?

A: No, to be honest we've got an excellent toolkit as an apprentice. We got a massive, well not massive but a generously sized toolbox on wheels and we're supplied with all the tools free of charge so we haven't had to pay for the tools, the MET have paid for them and obviously, if we was to ever leave we don't take them tools with us they stay within the job. But no, we've got the exact same tools as the lads have got in the workshop already and it, sort of, helps 'cause other companies you go and be an apprentice and you'll just get like a little counter-lever toolbox with the basics like a hammer and a couple of spanners but we've got all the tools we require for the jobs.

Q: So, you've spoken about the college training, can you tell us a bit more about the training here and the people who train you at the Wapping Police Boatyard?

A: The training I've received here on the job is brilliant 'cause obviously at college mainly doing the paperwork side of things but I'm a believer that you learn ten times more than what you do in college on a job. 'Cause obviously it's hands on, you work with people like a fella here's worked for about 30 years now so he's got all that experience and, you know, 30 years of experience is nothing compared to what you're doing in college really so you're learning all-- wouldn't say tricks of the trade but you learn how to carry out jobs quickly and efficiently and you just learn little techniques off of people. And the lads here they've been really good, they'll take the time out to teach me and even if a job takes longer, they don't mind as long as Bill's all right with it, you know, the boss. It's all good, so--,
Q: So, you’ve got--, so have you got one person that’s mainly your supervisor ‘cause it sounds like you’re saying all of the people here input into your training.

A: Yeah, so everyone here’s inputted into my training but I’ve also got a mentor so as well as having my line manager, I’ve got a mentor that’s dedicated to looking after me. So, say I’ve got an issue in the workshop, before going to management I go to my mentor express my issues or problems that I have then he’ll advise me on how to deal with them or take it further up to management to support me. And if I’ve got issues at college my first point of contact would be my mentor then he’ll again, support me and tell me how to deal with it so yeah, really supportive. And to be fair, it's not just my mentor that helps me out, I can go to anyone in the workshop and they'll help me out so yeah, it's really good.

Q: And it’s four years, you said you’ve been on the apprenticeship for four years?

A: Yeah.

Q: How long is the total apprenticeship and what qualification will you have at the end?

A: This--, well I’m in my third year now so I’ll be going into my fourth year in September so it’s a four-year apprenticeship and qualification at the end, hopefully, well I’ve already--, I’ve just finished my Level 3 City & Guilds so I’ve already got my Level 3 City & Guilds, Level 2 City & Guilds in Marine Engineering and I’ve also got my Level 2 and Level 3 NVQ in Marine Engineering. And hopefully at the end of it along with them I’ll also have a Level 3 Marine Electrical and Fault-Finding qualification and the 17th Edition 240-volt qualification which means I can work on shore power for the boats, ‘cause obviously they get plugged in to charge up and all that. [Inaudible 0:13:18] so I’m qualified to work on them and on top of that I’ll hopefully have my Level 2 Manufacturing qualification which is PEO Level 2 City & Guilds, so that’s lathe and mill works. Obviously, we’ve got a manufacturing workshop here as well where we can just take a big block of metal and turn it into something useful [laughs] for the boats. Yeah so, that’s hopefully what I’ll come out with at the other end next year. So, it's a lot of work but it's worth it, definitely.
Q: Excellent. We can see that you really love what you do here and it’s fascinating.

A: Yeah.

Q: Can you tell us what the difference is between a marine engineer and a boat builder? And you said manufacturing or building, is there any difference between those two things or do you get to do both things?

A: Within this workshop we all chip in when we need to so the majority of us can help out with each side of the workshop, boat building and engineering. But the main difference is engineers will work on all of the electrical systems and engine systems and propulsion systems, that’s engines, drive legs, all the electrics within the boat. But also, the boat builders will do the majority of the woodwork, the fibreglass work and any other repair work that needs to be done to the boat and they also are qualified to work on the electrical systems as well. But sometimes, if we’re short of boat builders us engineers might chip in and help them do some bodywork on a boat or even just oiling up the Tecan valves, every little helps when you’re working in a place like this. So, it’s not like “Oh you’re only-- you’re an engineer so you only work on engines and you’re a boat builder you only work on fibreglass”, we all chip in and help each other on different parts of it. So, yeah.

Q: Do you know anything about the history of this yard?

A: I know it was opened in 1973 and that’s roughly it, to be fair [both laugh]. Can’t say I know loads in detail.

Q: And over the time that you’ve been here, has anything changed? Have there been any changes in the type of boats you work with or the type of tools you use or--, I mean you mentioned like the electric thing of charging boats, can you tell us about anything that’s changed since you started?

A: To be fair, we haven’t-- the boats haven’t changed at all. They’re a standardised fleet, everything’s the same and so the boats have stayed the same. To be fair, not much has.
changed since being here ‘cause there’s not really much need for change to be fair. We’ve got a few more special service tools, so special tools to carry out special jobs on the engines. Health and safety has become a lot better, so we’re a bit more stricter on health and safety now so yeah, that’s about it really to be honest, yeah [laughs].

Q: I’m interested in how the boats get from the boatyard onto the river, are you involved with that all, the pontoons or the moorings, are you involved with the engineering of those things?

A: We’re not involved with the engineering but the operation we’re involved in. So, the boat-lift obviously, before and after each service we have to test the boats so some days we’ll be asked to carry out a service on one of the [tuggers 0:16:27] down the police station. So, we’ll go down there and collect it and test it and then we drive it onto the boat-lift and we’ll lift it out of the water. And then we then have a tug that we put it into the workshop and then we can work in a nice warm area of the workshop in the winter or a boiling hot workshop in the summer [laughs].

Q: So, you said every time a boat comes out the water it gets tested?

A: Yeah, depending on what the fault is or if it’s just a service. Sometimes we don’t need to but other times we do ‘cause obviously we don’t want to carry out work and then give it back to the police with a fault on it so it’s always best if we take for about a half an hour run just to make--, get up to operating temperature and ensure that all the machinery is working properly on the boat and it’s fit for service. If it’s not fit for service then we’ll bring it back in and sort out that problem before it goes out.

Q: And you said ‘we’, so how many apprentices or marine engineers would work on a boat to check it?

A: Typically, on service you have three people--,

[voices in background]
Q: Sorry, I was asking you about the number of marine engineers or apprentices that would work on a boat at any one time.

A: So, for a typical service you’d have three people working on a boat. You’d have a boat builder that does all the checks on all the safety equipment on the boat, the fibreglass checks and the woodwork checks. Then at the same time you’d have two engineers working on it, one engineer working on all the propulsion systems on the boat, so the drive legs and another engineer working on the engines on the boat. And then if any other work’s required and needs extra labour, then more people will be put on the job depending on the turnaround time for the job. So--,

Q: You’ve said that term ‘drive legs’ a few times, for someone who knows nothing about that, can you tell us what are ‘drive legs’?

A: Drive legs, they sit on the transom of the boat and they--,

Q: What’s--_, they sit on the--,

A: Transom so the rear of the boat, sorry.

Q: Yes.

A: And they connect into the back of the engine and they come out and they sit in the water, so underneath the waterline of the boat and they have two propellers on them and they also contain the gearbox and the running gear that puts it in ahead or astern, so forwards and backwards and neutral.
Q: So, these terms like ‘boat legs’, so when you started out as an apprentice would that be a term that you’d heard of before?

A: Oh no honestly, when I first started working here I thought I’d come into another language to be honest ‘cause boat terminology is a complete different language compared to what you normally talk about. So, if you’re saying to go left or the left side of the boat you’d say ‘port’, if you’re saying right side of the boat or if you’re turning right you say ‘starboard’ and then you’ve got the ‘bow’, you’ve got the ‘stern’, you’ve got ‘midships’, you got ‘cabins’, you got-- it’s never ending.

Q: [laughs] Can you tell us some more terminology that you’ve learned?

A: Oh blimey--,

Q: Are you still learning new terminology even now?

A: Yeah, still now I am, yeah.

Q: Can you tell us something recent that you’ve learned that you didn’t know before, perhaps at college or here?

A: Hmmm, not really [laughs].

Q: Don’t worry, if something springs to mind just let us know.

A: Yeah, not really to be fair, no [laughs].
Q: Yeah, well that's a new one on me, 'transom' is the back--,

A: Transom is the rear of the boat, yeah.

Q: And what's the front bit called?

A: The bow.

Q: The front bit's the bow?

A: Yeah, you got the chine so as you've got the V of the hull, so this would be for a planning vessel, look--, so a planning vessel when you put the power down to full throttle the vessel will rise out the water and then, sort of, fly and skim across the top of the water--,

Q: Yeah.

A: So that means there's less friction and the boat moves faster--,

Q: I see.

A: And the chine is where the V of the hull turns flat like that, and then that's just that edge across the side of the hull that's called the chine.

Q: Wow.

A: So yeah, there's a lot of terminology to learn.
Q: And so, the boat builders here would build that chine to a specific way?

A: The boat builders don’t build the boats. So, we buy the boats ready built and the boat builders just maintain them--,

Q: I see.

A: So, the boats have massive accidents--, not massive accidents but have been involved in a couple of collisions where the whole side of the boat’s had to be dismantled and cut away and a whole new side has had to be fitted in to the side of the boat and moulded. So inhouse, we take moulds of other boats to help fix other boats. Yeah, so it’s all quite involved really.

Q: It’s amazing. Once you’ve completed your apprenticeship will you continue working here?

A: There isn’t a guaranteed job but I’m hoping that if I prove that I’m a value to the work team and I’m useful at the end of the day then hopefully they’ll keep me on. It’ll be very nice to be kept on ‘cause it’s such a unique workplace to work in London really. There’s not another place on the Thames like it.

Q: Have you been to any of the other boatyards and places along the Thames?

A: Been to a couple of marinas but no, sort of, workshops at all or anything like that. I haven’t really been into any other place apart from here really.

Q: The other--, the people who train you, were they apprentices here? Was there anybody here training you who was an apprentice at one point?
A: The majority of the people that are part of the workforce in the workshop at the moment started here as apprentices. There’s about four or five of the engineers were-- , about four of the engineers were apprentices when they first started here and they’ve just carried on from the apprenticeship and now they’ve worked here about 11/12 years so yeah, from being an apprentice to working here for 12 years is quite a good thing.

Q: It sounds like people come here and train and they want to carry on like you want to do that and that’s true of your colleagues, as you say that they’ve stayed here as well.

A: Yeah definitely. That would be brilliant if I could stay here.

Q: So, you’ve got people here who will train you and were trained themselves here?

A: Yeah, so obviously they’ve done a similar course at their college to what I’m doing now so they know exactly what I’m doing at college and they can-- , and that, sort of, helps them helping and supporting me and yeah-- ,

Q: So, it sounds like you’re really happy with your work here and your role here so would you describe your working conditions as good? What’s it like? Do you have to get up early? Can you tell us a bit about working conditions?

A: Working conditions-- , so on a normal day I get up about 5 o’clock and then I ride my bike into work and then, sort of-- , we start work at 7 but it’s nice to get here early, have a cup of tea before you start work, just relax for a bit, wake yourself up and yeah, working conditions are good. We have two shifts so yeah-- , we have one shift that works from 7 ‘til 3 and another shift that works from 8 ‘til 4 just to cover whatever happens at the police station. And yeah, it’s really good, it’s a good environment to work in to be fair, it’s clean, it’s tidy, it’s all safe, there’s not really many dangers about ‘cause I’m aware that other boatyards can be quite messy and trailing wires and yeah, health and safety isn’t at the top of their list to be fair. But I think that’s all part of working for the MET police, very health and safety inspired and yeah, it’s a nice place to work in.
Q: Is it something you can see yourself doing in future years is, if someone like yourself comes in and you give them a bit of training?

A: Yeah definitely, yeah. I’d be happy to do that.

Q: And if somebody now, a young person younger than you, wanted to do this job what advice would you give them or is there anything that you’d tell them?

A: Just take what you can out of it really. Just get as many qualifications as you can so [you’re out 0:23:37] in the future and just enjoy what you’re doing and just when you’re at work just be interested really and come across eager ‘cause eager and more thankful you are, the more people will take time out to help you really so--,

Q: So, are there other apprentices here, sort of, at the same stage as you are?

A: Yes, there’s another apprentice. There’s two of us apprentices here. You’ve got--., I’m doing the marine engineering side and then you’ve got the other apprentice doing the boat building side so he’s being trained up on all the fibreglass work, the [teak 0:24:05] work on the woodwork and all the bodywork and he’s on his third year now but he goes to a different college, an IBTC college in Lowestoft and he does all his training there. So, they’re a specialist in marine construction and boat building and maintenance on that side of things.

Q: It sounds like you’ve achieved so much over these years and can you think of any particular achievement over these years in something that you’ve learned to do that you’re particularly proud of?

A: Oh blimey, hmmm--,

Q: Just take your time.
A: [laughs] Don’t really know to be fair. It’s just—, nothing like stands out but it’s just the overall view of being able to maintain the boats, work on them competently so I’m at the stage now where I don’t have to rely on the others. I can, sort of, undertake a job, I can easily take an engine out and a drive system off myself without being watched and helped. Well obviously, when you take an engine out you have to get a banksman and that when you’re using the crane and that to watch what you’re doing. But yeah, I don’t have to be supervised now, I’m trusted to carry out the jobs on me own so, sort of, I’m me own worker now so—,

Q: And how long did that take? So, you were supervised—, when you started being an apprentice you were always supervised, so for how long were you always supervised to when you were—,

A: It’s just lately really, about the last three or four months I’ve, sort of, been left to me own devices really to carry out jobs, but obviously the jobs get checked over before they go out into the water obviously—,

Q: Yes of course, yeah.

A: But yeah, I get left to me own devices more now and got a bit more trust on me shoulders. So, a bit more pressure on me shoulders to make sure the job’s done correctly and it don’t fail.

Q: So, have you got a memory of that when your trainer said to you, “We’ll let you do that by yourself today,” or when you were ‘left to your own devices’ as you said?

A: It just started slowly so, sort of, slowly eased me into working on me own really. I can’t say it was just like one day they said, “You’ll be working on your own now”. Just over time they let me do a couple of jobs on me own and checked it over and, sort of, slowly checked jobs over that I’d done on me own and then I’d be working with someone and then a job might come in and they’d say “Just do that on your own” and they slowly eased me into working on me own
and getting use to just relying on me self really and me own tools to get a job done and me own initiative.

Q: That must make you very proud--,

A: Yeah, yeah definitely.

Q: Congratulations.

A: Thank you.

Q: That’s fantastic. Is there anything else that we haven’t asked you about that you’d like to talk about in terms of your role as an apprentice marine engineer?

A: Not really [laughs]. Yeah, yeah it’s all right.

Q: It’s been so interesting. Thank you so much. Rachel, have you got any additional questions or Bea? [pause] Thank you so much, that was really--,

A: No worries, not a problem.

Q: Fantastic and really very best of--,

[END OF RECORDING – 0:26:48]
Oral History interview with James Templeman
Date: 20 June 2017
Interviewer: Stephanie Smith
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Q: This is an oral history interview with James Templeman by Stephanie Smith on June 20th at Wapping Police Marine Workshop. Also present are Rachel Howe and Bea Moyes from Thames Festival Trust. Hi James, first of all could you tell us your full name?

A: It’s James Templeman.

Q: James, can I ask you about your earliest memories of the River Thames?

A: I think the earliest thing that I remember about the Thames was the Oxford, Cambridge boat race, but I don’t really remember much about it ‘cause I was so young but it always stuck out in my mind, it’s always quite a competitive event obviously with the history of it.

Q: So did you watch it on tele or did you watch the actual race?

A: Yeah, I watched it on tele, I can’t remember how old I was but it did quite interest me. I never took up rowing but it was quite a-- quite a good thing to see as a youngster.

Q: And did you have any connection with the river growing up, or your family have any connection with the river at all?

A: No, not really. No, there was never any-- any family that worked on the river or any real connection to it, but yeah, it’s now that I work here that I find it quite-- quite intriguing, some of the stuff that goes on and…

Q: So how long have you worked as a boat builder?

A: I’ve been working for the Met for 13 years, I did an apprenticeship here when I left school and I’ve been here ever since.

Q: So was it your intention when you were at school to be a boat builder or to be involved with the river?

A: Erm, no, really I never-- never had any interest in the river to be honest, it was just when I left school and started an apprenticeship with the Met and I was doing the police vans, so I wanted to be a carpenter so I started on a carpentry course. And then the work that I was doing was outsourced so the Met honoured my contract and offered me a boat building apprenticeship and I accepted and here I am today.

Q: So it was a bit of an accident really?

A: It was, yeah.

Q: And you started off wanting to be a carpenter?

A: Yeah.

Q: And then you got into engineering with-- you worked for the Met workshop, you said, was that-- that wasn’t a marine workshop, it was--,
A: No, that was just, er, kitting out the vans—, the CID vans and the other work vans that they’ve got. And I ended up here doing fibreglassing and general boat building and maintenance really.

Q: And you said you were apprenticed, so you worked on land vehicles—,

A: Yeah.

Q: And then you came here—,

A: Yeah.

Q: And became apprentice boat builder?

A: Mmm.

Q: So can you tell us about some of your early memories of being an apprentice, like what—, what happened in the first few weeks of you walking into a boatyard?

A: It was quite strange for me really ‘cause I’d never been in such a big environment with—, obviously with boats, and there was a couple of other apprentices my age so I felt quite sort of welcomed in by the other apprentices and it was quite intriguing really. I mean it was strange to go out on boats and once we’d done our training being able to skipper a boat down the river, so it was—, yeah, it was good.

Q: And what did your training involve, so what were some of the first things that you were taught how to do?

A: One of the first things I was taught to do at Wapping was the, erm, was like safety on the water, just teaches you how to—, what a lifejacket does, what happens if you fall in, then how to tie lines when you’re crewing a boat. We were also—, did a basic boat handling skills test which shows us how to manoeuvre a boat, teaches you about how the water affects the reaction of the boat, then we also went on to do powerboat certificates, level one and level two. So yeah, it was—, we learnt quite a few skills along the way.

Q: And you had to go to college as well as part of that training?

A: I did, yeah.

Q: So what kind of things would you do at college that were different to the kind of things that you’d do here?

A: Well the college that I went to was the International Boatbuilding College which specialises in traditional wooden boats, so I learnt everything about traditional wooden boats from laying a keel to planking to building the ribs in the boats to the fit out, which is the furniture and the flooring. And I did a bit of fibreglass work up there as well, taught me the basics of how—, how that worked and the general layup of it. We also did a hand skills part of the course which teaches you how to use traditional wooden boatbuilding tools, like hand tools that don’t really get used much today, but it was interesting to do and it teaches you the basics of what the tools can do and how they respond to how you use them. So that was—, yeah, that was really beneficial.

Q: That’s fascinating, you said laying a keel, is that the first thing?

A: Mmm.

Q: Can you tell us a little bit more about that, what does laying a keel on a wooden boat involve?

A: It’s quite hard to describe really, ‘cause you work off of drawings so it’s—, you’re making a piece of timber into a shape to start the initial layup of the boat, it’s—, that’s the spine of the boat if you like, and everything is built off of that. So that’s your datum to work from essentially.
Q: How do you bend the wood?

A: Oh, there's a few ways of doing it, I mean it's a process known as steaming, so you'll have a--, you'll cut the timber to shape and then it'll be put into a box which will be sealed at either end and then it will have essentially steam pumped into it for a number of hours to make the wood pliable. And then you'll remove it and while it's still warm you'll put the fixings in and manipulate the wood to fit the space you're going into, i.e., a plank. And, erm, yeah, that's it really. There's a--, yeah, there's a few different techniques and a few different pieces that have got to be done in the process.

Q: And you said that there are specialist tools that are used for wooden boats that aren't so much used, but some of them still are?

A: Mmm.

Q: Could you tell us about…

A: Well it's--, for instance, there's a plane known as a bollow plane--,

[Interrupted by a tannoy announcement].

Q: …so I'm asking you about tools that were used in wooden boatbuilding and most of them aren't but some of them still are.

A: Yeah.

Q: Can you tell us about some of those?

A: When you're making an oar, to get the shape of the blade at the end you use a tool known as a bollow plane. We actually learnt how to make the bollow plane at college, so you make the plane and then use it to work the timber to make the oar, that's one of the tools. There's also, erm, traditionally for shaping like a stern of a boat you'd use a tool known as an adzes, which is an adaption of an axe which just has the blade on one side as opposed to in the centre. There's a caulking iron as well which is used for driving caulking between two seams on a carvel plank--,

Q: What is a carvel plank?

A: A carvel plank's, erm, planks that meet edge to edge as opposed to overlapping, and then the caulking is a cotton that's driven between the two planks in a certain layup so that when the--, they absorb water, the caulk swells to allow tension on the plank to stop water penetrating through the gap, that would probably be the best way to describe it.

Q: That's fascinating, and--., and 'cause I don't know anything about it, but that seems really clear.

A: Yeah.

Q: So do you train anybody yourself, the apprentices that are younger than you, do you--., are you involved in training?

A: Yeah, we took an apprentice on a few years ago, Pete, and he's--, he's worked with me on a few jobs, taken him under my wing and shown him what skills I know [laughs].

Q: And that happened to you as well when you were an apprentice?

A: It did, yeah.

Q: Can you tell us something about the people who trained you?
A: Well there was a few of them really, the old boy, Tom, who used to work here, he was traditionally a site carpenter doing shuttering and second fix on building sites. But when he came here he turned his hand to boatbuilding, he taught me a few good tricks through the years. Also Bill, our manager, he was a wooden boat builder by trade, so any time I had any problems I could just go and speak to Bill and take on his knowledge. And then just generally the other guys on the workshop floor that had had some experience or had tips that they could pass on to me. So yeah, I’ve learnt quite a bit from a general team of good guys really.

Q: Yeah, it sounds like you work as a team, there's quite a few [around 00:08:52] there and you all...

A: Mmm.

Q: So if--, can you describe a typical day in the boatyard there, is like--, there’s quite a few of you working together as a team and it sounds like you all communicate with each other.

A: Yeah.

Q: Can you give us an idea of what work will be going on, what you’ll be doing if you were repairing a boat or--,

A: Well on a general day we may have a service that will come in, so you’ll have a team of engineers, possibly two, one will service the engines, one will do the service on the drive legs. Then a boat builder will be assigned to the job, they’ll go around the boat and inspect the hull to make sure there’s no cracks, no chips, no damage. They'll also go round the cabin, make sure that every safety feature is in place, i.e., the flares, the EPIRB and the SART which are transponders if the boat was to sink. We also check the life raft is in date, there’s other various bits we do on the boat. We’ll all then sort of liaise with each other, how far we’re getting on the project.

Q: And do you have to conduct repairs, do they get damaged, [the boats 00:10:37]?

A: Yeah, we conduct repairs fairly regularly. Not generally sort of accidents and stuff, but general wear and tear, bits of timber floating in the river that you can’t see, the boat will go over them and bend props or it will put a dent in the hull which we’ll then have to grind out and fibreglass.

Q: And what's--., what's props?

A: Oh, sorry, the propellers.

Q: The propellers, I see, yes.

A: Yeah, the propellers on the back of the--., on the drive legs.

Q: And the drive legs is--., remind us what a drive leg is.

A: That's--., that's the, erm, it’s a leg that comes out the back of the boat which the engine drives, so the engine will drive a propeller which will then drive--., well drive a shaft that will drive the propeller which will thrust the boat along. So it’s two parts of the drive system.

Q: So do you know anything about the history of this particular yard ‘cause you’ve worked--., you said you’d worked in the land vehicle police workshop, erm, and this yard as well, so you’ve got quite a history working with the Met. Do you know anything about the history of the boatyard particularly?

A: Erm, not much of the history, no. I know it was built in the early ’70s--., I believe it was the early ’70s. We used to have a fleet of wooden boats before we--., well, before the process came forward to fibreglass, which is obviously the modern equivalent I suppose. Yeah, other than that I don’t really know much of the history of the yard, just that it’s always been a Met building, it’s always done police boats.
Q: Hmm-hmm. Have you got any feelings about the difference between wooden boats and fibreglass boats?
A: I think that the wooden boats are obviously very traditional, probably go back thousands of years, but I think it’s just that-- it’s like, erm, what’s the word for it, the evolution--
Q: evolution, fibreglass has come along and it’s a great material, it’s very adaptable, there’s a lot you can do with it, different colours in the finish. There’s different type of layups you can do to make the fibreglass react differently, it’s-- well, widely known as being more durable and I’d say easier to repair, you can do a repair fairly quickly and better than with woodwork, so yeah.

Q: And when you spoke about your training, your training started with wooden boatbuilding techniques--
A: It did, yeah.

Q: And then how long was it after that that you started to learn about fibreglass and how...?
A: Well generally it was-- it was on the same course that I learnt the two side by side really, but because we have mainly fibreglass boats-- well, only fibreglass boats with some woodwork involved, my trade’s basic-- mainly involves just fibreglass repairs and, yeah, I don’t have much to do with woodwork. But furniture wise it’s-- it’s better for furniture than boats in my opinion [laughs].

Q: And can I ask about how close the work is between the marine engineers and boat builders and the police, the actual operations, do you have any-- do you see police officers or have any involvement with practical use of the boats by police officers?
A: Yeah, we have quite a good working relationship with the police, they-- they will tend to, if they have an accident on a boat or they need something checking over, they’ll bring the boat over to us. We sometimes have a running repair which will be something that we need to go and test the boat of a morning to see if we can replicate the fault that they’ve reported. We’ll then go down to the pontoon via their police station, take the boat out on test, liaise with them and get a, erm, get it from the horse’s mouth so to speak about what they’ve experienced with the boat. Generally as well, if they request a boat at short notice that’s sitting in the workshop we’ll do our best to turn the boat around and get it out so that they can use it for an operation.

Q: And you said at the beginning you were taken out on the river to learn about how the practical-- what it’s actually like to be on a boat.
A: Mmm.

Q: Do you still go out on the river?
A: Yeah, we try and get out as much as possible, I mean it’s probably one of my perks of the job, it’s the bit I like the most so I try and get out whenever I can.

Q: And is that always as part of your job or do you-- are you a bit attached to the river now that you work here?
A: I think it’s always been part of the job, but it was-- I’d never really experienced going on fast boats as a kid, maybe the odd ship here and there but never the RIBs that we use and, you know, once I’d got on it and was shown how fast they can go. And when we’re on test we have to sort of use the boat to its maximum capability to check that everything’s working, i.e., the steering and the engines are going to withhold the pressures being put on them, so it’s-- yeah, it’s definitely one of my more favourable things to do at work.

Q: You’ve worked here for more than a decade, was it 13, 14 years?
A: Thirteen years, yeah.

Q: Can you think of any changes that have happened over those 14 years in terms of the way things are built or anything else that’s changed since you arrived?
A: The technology has come on quite a lot since I first started, there’s a lot more sort of digital--,
the digital age is coming into it a lot more. A lot of the equipment’s more, erm, high tech
whereas before anyone could really understand it, now it takes sort of-- you have to really
look into what you’re doing before you can make sense of it. The fibreglass itself, every year
there’s new products coming out so that makes our repairs easier and more practical. The
yard itself has changed, i.e., the safety-- the health and safety aspect of things is a lot more
strict, we all sort of try and adhere to the health and safety side of things a lot more than
maybe ten or 20 years ago than was expected to. So it’s definitely evolving well.

Q: So you’ve got a health and safety system in how the actual yard is-- operates--,
A: Yeah.

Q: And can you tell us about some of those things, what you would have to do, like leave aisles
clear or what are some of the safety aspects of you actually working there?
A: Well general housekeeping is a given for health and safety, making sure everything’s tidy and
neat. One thing that was implemented is if we’re working on a roof of a boat, doing a repair or
checking over a life raft or something, we have a full arrest system which is a harness that we
must wear and then we attach onto a tether which is joined to the ceiling, so if you were to fall
it would go taut and stop you falling five or six meters to--, yeah, impending death probably
[laughs].

Q: And that was something that was introduced while you were here?
A: Yeah, that was introduced maybe eight or nine years ago. A lot of building sites and stuff
have that on-- on their site.

Q: And you feel good about having those or does it--,
A: Yes, it’s a bit restricting at times, but it is-- it’s good that you know that if something did
happen that you’re going to be-- you’re going to stand a chance.

Q: You’ll be safe.
A: Yeah.

Q: Good to know.
A: Yeah.

Q: You were apprenticed yourself and had trainers, and now you train apprentices.
A: Yeah.

Q: And if you were going to have someone who was considering doing it, what advice you would
give them or what kind of things do you think they should consider before doing the job that
you do?
A: I’d definitely-- I’d definitely recommend boatbuilding, it’s a good trade to be in. It’s obviously
very localised, you can’t go anywhere in the country and do it, you’ve got to generally be near
water to be a boat builder. But it’s a good trade to get into, there’s lots of different avenues
you can take, even if you did want to go on from boatbuilding there’s a lot of certificates you
can get to drive boats, anywhere from the day skipper and basic boat handling courses all the
way up to ocean master or yacht master, driving the cruise liners. So it’s-- the world’s your
oyster. Yeah, I would definitely recommend it, you’ve got to be prepared to get dirty and dusty
at times ‘cause fibreglass when it gets on your skin is very itchy, but it’s-- it’s quite a manual
job but I would definitely recommend it if you like getting stuck in and working, it’s, er, yeah.

Q: And those things that you mentioned there, things that you can go on to do, have you got
plans to stay here or what are your plans for the future in terms of boatbuilding?
A: I'm not sure at the moment, I'm quite happy here at the moment, it's a good work environment, we've got good camaraderie, the money's not too bad either. Yeah, maybe in the future I'll look to-- to move on if I move out of London, I might-- might move to the coast and see if I can find work down there, but this is sort of the best of both worlds, you're living in a big city and doing a-- quite a niche trade, so I'm quite happy for the time being.

Q: And is the crew that are all here, the team, are most of them-- have most of them been here-- , do people tend to stay-- , once they've been apprenticed do they tend to stay for a few years?

A: Every apprentice that I've worked with has stayed for a number of years after. When I started there was five apprentices all started within a year of each other, two have now left quite recently but the other three-- well, the other two including myself, are all quite happy and settled here. So we're-- we're actually the longest serving members of the boatyard now, so it's-- the apprentices have come from the bottom to the top essentially and, yeah, I think possibly the prospect of going into management or sort of supervisory role at some point in my career would be quite nice, depending where I can go with it.

Q: How many of you would work on one boat at any one time?

A: Generally for a service you'd have two engineers and one boat builder. If that boat was necessarily going to be needed quicker, Bill could flood the boat with labour and maybe have up to three or four engineers and two boat builders on the-- on it at once. If we have an accident where there's excessive fibreglass damage we'll generally work in a team of two, so we can take the boat into our designated sealed booth where we can do all the grinding of the fibreglass and we sort of work together but we could also work in sort of like a rotation, so while one's grinding one can be preparing other bits and then we swap over. And we'll have our tea breaks together so that there's never one guy left on the job on his own.

Q: When you're-- when you're repairing fibreglass, so can you-- , if you've got fibreglass here in sheets or something that you cut and then add, can you talk us through a repair, say, a boat's got a dent in the fibreglass or a split or a crack and you have to repair it, can you talk us through that process?

A: Basically the fibreglass, it's actually known as GRP which is glass reinforced plastic. The glass itself comes in a roll and it's-- there's a few different forms, you can have it woven, you can have what they call chop strand mat which is just random strands of glass sort of glued together in a random pattern. The repair itself will be cut away so eliminating all the damaged areas, we then feather back the fibreglass to a knife edge. We'll then apply a mould to the outside or the inside depending on where the damage is and how accessible it is. The area will be cleaned, you will mix a resin which is a plastic based resin, it's a polyurethane, that will be-- actually I think it's a polyester resin-- polyester, polyurethane, one of the two. It will be mixed with a catalyst which will start a chemical reaction. That resin will then be infused into the mat, it'll be laid into the-- onto the mould then we will-- , we call it stippling, so it'll be-- , you apply it with a brush, you will scoops up some resin, apply it to the glass and as the two combine they sort of form one material. You roll out any excess air bubbles and then let the chemical reaction cure. Once that cures you've then got a solid fibreglass sheet which will form the new hull or whatever part of the boat it is you're repairing. You can also then sand it and finish it with gel coat-- , gel coat being the blue or the white or the yellow that you see on the outside of the boat, then that will be polished up to a mirror finish if possible.

Q: That's fascinating, thank you. Erm, we've spoken to a few people and everyone seems to really have a good time working here. And can I ask about what you feel are your achievements working here over-- , have you gone through mileposts, things that you feel proud of and that are achievements?

A: Well we've done quite a few major events here that have come-- , come across over the years. Obviously the Olympics being one of those, we were-- , we switched to a shift rota through that time, [which was the 00:25:58] Queen’s diamond jubilee. Getting the boats ready for-- , when these terrorist attacks have happened it's quite rewarding because you feel like you're giving something back to the community, when everyone's in-- , sort of in trauma and feeling down about things, you feel like you're giving something back to the community and helping them,
helping the police to try and do their job as best they can. I’ve established quite a lot of certificates over my years doing this job, [inaudible 00:26:30] boat handling certificates, I’m also certified to service portable fire extinguishers so I do all of those on the boats. Trained to service the lifejackets that all of our crew wear and loads of other tickets along the way, i.e., router courses and, yeah, plenty of--. plenty of paperwork.

Q: I bet-- are you still learning things now, there’s still--?

A: Yeah, yeah, there’s loads of-- loads of stuff to learn, you never know it all and I can learn something new every day here. I liaise quite closely with the engineers so I’ve-- over the years I’ve built a fairly good knowledge about how an engine works and the basics of electronics on the boats and stuff, so I’m always open to learning more from people that know the job other than me.

Q: Thank you so much--?

A: You’re welcome.

Q: Is there anything that I haven’t asked you about that you think that we should know?

A: Erm, no, I think you’ve covered-- covered pretty much everything. I hope I’ve been able to give good enough answers.

Q: It’s been so fascinating, thank you so much.

A: You’re welcome.

Q: Rachel or Bea, have you got anything to add? Thank you so much, that was fascinating.

A: You’re welcome.

[END OF RECORDING – 00:27:44]